Media Portraits in Times of Crisis (2008-2014). Public Views of the European Union and the Austerity Policies in the National Leading Press

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A Michel,
Manuela y Valentina,
por tanto.

A mi madre, mi padre y mi hermano,
allí donde todo empezó.

Abstract

This article-based doctoral thesis revisits the role of the national printed press in supplying political information related to the European Union during the years of economic crisis and austerity policy-making (2008-2014). The supply side of political information plays an important function in establishing a general information environment at the national level that affects the process of citizens' opinion formation regardless of people's direct exposure to media outlets and news consumption (Vliegenthart et al. 2008). However, empirical research is still scarce. I argue that this information is particularly relevant in times of crises and in relation to the European Union, of whom information is usually scant. The managerial role of the European Union during the economic crisis opened up extraordinary opportunities for making it known and, furthermore, for reconnecting European citizens to the project of European integration. First, through gaining visibility in the national public spheres, which are usually dominated by national political actors advancing their interests. Second, through public debates, addressing political and social issues that, at the time, profoundly concerned wide sectors of the national populations.

The first chapter presents the theoretical framework for the three empirical articles that follow, each of which builds upon the preceding one. These analyze and compare cross-country and over time the key political information that during the last economic crisis: (1) enabled European citizens to track political responsibilities related to austerity policy-making; (2) facilitated the understanding of complex policy-making; and (3) included political, economic and social actors in discursive interactions, especially, European citizens. The second chapter (first article) analyzes the Europeanization of the national public spheres. European visibility was limited during the economic crisis, but there were significant differences across countries. The third chapter (second article) considers the national public sphere as an arena for contention where social actors struggle to make visible and legitimate their interests. Core political actors and interest groups alternatively dominated the media in all countries, advancing economic and financial issues, while civil society remained almost absent. The fourth chapter (third article) examines the relationship between the European Union and austerity policy-making. There were no clear references for tracking political responsibilities; economic lexicon was preponderant and too technical to be easily followed by European citizens. Finally, the fifth chapter assesses the empirical results in terms of the proposed theories, reflects about the inferences, and proposes further research.

Altogether, this thesis evidences a lost opportunity for bridging the information gap between the European Union and its citizens, and for engaging European citizens in discussing sensitive policy-making during the economic crisis. The results have empirical and normative implications concerning the legitimacy of the European Union.

Reference

Vliegenthart, R., Schuck, A.R.T., Boomgaarden, H.G. and De Vreese, C.H. (2008). "News Coverage and Support for European Integration, 1990-2006". *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 20(4): 415-439.

Resumen

Esta tesis doctoral basada en artículos revisa el rol de la prensa nacional en el suministro de información política relacionada con la Unión Europea durante los años de crisis económica y de políticas de austeridad (2008-2014). El suministro de información política cumple una importante función en el establecimiento de un ambiente informativo general a nivel país, que afecta al proceso de formación de opinión de los ciudadanos, con independencia de su exposición mediática directa y su consumo de noticias (Vliegenthart et al. 2008). Sin embargo, los análisis empíricos son escasos. Sostengo que esta información es particularmente pertinente en tiempos de crisis y en relación a la Unión Europea, de quien existe de por sí poca información. El rol ejecutivo de la Unión Europea durante la crisis abrió oportunidades extraordinarias para darla a conocer; es más, para volver a conectar a los ciudadanos europeos con el proyecto de integración europea. En primer lugar, a través de ganar visibilidad en las esferas públicas nacionales, que normalmente están dominadas por actores nacionales que defienden sus intereses nacionales. En segundo lugar, mediante debates públicos abordando temas políticos y sociales que preocuparon a amplios sectores de las poblaciones nacionales.

El primer capítulo presenta el marco teórico para los tres artículos empíricos siguientes, cada uno de los cuales se construye sobre el anterior. Estos analizan y comparan entre países, y a lo largo del período, la información política clave que durante la última crisis económica: (1) permitió a los ciudadanos europeos rastrear responsabilidades políticas en relación a las políticas de austeridad; (2) facilitó la comprensión de políticas complejas; y (3) incluyó a actores políticos, económicos y sociales en interacciones discursivas, en especial, a los ciudadanos europeos. El segundo capítulo (primer artículo) analiza la europeización de las esferas públicas nacionales. La visibilidad europea fue limitada durante la crisis económica, pero hubo diferencias significativas entre países. El tercer capítulo (segundo artículo) considera la esfera pública nacional como un espacio de confrontación donde los actores sociales pugnan por visibilizar y legitimar sus intereses. Los actores políticos centrales y los grupos de interés dominaron alternativamente en todos los países, avanzando temas económicos y financieros, mientras que la sociedad civil permaneció prácticamente ausente. El cuarto capítulo (tercer artículo) examina la relación entre la Unión Europea y las políticas de austeridad. No existieron referencias claras que permitieran rastrear responsabilidades políticas. El léxico económico preponderante fue demasiado técnico para poder ser fácilmente

seguido por los ciudadanos. Finalmente, el quinto capítulo evalúa los resultados empíricos en función de las teorías propuestas, reflexiona sobre las inferencias y propone futuras investigaciones.

En conjunto, esta tesis evidencia una oportunidad perdida para reducir la distancia informativa que existe entre la Unión Europea y sus ciudadanos, y para integrar a los ciudadanos europeos en discusiones sobre la elaboración de políticas sensibles durante la crisis económica. Los resultados tienen implicaciones empíricas y normativas en relación a la legitimidad de la Unión Europea.

Referencia

Vliegenthart, R., Schuck, A.R.T., Boomgaarden, H.G. and De Vreese, C.H. (2008). "News Coverage and Support for European Integration, 1990-2006". *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 20(4): 415-439.

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Chapter 1

Political information, the media, and the European Union

1.1. The availability of political information in the national context

All news is a construction of reality. (Gulati et al. 2004: 237)

We live in times of political turmoil and increasing contestation of European integration. It is therefore highly relevant to analyze how citizens 'see' the European Union in different European countries, in particular, with regard to supranational, sensitive policy-making during difficult times. This thesis provides stark proof of the *availability* of crucial political information related to the European Union in the national public spheres throughout the economic crisis (2008-2014). In the following chapters, I present a comprehensive, comparative portrait of how the most prominent national media of several European countries presented the European Union, its member-states, and its sensitive policy-making to the national publics. I also assess the kinds of actors that participated in discursive interactions, particularly taking into account whether European citizens were engaged, or not.

First of all, I argue that studies on mass attitudes toward the European Union[1] tend to neglect the relevance of media contents in providing key information to European citizens in order to follow and assess supranational policy-making (e.g., Sanders et al. 2012, Boomgaarden et al. 2011a). Whenever media effects are considered, they are controlled at the individual level through self-reported news exposure, which may produce systematic errors (Druckman 2005b,

[1] The three main mechanisms that this literature explains are: (1) utilitarian, cost/benefit assessments linked to economic performance, (2) cultural and identity-related considerations, and (3) cue-rationality evaluations that spillover between the national and supranational political levels, namely related to performance.

Fraile and Iyengar 2014). Besides, media analyses on the European Union usually focus on the media's functions of framing, agenda-setting or priming specific European events, and how they affect citizens' attitudes toward European integration (e.g., Olsson et al. 2015, Schuck and de Vreese 2011, Boomgaarden et al. 2011b, Vliegenthart et al. 2008, de Vreese and Boomgaarden 2006a, Semetko and Valkenburg 2000). Instead, I aim at revealing the supply of relevant political information in the national public spheres, i.e., the amount and the kinds of particularly pertinent European-related information that may contribute to citizens' understanding of complex policy-making, facilitating to track political responsibilities within the multilevel polity (Shehata and Strömbäck 2011, Vliegenthart et al. 2008). Was this kind of political information available to European citizens during the last economic crisis? This question has normative and empirical implications: it relates to the concerns about the democratic deficit of the European Union, European legitimacy and mass support, and the significance of deliberative democracy. In addressing these issues, the thesis also contributes to methodological discussions on political communication research.

Politics in general, and European politics in particular, is mostly experienced indirectly (Delli Carpini 2004, Reese and Lee 2012, Hobolt and Tilley 2014, Soroka and Wlezien 2019). People do not live in a vacuum.[2] "The media provide for information and communication as the key ingredients of a democratic process of political debate and opinion formation" (Meyer 1999: 621). They supply of political information contributes to conform a general political climate in a country at a specific time (Van Aelst et al. 2017, Shehata and Strömbäck 2011, Jerit et al. 2006, Azrout 2012, Vliegenthart et al. 2008, Ciftci 2005). In this thesis I analyze mainstream information that contributed to create a general political climate in different European countries during the recent economic crisis. I argue that the political information that the media provided is relevant to understanding how European citizens perceived the responses of the European Union to the crisis. Iyengar (1996: 61) states: "Beliefs about who or what is responsible are likely to shift depending upon the information environment in which

[2] Shehata and Strömbäck (2011: 111) argue: "Most research on news consumption and its antecedents has focused on the importance of factors on the individual level of analysis, such as demographic, socioeconomic, and motivational factors. […] However, people do not decide whether to follow or not follow the news in isolation from their surroundings and the media environments in which they are nested. Media consumption is a matter of both supply and demand, and the social contexts and the media environment matter for both. Thus, there is a need for research linking factors on the individual level of analysis to factors on the system level of analysis."

political issues and events are presented." Furthermore, part of the effect of real sensitive issues (e.g., immigration) on attitudes is attributed to the medias' reporting of those issues, despite the fact that the real figures of the phenomena remain highly unknown (van Klingeren et al. 2015). In brief, in words of Van Aelst et al. (2017: 5) "there seems to be broad consensus that the supply side of political information environments matters. The underlying mechanism is that the more political information that is widely available, the higher the likelihood that people will be exposed to, and subsequently learn from, political information."

On the basis of these statements, I take a rather different approach. I argue that the political information that is available in the national context contributes to citizens' understanding of European-related political events *regardless of any direct exposure to particular media outlets* they might experience first-hand, and of interpersonal discussions that might also originate in information provided by the mass media. As Vliegenthart et al. (2008: 418) pose: "This does not imply that all citizens are exposed to such news, but that on the aggregate level news coverage has the potential to drive the attitudes of a substantial share of the population, effectively changing public opinion." This assertion outlines the relevance of analyzing news content at the macro level too. It is the starting point of my research.

Few studies in political science investigate this assumption. However, they all report significant effects of the political information environment created by the media at the aggregate level on citizens voting behavior (Hopmann et al. 2010, Kayser and Peress 2012), attitudes toward immigration (Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart 2009), political knowledge (Jerit et al. 2006), news consumption (Shehata and Strömbäck 2011), and support for EU enlargement (Azrout et al. 2012, Vliegenthart et al. 2008). For instance, Jerit et al. (2006: 266) report that the amount of information available in the mass media determines "a substantial part" of the variation they find in the relationship between the main independent variable and the dependent variable they assess (political knowledge). Moreover, studies that compare the aggregate (national information environment) and individual (news exposure) levels find that the effects of the information environment are generalized for different types of individuals proving to be much more significant than those of direct news exposure (Hopmann et al. 2010,

Azrout et al. 2012).[3] Thus, I argue that we should first of all be aware of which political information is available in the national context at specific times because this information affects society in general. We should study *what* the media predominantly communicate, not only the effects of media frames on citizens' political attitudes and behaviors. This kind of analysis should supplement, even precede individual-level examinations. Furthermore, in analyzing the European Union, it is particularly relevant that we compare the information available in different national information environments on particular policies at specific times. During crises, the interventions of the European Union result in sensitive policy-making that affects directly European citizens, impacts upon a range of social areas and sharpens conflicts (Scharpf 2012, Dregryse et al. 2013, Wren-Lewis 2016). All of which is complicated, distant, and very little known by its citizens (Hoboly and Tilley 2014, de Vreese and Boomgaarden 2006a). I argue that knowing exactly which mainstream information is available to European citizens during such periods is highly relevant for better understanding citizens' support to European integration from varied national perspectives.

I build upon Hopmann et al.'s (2010: 392) operationalization of the information environment that "entails the aggregation of media content characteristics (such as visibility and tone) of some of the widely used media sources within a certain context. These measures can be considered proxies for the information that is available in this context." In the European Union, the processes of opinion formation and identity construction are nationally bounded (Schlesinger 2007, Koopmans 2004a, Koopmans and Erbe 2003). Hence, in this thesis, I define the information environment within the limits of the national media system, which is interconnected to the social, economic, political, and cultural systems in each country. National media systems have their own national particularities and address directly their national publics (Van Aelst et al. 2017, Azrout et al. 2012, Hallin and Mancini 2004). From now onward, I will refer broadly to the 'national media environment' or simply 'information environment' when referring to the key European-related political information (actors and issues) supplied by the most influential national newspapers in the national public sphere. It is not meant to be the only political information available at the time. Rather, as I will explain

[3] As Hopmann et al. (2010) warn, both measures might not be completely independent, as direct exposure is embedded within the information environment. Nevertheless, these studies represent advances in disentangling both effects.

throughout the different chapters of this thesis, this mainstream media information is highly pertinent in terms of assigning political responsibilities and accountability in the multilevel polity.

1.2. Identifying media content that matters to European citizens

[N]ews content is explored as a symbolic environment, with its own internal coherence as a system of representation, from which a range of theoretical inferences in turn can be made about the forces shaping it and the resulting effects and societal implications. […] *in news content, we are concerned with that part of the symbolic environment that lays claim to connecting citizens to the political world and providing deliberative space for political voices.* (Reese, S.D., and Lee, J.K. 2012: 253, 254)

We live in intricate, hybrid media environments where information flows across different media outlets (Chadwick 2013, Pfetsch et al. 2013, Reese and Lee 2012). Politics is highly mediated. In such dynamic contexts, it is impossible to track all the political information to which citizens are exposed. Druckman (2005a: 518) posits that we should "isolate the most interesting normative or behavioral type of information and then seek to uncover exactly which media outlets […] provide that information." Fraile and Iyengar (2014: 289) assert that it "is not the medium *per se* but the content delivered by particular media sources that matters." In similar terms, de Vreese and Boomgaarden (2006c: 332-333) stress that "it is not the medium as such that matters, but the content of the news. […] we emphasize the importance of taking *content* into account […] It is not sufficient to rely on exposure measures and to merely speculate about media content." So, what kind of content matters for understanding supranational policy-making and tracking political responsibilities within the European Union? Where do citizens get this kind of information? (Delli Carpini 2004). These two questions guided the research design of my thesis: *what* is pertinent and *where* to find it.

Policy-making in the European Union is neither transparent nor straightforward. Citizens get informed about supranational policy-making through their national media (Hobolt and Tilley

2014, Vliegenthart et al. 2008, de Vreese and Boomgaarden 2006a). In the national context, the leading mainstream newspapers mediate political discourses to mass publics (Murray-Leach 2014, Delli Carpini 2004); influence the political agenda (Machill 2006, Reese and Lee 2012); are inter-media agenda-setters, spilling contents over to other media outlets and boosting news that originated in blogs and social media (Picard 2015, Pfetsch et al. 2013, Chadwick 2013, Habermas 2006);[4] and are the most important sources for retrieving European-related political information (Fraile and Iyengar 2014, Boomgaarden et al. 2013, Statham and Tumber 2013, Pfetsch et al. 2008, Vetters et al. 2006, Koopmans 2004a, Trenz 2004). Furthermore, in media studies, traditional newspapers are often considered "an essential element in promoting not only electoral democracy and responsive governance but also the development of a deliberative public sphere" (Fletcher and Young 2012: 36). All these media features are essential for my research. Consequently, this research focuses on the information provided by the mainstream national newspapers. If the information is not there, we may assume it will be much more difficult to have an opinion about European policy-making—at least, a reasoned, reflexive opinion.[5]

In general terms and in European studies, 'visibility'[6] refers to the amount of media attention given to the process of European integration. As Trenz (2004: 292) states: "The visibility of communication is the necessary precondition of the public sphere: it denotes that European

[4] Chadwick (2013: 26) notes that "in response to the development of digital media practices, broadcast media and newspapers have undergone decisive periods of adaptation and coevolution in order to maintain their legitimacy and preeminence in representing and shaping publics." See also Pfetsch et al. (2013) for a discussion on offline-online spillover directionalities.

[5] There are certain limitations and critiques that persist regarding the value of information acquisition. Although "there is clear evidence that the amount of information one possesses shapes attitudes and behaviors" Druckman (2005a: 517), it is still a matter of debate whether having more first-hand political information actually results in sounder political opinions (see Druckman 2005a for a discussion). People may fail in acquiring or processing the information that is available (Elenbaas et al. 2012, Druckman 2005a). Citizens also use other mechanisms (e.g., shortcuts, cueing political parties) in order to make decisions about the European Union (Hobolt and Tilley 2014). But the benefits of these mechanisms are not so clear-cut (Druckman 2005a, see also Friedman 2006 for a discussion). In any case, it seems difficult to consent that having little or no information on important issues does not matter at all in order to have an opinion about them. Fraile and Iyengar (2014: 289) stress the gains of the supply of information: "The practice of serious journalism contributes to an informed public. […] In-depth treatment of public affairs informs."

[6] The term 'visibility' is widely used in political science although seldom defined. A common definition is: "The degree to which something is seen by the public" and "The degree to which something is seen or known about" (Cambridge Dictionary). In media studies, 'visibility' is closely related to the concept of 'priming', which Iyengar et al. (1982: 849) define as the process by which "[b]y attending to some problems and ignoring others, media may also alter the standards by which people evaluate government." 'Visibility' also relates to 'salience', which Entman (1993: 93) defines as "making a piece of information more noticeable, meaningful, or memorable to audiences". 'Salience', in turn, is also connected to 'framing'. But political scientists namely operationalize 'salience' as 'visibility' (i.e., a measure of the amount of media coverage of a particular actor or subject) disregarding other ways of making salient particular news.

media and the public observe communication with reference to European politics". Quite simply, higher visibility of European subjects in the media provides citizens with information and cues about the importance of European integration (Boomgaarden et al. 2013). Empirical studies report that the effects of news coverage of the European Union on citizens' perceptions of events are "conditional upon the visibility and consistency in tone of the news" (de Vreese and Boomgaarden 2006b: 21). Greater visibility of European-related news is also positively related to citizens' knowledge gains about the European Union, and political participation (de Vreese and Boomgaarden 2006c). I do not analyze the tone of news coverage, but visibility is central to my research. As I have argued, first of all, it is important to know whether certain key political information is available, or not, in the national mainstream media. Hence, my research describes the visibility of this particular kind of information during the last economic crisis: European actors and issues in the context of austerity policy-making.

The European Union usually has low levels of visibility in the national public spheres due to the fact that the national media—who dominate the supply of European-related information to their national publics—namely make visible national actors advancing national interests. As a consequence, higher levels of European visibility are restricted to the occurrence of special events, as referenda, European elections or European summits (Loveless and Rohrschneider 2011, de Vreese et al. 2006, Schuck and de Vreese 2011, Schuck et al. 2011, Hobolt and Tilley 2014, Trenz 2004). In recent years, certain scholars report an ascending trend of European visibility in the national media even before the last economic crisis. Yet, it remains linked to short-term events (Rauh 2016), namely European elections (Boomgarden et al. 2013), or particular policies that are under European competence (Koopmans 2004a). I examine the period covering the last economic crisis understanding it as an exceptional time span that might have provided an opportunity for altering the balance that European and national actors and issues usually share in the national mainstream media. Considering that the crisis triggered exceptional circumstances in every European country for several years, and that the European Union took over a managerial role in order to handle it, I expect manifest visibility of European actors and issues in the national media during this period.

Although visibility is a clear indicator of media attention (e.g., Jerit et al. 2006) and certainly a useful measure to answer particular research questions, it does not, on its own, reveal the *quality* of political information. The visibility of actors facilitates accountability, and the visibility of issues reveals the political agenda. But the sole evidence of rising quantities of European visibility in the national media does not necessarily equal evidence of informative, pertinent information that might contribute to the understanding of the European Union and its policy-making.[7] Hence, many studies combine a measure of visibility with other measures of interest to their research (e.g., in politicization research).

The debates of political actors about issues and policies that take place in the media are crucial for the functioning of modern democracies (Delli Carpini 2004, Vliegenthart et al. 2012). Scholars provide evidence about the kinds of political information that are relevant to citizens' opinion formation. De Vreese and Boomgaarden (2006c: 332-333) state: "When news contains a lot of relevant and substantial content, that is when news is informative about the topic of interest, exposure has a positive effect on knowledge gains." Elenbaas et al. (2012) confirm previous research: citizens *do require relevant factual information* in order to monitor European policy-making, and it is best if this information is specific (i.e., detailed knowledge of a particular subject), not general information. "Information about what a government *does* is a crucial resource for the formation of opinions about that government" (Elenbaas et al. 2012: 730). Moreover, Gilens (2001: 379) proves that the lack of specific information and the consequent policy-specific ignorance lead citizens "to hold political views different from those they would otherwise hold". This has enormous implications for representative democracy. It is an important reminder for the European Union and its policy-making, of whom we do not know much. Especially during extremely difficult, unstable times, the European Union needs citizens' support. I stress the relevance of studying the key political information that was available to European citizens during the last economic crisis in the national domains. This kind of information might have contributed to citizens' understanding of sensitive supranational policy-making.

[7] This is particularly evident when we consider that references to the European Union are usually vague (e.g., 'Europe', 'Brussels', 'European Union').

Policy-making in the European Union's multilevel political system is intricate, complex and very difficult to follow. During the last economic crisis, economic policy-making affected all the spheres of citizens' lives. How did European citizens perceive who were responsible at different stages of the policy-making process? What kind of political information would have facilitated their understanding? Iyengar (1996: 59) remarks that "systematic reliance on episodic [issues presented as isolated illustrations] as opposed to thematic [issues presented in context] depiction of political life elicits individualistic attributions of responsibility […] By obscuring the connections between political problems and the actions or inactions of political leaders, television news trivializes political discourse and weakens the accountability of elected officials." Similarly, Meyer (1999: 663) asserts: "Without the personalization of political debates and decisions, political accountability remains invisible". The aim of this thesis is precisely to evidence the kind of information that enabled citizens to track political responsibilities within the European multilevel system during the economic crisis; also, to assess whether the information provided by the national mainstream media facilitated following complex policy-making. In this regard, Schmidt (2010a, 2013) posits that in the European Union we should discuss the political dimensions of policy—not just technical terminology—throughout the policy-making process.

In European-related subjects, the media function in amplifying issues and debates (Trenz 2004, 2008, Vetters et al. 2006). Scholars agree that those "representations that are most available in the media become more accessible in audiences' minds and are more likely to be used in subsequent judgments and evaluations" (Sotirovic and McLeod 2004: 385). Visibility in the media provides information about policy proposals, performance and political actors. But the visibility of political actors and issues in the media is not only important to European citizens. Political communication and media research have long acknowledged that media coverage is crucial for gaining political resonance and political influence (Koopmans 2004b). In particular, the ways in which actors, and issues, establish communicative links in the public sphere are central to the analysis of political struggles within the political system. In words of Koopmans and Statham (1999: 204), the "dimension of collective mobilization in the public domain [is] a key variable for explaining political change". Becoming visible, political actors may be observed, engage in public discussions, and observe competing political actors and

emerging issues. Through this communicative process of resonance in the public sphere, political actors are able to legitimate their positions (Koopmans and Statham 1999, Koopmans 2004a, 2004b, Vetters et al. 2006, Trenz 2004). In periods of crises, political, institutional, and discursive windows of opportunity open up. Discursive opportunities enable changes in the dynamics of the communicative interactions that take place in the national public sphere. Those political and social actors that do not usually have easy access to policy-making and the media may therefore participate in public discourses, promote their interests, contest other actors, and search legitimacy (Koopmans and Statham 1999, Kriesi 2004, Koopmans 2004b). In this study, I inquire whether the breadth of the last economic crisis might have opened up discursive opportunities in the national public spheres for different types of actors (namely, civil society) and those policy issues that were affected by austerity policy-making (e.g., social policies, pensions, labor, education, health).

In summary, citizens need information about political actors and policy options in order to participate in the political process, to make choices that represent their beliefs, and to support the political system. My research examines whether the mainstream national media of different European countries published this kind of political information during the last economic crisis. I explore, on the one hand, who the most prominent actors and issues were; on the other hand, which language the news articles used to communicate sensitive policy-making related to the European Union. Once I have uncovered this information, I assess the empirical results of my study relying on Meyer's (1999: 622)[8] three dimensions of the political process that should be made public in order "to facilitate public participation and accountability". These are:

"1. *The issues dimension:* What issues are being discussed, what are the arguments involved and what is about to be decided? This information is a prerequisite for informed public debate and the possibility of feedback into decision-making.
2. *The procedural dimension:* At what stage of the decision process the issues under

[8] Meyer (1999) analyzes the communication deficit of the European Commission. He proposes that the Commission should communicate these three dimensions of the political process to the media. I hereby make extensible the proposal for the media itself, as the final goal is to inform the public in order to facilitate its participation in the political process.

discussion are? What are the means, actors and access points to influence the outcome of the process? The communication of decision-making procedures can help to make politics visible and accessible to the public.

3. *The accountability dimension:* Who is advocating what? Who is responsible for a decision taken or the implementation of a policy? Without this information there can be no personal accountability vis-à-vis the public." (Meyer 1999: 622-623)

These three dimensions synthesize the key political information that identifies the actors and issues at different stages of the policy-making process, contributing to citizens following up and participating in decision-making. Throughout the last economic crisis, having this kind of information available in the national information environments during the process of austerity policy-making should have facilitated the understanding of complex issues and the allocation of political responsibilities in the multilevel polity. In other words, citizens would have found in the national information environments the necessary elements in order to accomplish informed public debates throughout an extremely critical period in the history of European integration. Whether having this kind of information effectively affected the perceptions that European citizens held about the European Union during the economic crisis is beyond the scope of this research. Yet, this thesis already draws attention to the issue and constitutes the first stage for advancing research in this direction: it provides in-depth, descriptive evidence of the supply of key political information in the national domains during the economic crisis.

The question of European visibility in the media is also central to the debates about the democratic deficit of the European Union. In this regard, it is expected that higher levels of visibility of European actors and issues would yield citizens' awareness of the multilevel polity while contributing to create some kind of European public sphere, which is considered fundamental for the development of European identity and for democratic performance (Loveless and Rohrschneider 2011, Eriksen 2005, Trenz 2004). As aforementioned, my analysis begins measuring the visibility of European actors and issues across different national public spheres during the economic crisis, and then goes beyond. I do not only examine the prominence of the European Union and European issues in the national domains, but also the

communicative links that existed among all kinds of actors nationally, across different European countries, between the national and European levels, and over time. Finally, I supplement this information with a lexical analysis of European-related news coverage. Therefore, this thesis provides a comprehensive picture of the *quantity* and *quality* of the dominant discursive interactions that took place in a selected sample of national public spheres during the economic crisis. The empirical results I present are framed within theoretical discussions that are particularly relevant to the project of European integration, today and into the future. To the best of my knowledge, such a comprehensive, comparative empirical research covering the whole economic crisis is still missing. This thesis contributes to fill the gap.

1.3. Deliberative democracy, the public sphere, and legitimacy

The notion of a public sphere of informal citizen deliberation enabling the formation of rational public opinion that can critically guide political systems is seen by many democratic theorists as central to strong democracy. (Dahlberg 2004: 3)

"There is a close link between theories of the public sphere and democratic theory more generally. Democratic theory focuses on accountability and responsiveness in the decision-making process; theories of the public sphere focus on the role of public communication in facilitating or hindering this process" (Ferree et al. 2002: 289). Empirical analyses of the public sphere tend to remain unrelated to broader theoretical and normative discussions in political science. Media analyses do have relevance on their own, and extensive literatures prove so. However, they gain broader sense when they are connected, in particular, to democratic theory. By detecting how things actually *are* in the public sphere, empirical research that is guided by theory delineates concrete ways on how things *could* and *should be*. Different normative models of democracy—representative, participatory, deliberative,

constructionist[9]—raise different procedures and processes of political decision-making. Accordingly, they propose different criteria for developing desirable, democratic public discourse that hold different expectations toward the role of citizens and the functioning of the media (Ferree et al. 2002, Strömbäck 2005). Our societies present traits from different theoretical models of democracy that coexist (Strömbäck 2005). However, each theoretical model understands democracy in different terms and consequently assigns the greatest relevance to different aspects of the democratic process.

In this thesis, I inquire whether during the last economic crisis European citizens had the necessary political information in order to: (1) track political responsibilities and assign accountability across the European multilevel polity; (2) understand supranational policy-making; and (3) whether civil society participated in discursive interactions during the process of sensitive policy-making. These questions relate to the legitimacy of the European Union and European integration during the economic crisis. Deliberative democracy is the democratic theory that best suits the aims of my empirical research. It poses the highest value on the quality of the deliberative process—neither on who represents whom (representative democracy), nor on citizens' direct participation in democracy (direct democracy), nor on avoiding the exclusion of unrepresented social groups (constructionist, poststructuralist theories) (Smismans 2013, Ferree et al. 2002, Dahlberg 2013). In its view, the public sphere is essential to democracy; it is the means for acquiring political legitimacy. Deliberation is thought of as an extension of participatory democracy; it is not meant to replace it. Habermas (1994: 8) explains that: "Discourse theory works [...] with the *higher-level intersubjectivity* of communication processes that flow through both the parliamentary bodies and the informal networks of the public sphere. Within and outside the parliamentary complex, these subjectless forms of communication constitute arenas in which a more or less rational opinion- and will-formation can take place. Informal public opinion-formation generates 'influence'; influence is transformed into 'communicative power' through the channels of political elections; and communicative power is again transformed into 'administrative power' through legislation. […] civil society provides the social basis of autonomous public spheres that

[9] See Ferree et al. (2002) for a comparison of four models of democracy: representative liberal, participatory liberal, discursive (i.e., deliberative democracy), and constructionist.

remain as distinct from the economic system as from the administration. This understanding of democracy suggests a new balance between the three resources of money, administrative power, and solidarity, from which modern societies meet their needs for integration."

Habermas (2006: 415) conceives the public sphere as "an intermediary system of communication between formally organized and informal face-to-face deliberations in arenas at both the top and the bottom of the political system." The public sphere is at the periphery of the political system. However, it plays a central role. "[T]he procedures and communicative presuppositions of democratic opinion- and will-formation function as the most important sluices for the discursive rationalization of the decisions of an administration constrained by law and statute. […] The administration is a subsystem specialized for collectively binding decisions, whereas the communicative structures of the public sphere comprise a far-flung network of sensors that in the first place react to the pressure of society-wide problematics and stimulate influential opinions. The public opinion that is worked up via democratic procedures into communicative power cannot 'rule' of itself, but can only point the use of administrative power in specific directions" (Habermas 1994: 9). Dahlberg (2004: 10) reinforces the idea of centrality of the public sphere in democracy, acknowledging its crucial role vis-à-vis the other systems, namely the state and the economy, from which the public sphere should be completely independent: "The direction of force and influence should be from the public sphere to [the state and the economy] systems, and not the other way around." In sum, the communicative conditions of public discourse presuppose: "Autonomy from coercive and instrumental forces *internal* to discourse (bribery, threats, dogma, domination, manipulation, etc.) [and] Autonomy from forces *external* to communicative reason (state coercion and corporate power)" (Dahlberg 2004: 10). These are very high standards, indeed.

The question of how such a strong public sphere comes into being, and gives birth to an equally strong public opinion capable of influencing the political system derives from the theoretical conceptions of Habermas. As Dahlberg (2004: 6, 10, 12) explains, in Habermas' discursive communication theory the public sphere is an "idealized form of public reasoning", "the social space of democratic reasoning" that is constituted by "taking up communicative rationality within informal interactions". Therefore, "it is the form of communication, and not

the content, that is decisive in defining the boundaries of the public sphere". 'Form' refers to the process and procedures, how interactive communications take place in society, including who participate and toward which end. As a result of this ongoing dynamic process of discursive interactions in the public sphere, public opinion "is always in the *process* of formation" (Dahlberg 2004: 12). The goal of the process is to attain a public opinion "through which citizens are able to influence and hold accountable formal government" (Dahlberg 2004: 10). In summary, as Eriksen (2005: 342) asserts: "The notion of a public sphere is internally linked to normative political theory as it is a medium for political justification—for putting the decision makers to account—as well as for political initiative, viz., the mobilizing of political support. It is the place where civil society is linked to the power structure of the state. The public sphere, then, not only enables *autonomous opinion formation* but also empowers the citizens to *influence* the decision makers."

Accountability relates directly to the concept of legitimacy. The legitimacy of the European Union and European integration during the last economic crisis is, in fact, the ultimate concern that underlies my empirical research. Deliberative democracy provides a particular understanding of legitimacy, and how it is constructed through the process of deliberation in the public sphere. Chambers (2003: 308) explains: "Deliberative democratic theory is a normative theory that suggests ways in which we can enhance democracy and criticize institutions that do not live up to the normative standard. In particular, it claims to be a more just and indeed democratic way of dealing with pluralism than aggregative or realist models of democracy. Thus, it begins with a turning away from liberal individualist or economic understandings of democracy and toward a view anchored in conceptions of accountability and discussion. Talk-centric democratic theory replaces voting-centric democratic theory. […] [It] focuses on the communicative processes of opinion and will-formation that precede voting. Accountability replaces consent as the conceptual core of legitimacy. A legitimate political order is one that could be *justified* to all those living under its laws. Thus, accountability is primarily understood in terms of 'giving an account' of something, that is, publicly articulating, explaining, and most importantly justifying public policy." In Habermas' discursive theory (1994: 4), "democratic will-formation does not draw its legitimating force from a previous convergence of settled ethical convictions, but from both the communicative

presuppositions that allow the better arguments to come into play in various forms of deliberation, and from the procedures that secure fair bargaining processes." The deliberative aspect of the public sphere, where all social, political, institutional actors, and citizens engage in the rational, respectful exchange of information and opinions in pursuit of consensus and common good, relies *in part* in the forum that the news media provide. The national public sphere is in fact composed of a multitude of discursive interactions that take place in different forms and at different levels of society. Deliberation operates across the whole system "as a cleansing mechanism that filters out the 'muddy' elements from a discursively structured legitimation process" (Habermas 2006: 415). The mass media play a central role in the dynamics of the political public sphere, which in turn is *the* crucial arena for legitimating the democratic process.

The normative concerns of deliberative democracy about the purpose, functioning, and outcomes of a strongly developed discursive public sphere bring into light important questions that affect the European Union. The deliberative aspect of the process of decision-making is particularly pertinent in relation to its communicative and legitimacy deficits (Meyer 1999, Meyer 2005, Boomgaarden et al. 2013, Zürn et al. 2012). It is in the public sphere where different visions of the European Union may be debated, spreading knowledge and information about the process of European integration (Eriksen 2005).[10] Most importantly, discussing how much, and what sort of, commonality the peoples of Europe, their representatives, the economic, social, and political actors want to define and implement. But before discussing these problems, we need to ground the normative considerations aforementioned into plausible empirical tools of analysis, defining in the first place the key characteristics of communication in the public sphere proposed by deliberative democracy.

[10] Habermas 1994: "According to the communitarian view, there is a necessary connection between the deliberative concept of democracy and the reference to a concrete, substantively integrated ethical community. Otherwise one could not explain, in this view, how the citizens' orientation to the common good would be at all possible. The individual, so the argument goes, can become aware of her co-membership in a collective form of life, and therewith become aware of a prior social bond, only in a practice exercised with others in common. The individual can get a clear sense of commonalities and differences, and hence a sense of who she is and who she would like to be, only in the public exchange with others who owe their identities to the same traditions and similar formation processes." The latter refers to developing the process of deliberation based on common grounds, as proposed by discursive deliberation—not to racial, religious or cultural particularities (Dahlberg 2004).

There is a "generally accepted and broadly defined conception of the public sphere as a space constituted by critical communication." (Dahlberg 2004: 3). Habermas' theory of the public sphere is a useful starting point "because it provides the most systematically developed critical theory of the public sphere presently available" (Dahlberg 2004: 3) although not free of criticisms (Dahlberg 2013, Chambers 2003, Ferree et al. 2002). A simple, clear definition of the two main components that define deliberative democracy highlights that the notion "includes collective decision making with the participation of all who will be affected by the decision or their representatives: this is the democratic part. Also, […] it includes decision making by means of arguments offered *by* and *to* participants who are committed to the values of rationality and impartiality: this is the deliberative part" (Elster 1998: 8). The premise of participatory inclusiveness in discursive interactions is hence explicit. It points manifestly to the inclusion of civil society and those in the periphery of the political public sphere, avoiding the risk of leaving the process of decision-making exclusively in the hands of core political actors. Habermas (2006: 421) clearly asserts: "The political public sphere needs input from citizens who give voice to society's problems and who respond to the issues articulated in elite discourse." As aforementioned, in Habermas' (2006) deliberative democracy, the *raison d'être* of rational argumentation is to build up a strong public opinion that influences the political process. The deliberative model expects the political public sphere "to mobilize and pool relevant issues and required information, and to specify interpretations [in order to] ensure the formation of a plurality of considered public opinions [...] and thereby to prepare the agendas for political institutions. […] This is still a quite demanding expectation" (Habermas 2006: 416).[11] In ideal terms, deliberation is "based on full information and the representation of all points of view" (Chambers 2003: 319).

These theoretical arguments resonate with, and even endorse, the empirical definitions of what constitutes pertinent political information for European citizens regarding supranational policy-making that I presented in the previous sections. Both stances, theoretical and

[11] Habermas (2006: 416) defines: "As an essential element of the democratic process, deliberation is expected to fulfill three functions: to mobilize and pool relevant issues and required information, and to specify interpretations; to process such contributions discursively by means of proper arguments for and against; and to generate rationally motivated *yes* and *no* attitudes that are expected to determine the outcome of procedurally correct decisions. In view of the legitimation process as a whole, the facilitating role of the political public sphere is mainly to fulfill only the first of these functions and thereby to prepare the agendas for political institutions."

empirical, point at common elements: in essence, the relevance of the public sphere as a space where inclusive discursive interactions take place, through which political actors are made accountable, and where citizens participate in the process of policy-making; for which precise political information is necessary. All of this results in strengthening the legitimacy of the policy-making process and the political system itself. I argue that all these elements take on greater relevance in times of crises, when policy decisions are particularly sensitive, and in multilevel political systems, which blur the allocation of political responsibilities. At critical junctures the risk of generating controversial policy outcomes that overlook the interests of important segments of European populations becomes even more dangerous for the legitimacy of the European Union.

From the perspective of deliberative democracy, the actors involved in communicative rationality—i.e., all those affected by the issues—are expected to become more informed, aware of others, capable of reviewing their own positions through the process of interactive argumentations, working together toward a common end.[12] They do not necessarily need to come up with an agreement. It is the process itself that builds up a stronger democracy based on broad, varied participation, as the issues change heading toward cohesion and therefore gaining force and influence to hold decision-making accountable. A varied participation in the discursive process guarantees that different views are represented. Most importantly, because the argumentative process is reflexive and inclusive, all the different views that meet the normative standards (e.g., quality of the ideas, common good) will be incorporated in the final decision. These considerations are central to my research that inquires about the relationships among actors, and the issues discussed in the public sphere at the pace of austerity policy-making during the economic crisis.

The normative condition of including heterogeneous, diverse participants is central to deliberative democracy for another reason too. From a problem-solving perspective, heterogeneous groups enhance the quality of deliberation because they reduce cognitive bias

[12] There is still a debate in empirical research across different disciplines as to whether this is exactly true. The findings present a range of outcomes, both positive (e.g., empathy, social cohesion) and negative (e.g., polarization, aggressiveness). Discussing these implications are out of the scope of my research.

(Druckman 2004). Bohman (2007) argues that deliberation should be regarded as 'error avoiding' instead of 'truth tracking', and that its potential depends on the value of diversity. It is not only a question of individuals, but rather that social knowledge has a distributed character across perspectives. "Rather than values or opinions as such, perspectives are the proper dimensions along which to measure heterogeneity. […] the relevant aspect of diversity that is necessary for improving the process of deliberation is not the pool of *reasons* as such but the availability of the *perspectives* that inform these reasons and give them their cogency." Perspectives are the "experiential source of values and opinions" (Bohman 2007: 350). Therefore, sticking to the normative condition of engaging in deliberation all the participants affected by the issues being discussed (those who hold different perspectives) warrants the quality of the process of decision-making itself. This definition has implications for further empirical research, which I discuss in the conclusions of this thesis (chapter 5).

So far, I have reflected on the participants and the kinds of information required to accomplish meaningful communicative exchanges. But for examining the democratic quality of the communicative interactions, particularly in the mass media, we need more specific criteria. I present three models derived from Habermas' discursive theory that I will later use for assessing the empirical results of my research.

First, Ferree et al. (2002: 290, 300-306) propose four main points to evaluate the quality of discourses in the public sphere, which characterize the main normative criteria of democratic theories. They apply them to assess (via content analysis) how quality newspapers presented a sensitive issue over time. Deliberative democracy should consider:

(1) Participants (who): Popular inclusion. Decisions are normally made at the center of the political system (institutional actors, political parties) but it is crucial that civil society and autonomous periphery actors (e.g., grassroots organizations) participate in "novel or normatively significant" issues.
(2) Content of the process (what): Deliberative. Better ideas should prevail over the weak ones. Transcend narrow self-interest and consider what "can be reasonably justified to people who disagree". Mutual and reciprocal recognition as autonomous, rational

subjects.

(3) Presentation of ideas (how): Dialogue, mutual respect, civility, but not necessarily detachment. Constructive interaction. Reasoned, understandable arguments. Consensus-seeking speech. Recognizing, incorporating and rebutting the arguments of others and justifying one's own.

(4) Relationship between discourse and decision-making "that is sought (or feared)" (outcome): Avoidance of premature non-consensus-based closure. The debates may continue if no agreement is reached because the process in itself contributes to building a strong public opinion.

With regard to the more specific role of journalists within the deliberative democratic normative frame, Ferree et al. (2002: 305) cite Tanni Haas (1999: 356)[13] who remarks that "the primary responsibility of journalists should be to *facilitate* [emphasis in original] public deliberations aimed at reaching rational-critical public opinions that are autonomous vis-à-vis the private sphere and the state." They also quote Jay Rosen (1994) to claim that journalists should center their attention on citizens as actors within the democratic process, not as observers.

Second, the communicative conditions of the public sphere that should guide empirical research according to Dahlberg (2004: 7) are obviously similar to Feerre et al.'s (2002). The last point (6) adds an important dimension that may affect the outcome of deliberation:

(1) Reasoned exchange of problematic validity claims "of an aspect of social life that has become problematized." They must address all those who are affected, whether present or not.

(2) Reflexivity. Argumentation is open to revision and critical examination of own values, assumptions, and interests.

(3) Ideal role taking. Taking the position of the other.

[13] Both Haas and Rosen are representatives of the civic or public journalism movement in the United States, inspired in Habermasian normative deliberative democracy.

(4) Sincerity. The previous point "assumes that all relevant information […] are put forward honestly."
(5) Formal inclusion and discursive equality. "All those affected by the claims under consideration are equally entitled and enabled to participate in deliberation."
(6) Autonomy from state and corporate power.

Third, also derived from Habermas' model and further refinements, Bennett et al. (2004: 440) propose to measure three levels in order to produce "robust empirical indicators that support systematic analyses within and between media systems":

(1) Access: Inclusiveness/exclusiveness in the media.
(2) Recognition: Identification of the actors and the amount of discursive space they have in the media.
(3) Responsiveness: Dialogue.

Finally, it should be noted that the democratic media system is one of the institutional conditions needed to develop such argumentative communications, which cannot flourish at the aggregate level on its own. "It is to these institutions that we must look in order to strengthen citizen deliberation and public opinion, evaluating their success via the communicative conditions outlined" (Dahlberg 2004: 13).[14] Moreover, Meyer (1999: 636) considers that "the very function of public debate in the media is to influence and adapt outcomes and extend deliberation to those actors which are not formally involved in the exercise of power". However, the problem with the "mediated political communication [that] is carried on by an elite" (Habermas 2006: 415) is that it fails the normative standards of participatory inclusiveness and system independence. Even though deliberation as a whole functions to legitimate the democratic process, the media system in itself is expected too to live up to the normative standards that deliberative democracy sets for a good functioning of democracy. We may acknowledge that the conditions in which media messages are produced

[14] Dahlberg (2004: 13) argues that "for the discursive conditions to be approximated in large, complex, plural societies, various institutional conditions are needed as mediations and groundings of communicative rationality, including a democratic media system, a vibrant civil society, and open governmental processes."

are influenced by the market, the political power, and professional limitations but the normative standards still hold valuable as an ideal aspiration, a benchmark against which we may empirically assess the functioning of the media. In theory, these limitations could still be 'absorbed' through the interactions that take place within the democratic process. Due to the interrelation of the different systems (e.g., public sphere, state, economy) and subsystems (e.g., media, political parties, institutions within the political public sphere), the moment one of them effectively relies on the normative standards of deliberative democracy for its process of decision-making, the other systems will be affected too; finally, they all should rely on discursive deliberations. As we have seen, inherent to the procedures of deliberative democracy is the assumption of the diversity of participants. Therefore, according to the issues that are being discussed, certain institutions, certain citizens, certain political agents, and so forth, will be implied in different systems, overlapping in dynamic, ever changing roles, influencing each other (Habermas 2006). This thesis offers a comparative assessment of different national public spheres, based on the discursive interactions that took place in the national mainstream media during the last economic crisis in Europe.

1.4. Political communication, discursive interactions, and the legitimacy of the European Union

The lack of public deliberation over EU politics is "the background if not the cause of the […] *much debated democracy deficit. It represents the prerequisite for the allocation of legitimacy"* (Gerhards, 1993: 90, cited and translated by Meyers 1999: 622).

The transfer of policy-making power from the member-states to the supranational level that characterizes European integration raises concerns about the democratic deficit of the European Union, time and again. Whether we agree, or not, that the European Union suffers from an inherent democratic deficit,[15] it seems clear that its legitimacy depends on its citizens'

[15] The issue still divides scholars. On the one side, critics note that in the European Union there is no such thing as a European *demos*, a European electorate or a European public sphere. European citizens do not vote European executive representatives,

approval (Smismans 2013, Loveless and Rohrschneider 2011, Scharpf 2009, Jones 2009, Hooghe and Marks 2009). Legitimacy broadly refers to "the generalized degree of trust that the governed have toward the political system" (Smismans 2013: 342). In Scharpf's (1999) model of political legitimacy there are two distinct dimensions. Input-oriented legitimacy (government *by* the people)[16] refers to the involvement of citizens in the decisions made within the political system. Output-oriented legitimacy (government *for* the people) refers to the effectiveness of the outcomes of those decisions. Input legitimacy relates to the participatory quality of the democratic process while output legitimacy is associated to performance, efficiency, and the problem-solving quality of laws and rules. In this model, the legitimacy of the political system derives from citizens' satisfaction with the interplay between these two dimensions.[17] Both dimensions do not necessarily need to be positive at the same time, as one of them may prevail over the other one and suffice to legitimate the political system, or not (Scharpf 2014, Smismans 2013, Schmidt 2010a, 2013). In this regard, Scharpf (2014: 19, 20) states that "in a democratic polity, the problem-solving effectiveness of government 'for the people' must be complemented by the input-oriented justification of governing choices as an exercise of collective self-government 'by the people'. To ensure responsiveness to the politically salient preferences of the governed, public policy should thus be shaped through political debate in a common public space, through political competition for the exercise of governing powers, and through political institutions that ensure the electoral accountability of governors to the governed."

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the control of the national parliaments over the European executives is limited, and even the European parliament, which has been reinforced through successive treaties, is still a weaker institution than the Council or the Commission (Scharpf 1999, Follesdal and Hix 2006, Crombez 2003). On the other side, scholars argue that the shortages of the supranational polity are not necessarily more severe than those of its constituent national democracies (Moravcsik 2002, Sorace 2017).

[16] Schapf's (1999) "definitions pick up on Abraham Lincoln's famous dictum about democracy requiring government *by* the people, *of* the people and *for* the people at the same time that the terms themselves have been borrowed from systems theories. They originate in particular in the work of David Easton (1965), who defined input into the political system as consisting of citizens' demands and support (conferred not only through elections but also by citizen identity and sense of system legitimacy) and output as government decisions and actions, leaving what went on in the political system itself largely blank." (Schmidt 2010a: 6).

[17] Schmidt (2010a: 5, 2013) adds a further intermediate mechanism: 'throughoutput legitimacy', which is "judged in terms of the accountability, transparency and efficiency of the EU's decision-making processes along with their openness to pluralist consultation *with* the people." I do not use this dimension in my current analysis.

From the perspective of discursive institutionalism,[18] input legitimacy is "more concerned with the legitimacy built […] through the 'communicative' discourse of public deliberation, contestation and legitimization [...] which follows from the communicative processes involved in elections and other forms of deliberative interactions with the public and civil society, and how these may contribute to the construction of a sense of collective identity and/or the formation of a collective political will in a European 'public sphere'" (Schmidt 2010a: 7). Output legitimacy depends not just on policy performance but "on how such EU policies resonate with citizen values and build identity, mediated by how well elites' discourse serves to legitimate those policies and how citizens respond in the context of media-carried 'communicative discourses' of deliberation or even contestation" (Schmidt 2010a: 7). The focus is on "the discursive logics of communication in the European Union's deliberative public sphere [and] in the interactive construction of democracy in the EU by a *demos* in the 'European public sphere'" (Schmidt 2010a: 5, see also Eriksen 2005, Koopmans 2004a). The fundamental remark is that "the problems for legitimacy [of the European Union] are not only structural and path dependent […] They are also ideational and discursive, as leaders fail to legitimate and citizens fail to deliberate" (Schmidt 2010b: 7-8). This assertion stresses, once again, the relevance of analyzing discursive interactions in the public sphere, which contribute to building the legitimacy of European integration. In the following chapters, I assess how the national and European political, economic, and social actors engaged in discursive interactions across Europe; and how these related to austerity policymaking and the European Union. This thesis hence provides empirical evidence over a particularly difficult period, the last economic crisis.

The relationship between European elites and European citizens has changed over time. During the first decades of European integration, the project enjoyed a general acceptance that left policy-making to the elites without close public scrutiny ('permissive consensus' period). In Scharpf's model, these years correspond to output-based legitimacy. As far as European

[18] Schmidt (2014: 246) defines: "This approach tends to be very open to a wide range of ways of analyzing the substantive content of ideas and the interactive processes of discourse in institutional context […] With regard to the interactive processes of discourse, […] discursive institutionalism [also] builds on […] those concerned with the 'communicative discourse' between elites and the public through deliberation and contestation with mass publics, the media, electorates, social movements and the everyday public" as in Habermas, for example."

citizens perceived the benefits of European integration, there seemed to be no need for higher levels of civic involvement (input legitimacy). However, the question of legitimacy gained increasing importance when the process of economic globalization and European integration consolidated as from the 1970s onward (Scharpf 1999, McLaren and Guerra 2013).[19] The unprecedented development of supranational governance that represented the Maastrich Treaty in the early '90s was mirrored by a critical shift in citizens' attitudes toward the European Union reflecting a growing public awareness and contestation ('constraining dissensus' period). Since then, elites can no longer ignore citizens' opinions toward European integration (Hooghe and Marks 2009, Boomgaarden et al. 2011a, Loveless and Rohrschneider 2011, Smismans 2013, Lindberg and Scheingold 1970).

European citizens proved that the legitimacy of European decisions is not static over time. Scholars argue that the European integration process inevitably leads to contesting the legitimacy of the European Union. As the supranational level acquires more competences and reduces national sovereignty, the European Union necessarily conflicts with national interests (Majone 2014, Zürn et al. 2012, Kriesi 2014). It also becomes increasingly more difficult to base legitimacy solely on the outputs of the system because increasing political authority at the supranational level unleash demands for public justifications of supranational decision-making (Rauh 2016). The last economic crisis is one of these instances in which the amount and the quality of the supranational interventions marked a milestone in the process of European integration (Dinan 2012, Hodson 2013). These interventions of the European Union did not only reduce national sovereignty; they also implied very high social costs (Hermann 2013, Theodoropoulou and Watt 2011, Wren-Lewis 2016, Scharpf 2014).

The European Union played a principal role in the agency of the crisis. In doing so, the exceptionally critical circumstances exposed it to vast public visibility. The way in which it reacted was extraordinary. There were impressive transfers to the bank system, exceptional financial support to member-states conditional upon accepting the unprecedented surveillance

[19] After the first enlargement in 1973 (UK, Ireland, and Denmark) the EEC-EU began limited consulting with European mass publics. The Single European Act (SEA) "marked a turning point" with increased economic coordination and "member state governments selling their varying visions of a renewed European project that would contribute to further economic development of the member states" (McLaren and Guerra 2013: 355).

of national economic policies, binding commitments to fiscal discipline in national law, direct political interventions replacing democratically elected governments, extremely frequent intergovernmental summits, a far-reaching reform of the euro area governance, and so forth. The transfers of power to the supranational level proved to be hugely unpopular both in the creditors (due to the transfers made to bailed-out countries) and in the debtors (due to the austerity policies implemented) member-states (Hodson and Puetter 2013, Scharpf 2014).

Research on mass attitudes toward the European Union during the economic crisis reveals that the loss of support was greater in the European member-states that were most severely hit by the crisis, with unprecedented high unemployment rates, and that underwent a bail-out (Armingeon and Ceka 2014, Roth et al. 2013). A series of challenging events that still hover the European Union include political crises, open contestation of European policies, increasing Euroscepticism, the escalation of national political demands, the success of populist parties that openly oppose any further integration or quite simply advocate quitting the European Union (Hobolt and de Vries 2016, Kriesi and Grande 2014, Kriesi 2014). These questions pose major challenges upon the European integration project. Smismans (2013: 351) clearly states: "The economic crisis was a particular challenge for the legitimacy of the EU. […] The economic crisis and the way in which the EU has reacted to it have amplified in an unprecedented fashion all of the main features of the EU's democratic deficit […] a real blow to the EU's output legitimacy".[20] The transfer of policy-making power from the national to the supranational level was conducted without sufficient democratic control (Scharpf 2014, Majone 2014, Kreuder-Sonnen 2016, Tosun et al. 2014). Consequently, the idea of the democratic deficit of the European Union and its lack of legitimacy gained renewed impetus.

[20] It is meaningful to note the shift in the opinions of Giandomenico Majone regarding the legitimacy of the European Union over several decades of integration. In my regard, the change of opinions evidences the transformation of the European Union itself. It also draws attention to how European integration should be developed in order to respond to its citizens' approval. In the 1990s, Majone argued that the EU's democratic deficit was not such if compared to the nation-states. However, in 2014, after the impact of the euro crisis, he explains: "Less than twenty years ago it was still possible to argue that a problem of democratic legitimacy in the EC/EU did not really exist. […] I concluded that as far as the European Community was concerned, the indirect legitimacy provided by the democratic character of the Member States was sufficient to legitimate the delegation of such limited competences to the supranational level. I did point out, however, that 'doubts as to the legitimacy of non-majoritarian institutions […] increase in direct proportion to the expanding role of these institutions' (Majone, G. 1996. *Regulating Europe* London: Routledge: 287)." (Majone 2014: 1216)

Nevertheless, more power shift to the supranational level may have brought in more media attention. Some scholars already refer to the enhanced visibility of the European Union and to more public awareness of the role of the European Union in the management of the economic crisis (Scharpf 2012, Hobolt and Wratil 2015, Statham and Trenz 2015, Kriesi and Grande 2014). This might have resulted in improving the quality of the information too, the media supplying more pertinent political information and identifying the actors involved at different stages of sensitive policy-making. Besides, as we have seen, during critical integration steps and in times of crises, windows of opportunity may open up for new political actors. This might have lead to more inclusive public debates and more participation of civil society in the national public spheres. This thesis assesses these assumptions. The last economic crisis offers and interesting juncture for analyzing what European citizens perceived about the European Union through the national mainstream media at a time when extraordinary supranational policy-making deeply affected all the domains of their everyday lives.

In the midst of uncertainty, threat, and difficult decision-making, public communication becomes ever more important as a tool for bridging policy-makers and citizens. I argue that, in the scenario of the economic crisis, political communication and debates in the public sphere may have functioned as means for enhancing the political legitimacy of the European Union *if they discussed policy-making among a variety of actors, including civil society, and if they transmitted pertinent political information about the actors and issues discussed in the process of policy-making*. In this regard, Meyer (1999: 622) states that "political communication contributes to the legitimacy of governance if it helps to increase citizens' influence on decision-making and to hold political actors accountable for their actions in between electoral procedures. In order to accomplish this goal, issues under deliberation would need to be visible *before* decisions are made, the decision-making process and its political conflicts made transparent, and political actors made visible as agents in this process". Political communication hence contributes to legitimacy facilitating a "continual process of public reasoning and scrutiny" (Meyer 1999: 620) that leads to the approval of government. Transparency of decision-making is required as "a pre-requisite for the formation of public opinion and the possibility of influencing the outcomes" (Meyer 1999: 631). In particular,

European "public events are significant because they personalize EU decision-making visibly and thus enable public access to otherwise hidden procedures and actors" (Meyer 1999: 632).

I consider the last economic crisis from the perspective of a 'European public event', in the sense of being a phenomenon of the greatest magnitude that reached European-wide attention, deeply affected, and even threatened, the project of European integration itself. As Smismans (2013: 352) asserts: "The main challenge for EU democracy remains the difficulty of linking European decision-making to a broad public debate across member-states." The extraordinary events that the economic crisis triggered might have represented an opportunity in this sense. This thesis provides empirical evidence of the visibility of actors and issues, and the transparency and inclusiveness of the policy-making process across different national public spheres during this critical period. It inquires whether European legitimacy was built through this kind of discursive interactions. In brief, it contributes to assessing the national public spheres in several European countries at a time of increased contestation that called into question the European Union itself.

1.5. Object of the thesis

This thesis aims to contribute to our understanding of the national media environments in times of crisis, considering it is the space where European citizens get informed, directly or indirectly, about supranational policy-making. Do crises enhance the availability of political information related to the European Union in the national public spheres? Does sensitive policy-making during crises provide the necessary information for citizens to learn about the European Union through the national media? Did the last economic crisis open a window of opportunity for citizens to participate in the public sphere in deliberations related to the policy-making process? The following chapters depict a series of media portraits about the European Union and austerity policy-making that supplied important political information to the national publics during the last economic crisis (2008-2014). They conform public representations of

the European Union in extremely difficult times. The subjects discussed in the data were introduced by the most prominent political actors through the most influential printed press. I present a thorough comparison of the discursive interactions that took place among these political actors within and across different national public spheres in Europe, tracing their evolution over time. These were an essential component of the national information environments where European citizens lived at the time. I therefore presume that this supply of information into the national public spheres contributed to build citizens' perceptions about the European Union and, in particular, might have affected how they assessed the European Union managing the economic crisis. So far, this research remains descriptive and lays the foundations that will enable further research to test these arguments, and more.

The main research question that underlies this study is: *How did European citizens living in different countries 'see' the European Union in relation to the economic crisis and austerity policy-making?* From which several specific research questions derive, which should be asked in each country and over time.

Types of actors (accountability, inclusiveness):

RQ 1: Were supranational and national political actors clearly identified?

RQ 2: What types of actors dominated the discursive interactions?

RQ 3: Did ordinary citizens participate in discursive interactions?

RQ 4: Did varied types of actors from different political levels (national/supranational) and different European countries engage in discursive interactions?

RQ 5: Was the European Union associated to austerity policy-making?

Policy-making process (transparency, argumentation):

RQ 6: What types of issues dominated the discursive interactions?

RQ 7: Was the process of austerity policy-making discussed at different stages, particularly, before implementation?

RQ 8: Were other policy alternatives taken into account?

RQ 9: Were social policies considered side-by-side economic policy-making?

RQ 10: Were national differences within the European Union evident?

Lexical quality (understanding complex policy-making):

RQ 11: Was the language used clear and accessible?

These research questions point at identifying all the pertinent political information that European citizens needed in order to allocate political responsibilities, and to participate in informed, public debates during the last economic crisis. They also aim at revealing whether there was, or not, an overarching discourse across different European countries.

The political information that we find in the national context flows across a variety of offline and online media outlets. My intent is neither to quantify all the political information that was available at the time of the economic crisis, nor to measure the whole media environment in each European country. Rather, I aim at selecting the appropriate data and methodologies that may reveal the most significant communicative interactions that took place in different European national public spheres during this critical period. The following section, 1.6. Methodology, gives an account of the methods and data I have used toward this end.

1.6. Methodology

Why, then, be quantitative about communication? Because of the scientific and policy gains that can come of it. The social process is one of collaboration *and* communication*; and quantitative methods have already demonstrated their usefulness in dealing with the former. Further understanding and control depend upon equalizing our skill in relation to both.* (Lasswell, H.D. 1949: 52)

The three empirical chapters in this thesis have each a section on methodology and data that explains the research design step by step, in detail. Hereafter, I will only clarify a few general considerations regarding (1) the choice of methods and sample I used (*1.6.1. Comments on the research design*) and (2) the value of descriptive inferences in media studies (*1.6.2. Methodological approach*).

1.6.1. Comments on the research design

[A]nalyses of language can usefully complement the analysis of politics. (Morley 2012: 295)

This thesis intends to grasp the perspective of European citizens 'looking' through the lenses of their national media at the European Union and its policy-making in difficult times. My goal is to identify key elements that enabled citizens (1) to trace political responsibilities in the national public spheres, and (2) to understand the complex policy-making that was taking place at the time; in addition, to illustrate (3) their participation in public discourses. Therefore, I aim at revealing, on the one hand, who the most relevant political actors were, and how they interrelated in the public sphere; on the other hand, whether supranational policy-making was publicly presented in comprehensible terms. In the following, second chapter of the thesis, I introduce the question of Europeanization in the national public spheres, which relates to the amount of visibility that the European Union and European issues have in the national media. I therefore assess the horizontal and vertical discursive interactions that took place during the economic crisis among the dominant actors in different European countries. In the third chapter, I analyze the discursive interactions among different types of political, economic, and social actors, tracking the participation of civil society; and identify the kinds of issues they promoted in the same European countries. In the fourth chapter, I take a closer look at the lexicon that the news articles used, I inquire whether the European Union was directly associated to austerity policy-making, and track the dominant topics clustering words that often correlate in the texts.

All in all, I intend to capture a relevant picture of the information supplied by influential media on contested policies in the national public sphere. Reese and Lee (2012: 253) observe: "Content is no longer relatively easy to isolate within a select group of clearly defined publications and broadcast programs. The continuous online news stream, further amplified and dissected by the various tiers of blogs and social media, make fixing a sample of news content more difficult than in the pre-digital era." There is a flux of information that transits across offline and online media outlets, which recover, re-use and amplify the most relevant

contents (Chadwick 2013). I have already argued why I chose to retrieve political information from the mainstream national newspapers (see the previous sections). Media bias in the sample selection is one of my main concerns. The mechanisms of news selection in the media are beyond our control. The collected news data might not correspond to the magnitude of the real events. Franzosi (1987: 7) argues that "the problem with using the press to collect data is that we risk collecting insufficient, rather than faulty, information […] Not all events or items of information are equally liable to misrepresentation in the press." In order to overcome media bias, among other considerations, I use two different methodologies: political claims-making analysis (Koopmans and Statham 1999), in particular, and Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) topic modeling (Blei, Ng and Jordan 2003) as a complement.[21] Applied alternatively to the same dataset, these two methods provide insightful, supplementary information so as to achieve my research goals. As we know, data tested with different methods and from different perspectives becomes more robust. As far as I know, these two methodologies have not yet been used together to analyze media contents. This is one of the contributions of my research.

Political claims-making analysis is a methodology that retrieves political claims—strategic interventions in the public sphere—from news articles, made by collective political actors that have overcome the press filters (i.e., media selection bias), which implies these are relevant actors in the national scene. Claims indicate the concerns of specific actors and their alignments along particular cleavages. They trace a relational communicative structure that indicates alliances and cleavages represented in the public sphere at a given time (Vetters and Trenz 2006). Claims-making analysis is based on human coding of pre-established categories of interest that become variables in the dataset. It identifies political actors along three basic dimensions: as 'emitters' making the claim, as 'addressees' receiving the claim, and as 'objects' affected by the claim—together with the content of the claim and contextual data that are also coded in the dataset. This method is either used on its own or complementing other research methods, namely to retrieve crucial contextual information (e.g., within the European Social Survey, see Statham and Tumber 2013). As Statham and Trenz (2013: 970) posit, "an advantage is that the claims-making approach is an *analytic descriptive* method: it simply

[21] Please refer to the individual chapters for a thorough explanation of each methodology.

describes who and what is present in the public sphere. This means that the claims data can be used to answer questions that come from a wide range of different theoretical and conceptual backgrounds."

Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) topic modeling is an unsupervised quantitative text analysis method that uncovers hidden thematic relationships in textual data. In my research, LDA also enables an in-depth textual analysis that contextualizes the claims made by the key political actors previously identified in the sample, assessing the whole text of the news articles where those claims were made. As Mohr and Bogdanov (2013: 560) state, "it is useful to think about topic models not as providing an automatic text analysis program but rather as providing a lens that allows researchers working on a problem to view a relevant textual corpus in a different light and at a different scale". Topic models can be used for viewing small-scale corpora, and work well supplementing other methods of content analyses (Jacobs and Tschötschel 2019, Mohr and Bogdanov 2013). They also provide "a fundamental shift in the locus of methodological subjectivity—from pre-counting to post-counting. […] interpretation is still required, but from the perspective of the actual modeling of the data, the more subjective moment of the procedure has been shifted over to the post-modeling phase of the analysis" (Mohr and Bogdanov 2013: 560, 561). In summary, the thematic clustering of words is algorithmic, machine-driven, and needs the researcher's interpretation once the relationships have been established.

This thesis uses primary data that was collected and coded within the framework of the LIVEWHAT EU-FP7 (2013-2016) project in which I participated. The dataset is from the Work package 3, "Collective Responses to Crises in the Public Domain". It was meant for claims-making analysis. The sample is representative of the main national press and covers an ample ideological spectrum in nine European countries. All the news articles contain the words 'austerity', 'crisis' (economic, financial, debt), or 'recession'. As we will see throughout the chapters, this has important implications for my research. The first two empirical chapters of this thesis (second and third chapters) apply political claims-making analysis to the same original LIVEWHAT EU-FP7 (2013-2016) sample of nine selected European countries during the period 2008-2014. Using political claims-making analysis, I

cannot differentiate 'austerity' from the 'crisis' or 'recession' that appear somewhere in the body of text. In contrast, I do gain a thorough representation of the composition of, and the links among, all the political actors, and the issues they bring forward in each country over time, differentiating the political levels of interest to this research (European Union and member-states).

The fourth chapter takes a rather different approach. At this instance, I aim at analyzing the wording in detail, paying particular attention to the associations between the European Union and austerity. LDA identifies all the terms in the sample; hence it differentiates 'austerity' from 'crisis', and 'recession'. Due to my own linguistic limitations, I reduce the sample and keep three LIVEWHAT EU-FP7 (2013-2016) countries, considering that these are valuable cases for the interest of my research.[22] I keep in the sample all those articles that in any part of the text contain a European reference—not just those where a European claim-actor or European issue had been previously identified. I might be now considering, for example, an article where we had previously coded a national political actor making a claim, but we did not identify a European reference because it did not correspond to any of the variables coded in the LIVEWHAT EU-FP7 (2013-2016) dataset. However, in these news articles there are meaningful references to 'Europe', which I am interested in analyzing too. The resulting sample has in all its articles all the words that should reveal the most meaningful relationships of interest to this research: 'austerity', 'recession', or 'crisis' (financial, economic, or debt); and 'European Union', the member-states, or 'Europe' (and its derivate wordings). Within such a particular sample, I expect to reveal strong relationships among key words and, more specifically, a significant presence of 'Europe'. Nevertheless, as we will see, the results show that all these manifest references are not strong enough to cluster together into meaningful topics.

[22] Some researchers translate automatically the texts when using quantitative methods that rely on 'bag-of-words', as LDA (de Vries et al. 2018, Reber 2018). However, I have decided to take a more conservative approach that would allow me to read and understand the original texts.

1.6.2. Methodological approach

Content analysis is a technique which aims at describing, with optimum objectivity precision, and generalizability, what is said on a given subject in a given place at a given time.
(Lasswell, H.D. et al. 1952: 34)

This study is empirical, in-depth descriptive, and exploratory; it draws inferences that may guide further research. I have already stressed the relevance of having, first of all, accurate knowledge of media contents (what information the media convey) before analyzing media effects (how the media deliver particular information). At this point, I will not refer to any particular method; rather, I aim at discussing the merits and limitations of description that are common to quantitative text analyses in general.[23]

Applied quantitative content analysis research is often descriptive, and media analyses are no exception.[24] Quantitative text analyses provide a systematic, objective, and replicable description of the *manifest* content of communication (Riffe et al. 2014). Lasswell (1949: 48) already argued that "quantitative procedures reduce the margin of uncertainty in the basic data" in communication research. These are powerful tools to explore data and observe political and social problems. Important findings have been made in science even if they addressed the *how* question, and not the *why*. "Knowing how […] is valuable knowledge. And science needs ascertained facts and reliable data patterns as much as theories" (Franzosi 2008: 38). Obviously, no causal inferences are made in descriptive studies,[25] but nevertheless some aspects of the phenomenon may be already learnt from fine-grained description itself.[26]

[23] The authors I cite discuss theoretical and methodological aspects of description from a range of perspectives.

[24] See Franzosi 2008, Riffe et al. 2014, and others, who discuss many examples of insightful media content descriptions.

[25] The ongoing debate is much broader and refers not only to methods, but mostly to the theories that use these methods. In the end, there is a trade-off between the accurate description of a population and "the ability to reflect the complexity and indeterminacy of political processes" (Hay 2002: 36), on the one hand, and explanation and generalization, on the other. Hence, because "each approach has characteristic strengths and weaknesses that flow rather directly from their different assumptions and logics, it may be more fruitful to explore what they have to offer each other than to decide between the two once and for all." (Hay 2002: 46). Franzosi (2008: 38) argues: "Not that work based on hypothesis testing is necessarily 'better' and descriptive work 'worse'. As I have written: "The idol of 'hypothesis testing' before which we kneel with religious fervor tends to obscure the invaluable role that good statistical work can play in bringing out patterns in the data" (Franzosi 2004: 231)."

[26] Riffe et al. (2014: 12) state: "Even apparently simple descriptive studies of content may be valuable […] the importance of a research finding cannot be determined statistically" (Riffe et al. 2014: 47).

Quantitative text analyses also "reduce communication phenomena to manageable data […] from which inferences may be drawn about the phenomena themselves" (Riffe et al. 2014: 18). Through systematic quantitative text analyses we may identify key terms, relationships, patterns, and trends in a sample population, then draw inferences from the content to the context of real world phenomena. As King, Keohane and Verba (1994: 7) stated: "The goal is inference. Scientific research is designed to make descriptive or explanatory *inferences* on the basis of empirical information about the world. Careful descriptions of specific phenomena are often indispensable to scientific research, but the accumulation of facts alone is not sufficient". Franzosi (2008: 37) emphasizes: "There is description and description. […] even when used descriptively, content analysis does not necessarily just deliver 'trends and changes in content.' It can highlight the mechanisms behind those trends and changes."

A precise description of a phenomenon may be the prelude and even a pre-requisite to explanation. "Description is the basis from which interpretation and explanation must build […] while empirical evidence alone is never enough, it is an important and necessary starting point" (Hay 2002: 252). In-depth description points out to new questions and opens up the path to new, fine-tuned research that will be developed with other methods. Riffe et al. (2014: 15) stress the "utility of systematic content analysis, alone or in conjunction with another method, for answering theoretical and applied questions explored by journalism or mass communication researchers." Starting off new research from an accurate description is focused, effective, and timesaving.

1.7. Content of the thesis

This thesis is structured in three main chapters (chapters 2, 3, and 4) of empirical analysis that answer the research questions aforementioned. These three chapters follow a common thread concerning media representations of the European Union and austerity policy-making during the last economic crisis. Each chapter is an independent piece of research that answers the

questions from a particular perspective. Therefore, an individual chapter may be well read on its own and convey meaning independently. However, the three chapters altogether give a rounder understanding of the object of research. They interweave similar theoretical arguments, but each chapter addresses particular discussions and hence approaches the research questions from a distinct, supplementary perspective. This result is stressed by a particular research design that complements two different methodologies, as explained in the previous section, *1.6.1. Comments on the research design*.

The second chapter of this thesis analyzes the visibility of collective actors in the mainstream press of nine selected European countries (France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the UK) during the economic crisis (2008-2014). I inquire whether the crisis, with the managerial role played by the European Union in austerity policy-making, opened up an opportunity for the direct Europeanization[27] of these nine public spheres, giving prominence to European actors and issues in vertical (national/European Union) and horizontal (national/other EU member-state) discursive relationships. The chapter argues that the Europeanization of the national public spheres implies a continuous process of advancing European interests and subjects (de Vreese 2012, Koopmans and Erbe 2003); that the national public sphere is an arena for political contention that reflects the political relationships that exist in society itself (Koopmans and Statham 1999); that it is meant for broad, public deliberation, and engagement in issues that concern modern societies (Loveless and Rohrschneider 2011); where communicative flows allow for the diffusion of particular understandings and conveyed meanings (Schlesinger 2007); that it represents a medium for political justification and for mobilizing political support (Eriksen 2005); through the dynamic flux of interrelated communications (Koopmans 2004b); that there is a tension between the supranational level of policy-making, and the national level of policy implementation and opinion formation (Koopmans and Erbe 2003); and that the national media are central in delivering the necessary European-related political information to European citizens, linking the communicative flows between the supranational and national political levels (Hobolt and

[27] I use the term 'direct' Europeanization in order to differentiate this process from the 'indirect' Europeanization that may also occur in the national public spheres when national actors internalize and appropriate European issues and discourses as their own (see, for example, Lahusen 2007).

Tilley 2014, Vetters et al. 2006). I identify, and illustrate thoroughly, the links among the most prominent political actors at different interrelated political levels; and track national and European issues longitudinally and cross-country. In terms of European actors, I differentiate three kinds: those belonging to the European Union, to another member-state, and to Europe in general (excluded the two previous). This is the first step I take in revealing the presence of the European Union and European issues in different national public spheres during the last economic crisis.

The third chapter advances a step forward and inquires about the typology of these collective actors, the kinds of issues they promoted, and the interests they affected in the same nine public spheres during the same period (2008-2014). I inquire whether those actors in the periphery of the political system, namely civil society and alternative organizations, who usually have limited access to policy-making and/or the media, were able to gain public visibility and promote their issues due to the exceptional circumstances of the economic crisis. The chapter argues that crises offer a window of opportunity for advancing new political actors and sensitive policy issues (Kriesi 2004); that public discourses contribute to the definition of crises, their diagnosis and prognosis, justifying policy-making (Hay 1999, Hay and Rosamond 2002, Schmidt and Radaelli 2004, Widmaier et al. 2007); that the public sphere is an arena for political contention that offers discursive opportunities for conflicting political actors; that public discourses represent symbolic struggles and reflect social conflicts (Koopmans and Olzak 2004); that visibility in the media is the first necessary condition for influencing public discourses, and opens the possibility of gaining political legitimacy (Koopmans 2004a); and therefore having a voice in the national media may be considered as a relative measure of political power. I analyze who made the political claims, to whom, about what, and affecting whose interests. I compare the shares of core state and political actors, interest groups, and civil society. Similarly, I delineate the typology of two main groups of issues: economic/financial and social/political. Up to now, these two chapters clearly reveal the presence of those political actors and issues that gained visibility in the influential national press during the economic crisis. They conform two complementary perspectives of the same object, viewed in terms of political levels (national/European) and typologies (of political actors and issues).

The fourth chapter examines in detail all the news articles that contain European references published in three out of the nine selected countries (France, Spain, and the UK) throughout the period 2007-2014. I inquire whether the lexicon used facilitated citizens tracking political responsibilities and understanding sensitive policy-making within the multilevel political system, whether the European Union was associated to austerity, and whether the information conveyed was similar across different countries, regardless of national specificities. The chapter argues that political information shapes our understanding of events and policy-making (Delli Carpini 2004); that in hybrid media systems political information, at some point, originates in, or is boosted by, the mass media (Chadwick 2013); that quality newspapers are still influential agenda-setters in the national domains (Damstra and Boukes 2018); that European citizens have difficulties to assess supranational policy-making due to the complexity of distant decision-making; that the supply of political information in the national domain is central to the process of opinion formation (Hobolt and Tilley 2014); that there was an overarching ideological coherence in economic policy-making across Europe during the last economic crisis (Wren-Lewis 2016); and that, nevertheless, the unprecedented political interventions of the European Union in the national realm might have clashed with national interests (Scharpf 2012). I compare across countries the lexicon used and the topics addressed by the influential national printed press. Words that often correlate are clustered in topics that I interpret based on the first words of each topic. In particular, I identify topics that relate to the European Union and European issues, to austerity, to economic, political, and social issues.

Altogether these three empirical chapters illustrate which were the mainstream media representations of the European Union and austerity policy-making during the last economic crisis (2008-2014). The thesis provides a comprehensive portrayal of the discursive interactions that took place among the most prominent political, economic, and social actors in a selected sample of European countries, comparing them over time. I evidence the subjects these actors advanced in the national public spheres, and take into consideration the involvement of civil society in discursive interactions at the time of austerity policy-making. In chapter five, I conclude the analysis assessing the empirical results in relation to the normative standards of deliberative democracy (Ferree et al. 2002, Dahlberg 2004, Bennett et

al. 2004) and to the dimensions of political communication (Meyer 1999) presented in this first chapter of the thesis. Finally, I reflect on the relevance and limitations of this investigation and, in the end, I propose further, promising lines of research.

1.8. References

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Chapter 2

The visibility of the European Union in the national public spheres in times of crisis and austerity

Abstract

This chapter examines the visibility of the European Union (EU) in discursive interactions that took place in the national public spheres of nine selected European countries between 2008 and 2014. It inquires whether during this critical period the European Union, its member states, and European issues enjoyed high levels of visibility in the national public spheres. Using political claims-making analysis, the chapter maps the trends that result from the visibility of the collective actors in the main national newspapers of France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. The sample allows for comparisons among a variety of situations regarding Europe and the European Union; it presents a range of gradations in the socioeconomic effects of the economic crisis and the austerity policies. The prominence of European actors, addressees, and issues is contrasted against their national counterparts, assessing separately the European Union, its institutions and its member states. Results show that, despite the very limited overall presence of the European Union and European subjects in these national debates, there were meaningful differences among the nine selected countries. First, there is evidence of Germany's leading position conveying visibility to European claims, followed by Greece, Italy and France. In contrast, there are negligible levels of visibility of the European Union in the UK and Switzerland along with general low levels in the remaining selected European countries; quite surprisingly, even in those countries most severely hit by the recent economic crisis and under supranational surveillance. Overall, the pattern of discursive interactions during this period was closed, restricted within one political level (national/national, European/European).

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2.1. Introduction

The magnitude and depth of the recent economic crisis jeopardized the European integration project while revealing considerable differences across European countries. While some states in Southern Europe heavily suffered the social consequences of the economic collapse—tangible in acute debt crises, critical unemployment rates, and ongoing austerity policies that altered every social sphere, from education to health, welfare, pensions, labor, taxation or housing—other European states experienced moderate or even minor public policy retrenchments. In any case, the economic and debt crises highlighted the inter-dependence of the European national economies, underlying conflicts between debtors and creditors' interests, and the risk of 'contagion' among the weaker economies. The European Union (EU) undertook new political roles defining and supervising the implementation of national policies in order to access EU/IMF credit, and even decided new institutional governances under the Troika's surveillance (Pisani-Ferry et al. 2013, Hellwig 2011) with negative impact for its institutions (Roth et al. 2016, Jones 2009). Given the acute impact of the crisis in Europe, and regardless of whether the European Union has been positively or negatively assessed, we would expect that these exceptionally critical circumstances have altered the limited visibility of the EU in the national public spheres, usually dominated by national actors and national concerns.

The public sphere is an arena for political contention. In a period of 'constraining dissensus' regarding the European integration process (as opposed to the first years of 'permissive consensus' in European public opinion), at a time when the economic crisis has accentuated the contrast between different national and regional contexts, it appears relevant to examine and compare the presence of the European Union in diverse national public spheres, which might affect the legitimization of its institutions, its policies, and the ongoing process of European integration itself. In this chapter we inquire whether the European Union and European subjects gained visibility in the national debates as a function of the intensity of the economic crisis or the consequent implementation of austerity policies at the national level under imposition and surveillance of the European Union itself. We explore the multi-level

communicative links among the European Union, EU member-states, other European and national actors while measuring the spread of European issues in a set of noticeably different European countries, where we expect to find contrasting differences on account of the variety of socioeconomic contexts. The nature of our data does not allow differentiating the crisis from the austerity policies. Nevertheless, we presume that the European Union must have been more visible in the Eurozone countries most affected by the austerity policies dictated by the European Union itself, bounded to the European Union's monetary restrictions and the regulations of the European Central Bank.

We therefore map the variations over time (2008-2014) and compare cross-country the presence of the European Union and European issues against their national counterparts in a sample of selected European countries: France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. Applying claims-making methodology based on Koopmans and Statham's (1999) systematic approach to the Europeanization of the national public spheres, we use the LIVEWHAT EU-FP7 (2013-2016) project's dataset of 8,707 claims that refer to the crisis, recession and austerity, published in the five major newspapers of each country. Our work follows a series of analyses that have addressed similar questions and methodology (see for instance Europub.com 2001-2004, Koopmans and Statham 2002, Koopmans and Erbe 2003, Pfesch 2004, 2007, Vetters et al. 2006, Statham 2007, Cinalli and Giugni 2013). However, unlike most of the preceding studies, we examine a broad comparative European sample that reflects the crisis, recession, and austerity in every policy domain and in all sections of the selected national newspapers. Our approach allows for a comprehensive view of the magnitude of the European claims published in the national public spheres that is not restricted to a theoretical selection of specific policies under the European Union's domain—where we would certainly expect to find increasing European presence—contrasted to a selective approach to other strictly national policy domains—where we would expect to find a prominence of national claims. We propose a more unrestricted examination of the national debates in an exceptionally critical period, aiming at capturing the significance of European claims that appealed to the crisis, the recession and the austerity in their real contexts. As far as we know, there is no other study that poses the question of

European visibility in the national public spheres in such a comparative European perspective, addressing general topics across an ample selection of cases during the recent economic crisis.

The chapter unfolds as follows. First, we outline a theoretical framework based on the literature on Europeanization of the public sphere. Second, we introduce the methodology and data. Third, we present the results of the claims analysis. Finally, we present the conclusions of this analysis and propose further research.

2.2. The Europeanization of the public sphere

The European Union's multilevel political structure holds an increasing supranational level of political decision-making and a prevailing national level of public opinion formation and deliberation. National states still remain the key controllers of citizenship and the providers of collective identities, where decisions are made over a range of policies that affect everyday life. National public spheres are persistently dominant, bound to national cultures, while transnational communicative flows continue to be related to specific interests or groups. In such a context, the development of a European public sphere is usually regarded as a precondition for, or at least carries an underlying assumption that it would strongly contribute to, the legitimization of the European Union and its policies, bridging the gap between the European Union and its citizens (de Vreese 2012, Trenz 2007, Schlesinger 2007, Eriksen 2005, Koopmans and Erbe 2003, Koopmans and Statham 2002). In this regard, the national media link the communicative flows between different geopolitical levels, relating the European Union to the public while allowing European actors to provide expert knowledge and inside information that is crucial for citizens' opinion formation in subjects that are usually far away and difficult to assess (Hobolt and Tilley 2014, Vetters et al. 2006). In addition, gaining visibility in the media may arouse resonance in the reactions of other political actors, legitimating the initial discourses (Koopmans, 2007, Vetters et al. 2006, Loveless and Rohrschneider 2011, de Vreese 2012).

Our aim is to explore whether the visibility of the European Union and European issues varied in the national debates over time and across countries during the recent economic crisis. Although our study is framed within the theories of Europeanization of the public sphere, we are neither strictly discussing Europeanization and its explanatory factors—which we recognize as a broader and complex subject, largely discussed in relevant literature—nor the role of the mass media in determining the national public spheres. Rather, we address the visibility of European actors and subjects as a partial approach related to the Europeanization of the national public spheres in times of crisis and austerity.

The notion of public sphere is thoroughly discussed in the literature. In general terms, "it is most commonly referred to as a space or arena for (broad, public) deliberation, discussion, and engagement in societal issues" (de Vreese 2012: 5). The public sphere is a medium for political justification and for mobilizing political support, "the place where civil society is linked to the power structure of the state" (Eriksen 2005: 342). For our analysis, we conceptualize the public sphere as "an open field of communicative exchange […] made up of communication flows and discourses which allow for the diffusion of intersubjective meaning and understanding" (Trenz 2008: 2). We recognize that the European public sphere is "fragmented, differentiated and in flux" which acknowledges its dynamic character within the processes of deterritorialisation and dissociation that characterize contemporary multicultural societies (Eriksen 2005, Trenz 2008, Schlesinger 2007).

The concept of a utopian European public sphere, defined as a singular supranational space that echoes the national public sphere, is nowadays rejected in the literature under the evidence of a missing common European identity, the lack of significant purely European media, and communication difficulties, namely language differences (see de Vreese 2012, Trenz 2007, but also Esmark 2007). More recent literature favors a realistic approach that regards the Europeanization of national public spheres as a continuous process of advancing European interests and concerns into the national domain (de Vreese 2012, Statham 2007, Koopmans and Erbe 2003). Hence, the emergence or development of a European public sphere should not necessarily follow similar patterns as those performed by national public spheres. If we expect the consolidation of powerful European media that specifically cover

European news, both occupying to a great extent the national public sphere in each EU member-state, we might as well never detect other ways of Europeanization of the national public spheres that are currently taking place in the mass media—i.e., the indirect effects of Europeanization. "To the extent that it emerges at all, a European public sphere will build itself, and be built, through the interactions of collective actors who politically engage over European issues, both between and within different levels of polities. […] [S]uch actions are mediated through the mass media and rendered visible to citizens in the public domain" (Statham 2007: 85). This perspective considers public discourse as another medium for social conflict and symbolic struggles (Koopmans and Statham 1999). New strategic repositioning occurs in the national domain due to the progressive denationalization and regional integration. As a new challenge, the European Union provides new opportunities for new structural alignments and new strategic alliances. Domestic and European interests that converge and compete in the national domain are likewise evident in the public sphere. There is an expectation of high correspondence between discursive and policy-making powers that may be traced examining the debates that are published in the national media (Koopmans 2007, Koopmans and Erbe 2003, Statham 2007, della Porta 2003).

However, we also need considering the limitations that we foresee regarding a broad visibility of the European Union in the nationally bounded public spheres. The distinctive multilevel feature of the EU polity is not reflected in the nationally centered debates presented by the media in the European countries. The national media are already heavily concerned with national issues discussed by national actors and directed to national targets, severely limiting the possibilities of directly advancing a European presence in the debates of the national public spheres. National actors dispute national interests, whereas Europe represents just another realm of contention. The alignment of national political actors targeting European addressees and debating European issues is dependent on whether the issues being discussed affect their own interests. Those actors that are weaker might target the European Union in search of political opportunities that they may then use at home to put pressure on their own national governments (Trenz 2007, Koopmans 2007, Vetters et al. 2006, della Porta and Caiani 2009). Although studies on social movements have already noticed that the EU is not a direct target for protesters, we presume that due to the exceptionality of the period we study

political contention must have been intensified in the scarcity of economic resources and the execution of extraordinary public policies, enhancing the visibility of the European Union and European debates in the national public spheres.

In order to examine the discursive flows that take place in the national media of a multilevel political structure as the European Union, we adapt a conceptual model of claims-making inter-sphere communications that represents the possible ways of Europeanization of the national public sphere (Koopmans and Erbe 2003, Statham and Gray 2005, Statham 2007, Pfetsch 2004, 2007), distinguishing four basic communicative flows:

- Vertical communications (multilevel: links EU to/from national levels)
- Horizontal communications (transnational: links national to other national levels)
- Supranational communications (within the EU level)
- National communications (within own country)

Although multilevel relations may also take place among other supranational organizations, we circumscribe the conceptual model to the European Union, which is our subject of examination. First, vertical communications refer to the communicative flow between actors from two different political levels, national and supranational, either top-down (from the supranational EU level to the national level) or bottom-up (from the national level to the supranational EU level). They are open communications because they transcend the national boundaries of the nationally confined public sphere, conveying visibility either to EU supranational actors/addressees, or to European issues. Second, horizontal communications define the discursive flow between variables from the same political level but beyond the national boundaries; they take place when a national actor addresses its counterpart from another EU or European country, or vice-versa. These are also open relations that transcend the national limits and allow European visibility. Third, national communications denote the communicative flow between variables within the same country. A purely national debate involves a national actor discussing a national issue with a national addressee, all from the same country. In this case, there is no visibility of Europe: the relation is closed, circumscribed to the limits of the national public sphere in all its facets. However, when two national actors

from the same country discuss a European issue, Europe becomes visible in the debate, despite the closeness of the relation that still occurs within the nation. In contrast, supranational communications define the flow of debates at the EU level. In our sample there are no purely supranational communications—i.e., two EU actor/addressees that discuss a European topic in a European media—as all these debates were published by the national media in national public spheres, making them visible to the national publics. We therefore consider these supranational debates as open debates that confer visibility to the European Union. Table 1 (next page) summarizes the different types of communicative flows that can be identified considering the characteristics of the issues, actors and addressees involved in each claim.

Table 1. Levels of communicative linkages in claims-making

The examples belong to the Spanish newspapers

		ADDRESSEES		
ISSUES	**ACTORS**	**EU supranational addressee**	**EU-state/ European addressee**	**National domestic addressee**
European	**EU supranational actor**	Supranational communication. *e.g., The Commissioner for Economic Affairs demands a change in the formula of bailouts in which the Eurogroup is involved and proposes that in the future the Communitarian institutions assume the main role.*	Vertical communication. *e.g., The European Commission extends state aid to European companies in financial difficulty to avoid bankruptcy.*	Vertical communication. *e.g., The European Central Bank and the European Commission agree to pay the first 30,000 million for the European bailout and call on the Spanish government to meet its commitment to reduce the deficit accordingly.*
	EU-state/ European actor	Vertical communication. *e.g., Angela Merkel says to the EU that those who speak now of eurobons have not understood this crisis, and adds that her goal is fiscal integration.*	Horizontal communication. *e.g., Sarkozy and Merkel agree that Germany accepts the voluntary participation of the private sector in the Greek bailout, and ask for Greek support. The objective is to underpin the euro.*	Horizontal communication. *e.g., The Greek prime minister demands support to the Spanish president for negotiating policies to enhance employment in the Eurozone, particularly in the most affected countries.*
	National domestic actor	Vertical communication. *e.g., The Spanish finance minister says the current situation is unsustainable and that in order to avoid the final collapse the European Central Bank should buy debt of the most affected countries.*	Horizontal communication. *e.g., Elena Salgado calls on the governments of France and Germany to accelerate the process of European economic governance to anticipate economic imbalances.*	National domestic communication with an issue of European scope. *e.g., The economist Xavier Sala warns Spanish vice-president Pedro Solbes that the European Central Bank should purchase debt to avoid Eurozone countries' bankruptcy.*
Not European	**EU supranational actor**	Supranational communication. *e.g., The Green MEPs remind that the EU should not lag behind its commitments toward a global agreement on climate change due to the economic crisis.*	Vertical communication. *e.g., The European institutions ask the Portuguese government to stimulate the economy and employment in the country.*	Vertical communication. *e.g., The EU Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion admits to Rajoy that Spain has gone through very difficult times and that Spain is working in jobs recovery.*
	EU-state/ European actor	Vertical communication. *e.g., A European NGO confederation calls on the EU to still champion global poverty in times of crisis as it remains the world's biggest problem.*	Horizontal communication. *e.g., European intellect-uals and academics jointly launch a manifesto targeting European governments to intensify their efforts in combating international fiscal paradises as a means for tackling the causes of the world economic crisis.*	Horizontal communication. *e.g., Angela Merkel supports Rajoy rejecting a Catalan unilateral declaration of independence.*
	National domestic actor	Vertical communication. *e.g., Zapatero declared to Brussels that the Spanish economy has entered a "period of stagnation" with "very serious difficulties to grow" and situated the exit of the crisis as his government's top priority.*	Horizontal communication. *e.g., The Spanish health minister explains to a Swiss medical association the government's plans to privatize basic services at the Spanish national hospitals.*	National domestic communication. **No European visibility.** *e.g., Fernández Díaz claims that the municipal government is not doing anything for those who suffer the crisis.*

Source: Adapted from Koopmans and Erbe (2003) and Statham and Gray (2005)

From previous research we expect most claims-making taking place at the national level. Different types of communicative flows may involve different types or degrees of visibility of the European actors and subjects with different implications, but the crucial question remains to what extent they are visible at all.

2.3. Methodology and data

The goal of our study is to comparatively assess the degree of visibility of the European Union and of European subjects in the debates that took place in the national public spheres of a set of selected countries throughout the recent economic crisis. Our examination tracks all the references to Europe and the European Union in a representative sample of claims related to the crisis, recession and austerity in every policy field, as they were published in the different European national media between the years 2008 and 2014. We consider that "claims-making acts which link different levels of polities are important carriers of Europeanization processes in national public spheres" (Statham 2007: 101).

Our study of the European communicative flows is based on political claims-making analysis (Koopmans and Statham 1999), a methodology that uncovers the relationships among all forms of national, supranational and transnational discourses that are presented by the mainstream national media, namely in printed newspapers. Claims are direct verbal or non-verbal statements, not journalistic interpretations of those statements; they are published as they are, without intermediaries. Claims analysis is interested in what has been effectively published by the media, as a relative measure of the political discursive opportunities and cleavages already present in society. Therefore, the problem of media bias that usually arises when analyzing public discourses becomes an opportunity for understanding powerful cleavages that exist in society itself (Koopmans and Statham 1999, Statham and Koopmans 2009, Cinalli and Giugni 2013). In our study, these are the direct debates that shaped an important part of the European national public spheres during the recent economic crisis. As

such, they conveyed visibility to subjects and actors that sustained political information and meanings with which the European citizens could construct their own opinions regarding the European Union as the events developed.

Our units of analysis are political claims. A political claim is a strategic intervention, either verbal or non-verbal, in the public space made by a given actor on behalf of a group or collectivity and which bears on the interests or rights of other groups or collectivities (LIVEWHAT EU-FP7 2013-2016). "To be included, a claim must be made in one of our countries of coding. Claims are also included if they are made by or addressed at a supranational actor of which the country of coding is a member (e.g., the UN, the European Union, the IMF), on the condition that the claim is substantively relevant for the country of coding (e.g., a decision by ECB is included if affecting one's own member state)" (LIVEWHAT EU-FP 2013-2016: 3). Political claims on a number of themes (unemployment, recession, exclusion, welfare reforms, economic stability, budget balance, spread, etc.) that referred explicitly to the crisis were tracked in selected newspapers of each country.

The sample we use contains 8,707 claims and covers the period 2008-2014[28]. Claims were coded by random sampling of 1000 articles from five newspapers in each country, selected to increase the representativeness of the sample: France (Le Figaro, La Tribune, Le Monde, Le Parisien, Libération), Germany (Bild, Die Welt, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Frankfurter Rundschau, Süddeutsche Zeitung), Greece (Eleytherotypia, Kathimerini, Rizospastis, Ta Nea, To Vima), Italy (Corriere della Sera, La Stampa, Repubblica, Secolo XIX, Sole 24 Ore), Poland (Dziennik Gazeta Prawna, Super Express, Gazeta Polska Codziennie, Gazeta Wyborcza, Rzeczpospolita), Spain (ABC, El País, El Periódico de Catalunya, La Vanguardia, El Mundo), Sweden (Aftonbladet, Dagen Nyheter, Göterborgs Posten, Norbottens Kuriren, Svenska Dagbladet), Switzerland (Blick, Le Matin, Le Temps, Neue Zürcher Zeitung, Tages Anzeiger) and the United Kingdom (Daily Mail, Daily Mirror, The Guardian, The Sun, The Times). All articles from all newspaper sections, excluding the editorials, containing any of the three words 'crisis' or 'recession' or 'austerity' were selected through key words search

[28] The LIVEWHAT EU-FP7 (2013-2016) dataset covers the period 2005-2014. We discarded the data previous to 2008 due to the scarcity of claims related to the crisis, austerity or recession.

and retrieved. Unfortunately, with the available data it is impossible to disentangle 'crisis' from 'recession' or 'austerity'. We therefore explore the three concepts altogether, extensively referencing a particularly critical period for the European Union and the individual European countries.

For each claim we identify the actors (those who declare the claims), the addressees (to whom these claims are directed), and the issues involved (topics of discussion between actors and addressees).[29] The original LIVEWHAT EU-FP7 (2013-2016) dataset distinguishes seven scopes for actors, addressees, and issues: 'supra- or transnational: European', 'supra- or transnational: other', 'multilateral', 'national', 'regional', 'local', and 'unknown/unclassifiable'. These scopes have been recoded according to the objectives of our study. The scopes we use for actors and addressees are five: 'EU', 'EU-state', 'European', 'national', and 'other'. The 'EU' scope refers strictly and explicitly to the European Union, its institutions, officials, policies, and citizens; it measures either supranational or vertical communications. Similarly, the 'EU-state' scope explicitly mentions another EU country, its citizens, government, officers, institutions, and policies; it measures horizontal communications within the political limits of the EU member states. 'European' scope refers to the geographical limits of Europe and measures the most broad, inclusive concept of Europe; it also embraces ambiguous and general notions of Europe (e.g., the European citizens, the European banks, the European economies, etc.) as well as all kinds of actors with no restriction regarding their institutional status (e.g., European organizations in any subject, European individuals, etc.). The 'national' scope covers national, regional and local actors and addressees. Finally, 'other' includes international and supranational actors and addressees beyond the EU or Europe (e.g., UNO, the World Bank, USA), and unspecified scopes. Many claims have no direct target; hence, we find a high amount of unspecified addressees particularly in Sweden, the UK, Switzerland, France and Spain. In our search for European claims we are not interested in further detailing this scope.

[29] Because of the small frequencies of second actors and issues in the original LIVEWHAT EU-FP7 (2013-2016) dataset, we only examine first actors and first issues in our study.

The scopes of the issues were coded in the original LIVEWHAT EU-FP7 (2013-2016) dataset in seven categories as well, according to the reach of the topic and considering at which level the issue had been raised, i.e., dependent upon whether the issue was discussed from a European perspective ('European' scope) or from the exclusive perspective of the national state ('national' scope in the original LIVEWHAT EU-FP7 (2013-2016) dataset). For example, a Spanish claim that reports "Brussels approves a proposal that gives more power to the national Central banks to restrict the activity of large banks in cases of solvency deficiencies" is coded as having a European scope. In contrast, a Spanish claim that states: "In a meeting with experts and the government, the Bank of Spain insists on the need to increase labor flexibility and warns that the strong wage increases will hurt the Spanish competitiveness" is coded as bearing a 'national' scope. Similarly, global, regional and local subjects are not European issues, e.g., "The Valencian government asks the central government to borrow and incur deficits in order to maintain the investment needed to stimulate the economy", "The National Council of Fiscal and Financial Policy agreed that the Autonomous Communities may incur in deficit during the next triennium". For our purposes, we recoded the issues as having either a 'European' or 'not European' scope (1-0 dummy variable).

With the information provided for actors, addressees and issues we are able to construct our dependent variable following the conceptual scheme outlined in the previous section. A dummy variable identifies whether there is European visibility in each claim (1), or not (0). Value 1 indicates that the claim contains at least one EU, EU-state or European actor, addressee, or European issue. In contrast, claims on non-European issues produced by national or 'other' actors targeting national or 'other' addressees are considered as 'not European' and coded 0. Due to the scarce amount of European claims in the sample, for the purpose of this chapter we discarded any further differentiation in degrees or types of European visibility.

In sum, whenever a claim is being made by, or targeted to, an EU, EU-state or European actor/addressee, or whenever the issue debated holds a European scope, we consider it conveys visibility to Europe, the European Union, its institutions, its member states, or its policies in the national public sphere. Although we do not assess levels of Europeanization of

the national public spheres—being aware of the multiple indirect forms it may develop—we do inscribe this evidence of European visibility as a clear indicator of the presence of the European Union and Europe in the debates of these national public spheres. Despite the lowering bias that our conservative approach might confer to the real presence of the European Union and Europe in the national public spheres, our data reflects undeniable values in different European countries over time.

The countries in our sample present a variety of economic and social contexts. The crisis impacted upon the European countries at different degrees. Our nine countries conform three basic groups: strongly affected by the economic and debt crises (Greece, Italy and Spain), intermediately affected (France and the UK), and with weak or lateral effects (Germany, Poland, Sweden and Switzerland).[30] Our cases represent a comprehensive set of European countries that reaches beyond the 'usual suspects' (i.e., France, Germany, the UK) or specific groups of comparative European studies. We include EU and non-EU member states; creditors and debtors; EMU, opt out and non-euro countries; pro-EU and Eurosceptics; founder members and countries from subsequent accession waves; and Western and Eastern Europeans.

2.4. Results and discussion

We aim at comparatively examining the visibility of the European Union and EU-state actors, addressees, and issues through a detailed observation of the communicative flows between the different geopolitical levels across the nine selected countries. We also analyze other European actors and addressees considering whether they relate to their European Union or EU-state counterparts, in the first place, or to national and other actors and addressees. In any case, we should always keep in mind that our analysis reveals the presence of the European Union's and European communications in these national public spheres only when the news articles refer to the crisis, recession or austerity between 2008 and 2014.

[30] For more details on this classification, see the contextual data collected in Work package 1 of LIVEWHAT EU-FP7 (2013-2016).

First of all, we present the distribution of the 8,707 claims, contrasting the scopes of actors (Figure 1), addressees (Figure 2), and issues (Figure 3) across the nine selected countries during the whole period. As can be observed in Figures 1 to 3 it is clear that the national protagonists and their national concerns[31] dominate the discursive activity in every country, far ahead from any EU/EU-state/European scope. National actors conform 83% of the whole sample (ranging from Swiss 69% to Swedish 95%) while all the scopes of European actors register a meager 4% (ranging from the UK's and Swiss 1% to 16% in Germany). Similarly, although we should always remind the high percentages of undefined targets, national addressees constitute 54% of the sample (ranging from Swedish 23% to Italian 75%) against 6% of all European scopes (again spanning from the UK's and Swiss 1% to German 15%). Lastly, non-European issues represent 91% of the sample (ranging from German 73% to the UK's 97%) while European issues account for the remaining 9% (ranging from the UK's 3% to German 27%). In sum, European scopes altogether are most visible in Germany followed by Greece (11% actors, 12% addressees, 6% issues), Italy (7% actors, 9% addressees, 11% issues) and France (7% actors, 5% addressees, 12% issues), and least visible in the UK (1% actors and addressees, 3% issues) and Switzerland (1% actors and addressees, 5% issues). Although EU/EU-state/European actors and addressees are also negligible in Sweden, 10% of Swedish issues have a European scope, only short after Italy and more prominent than in Greece and Poland (6% each), Switzerland (5%) or Spain (4%). In detail, the EU is always more visible than the EU-state or other European scopes. EU actors represent 13% of German actors, 6% of Greeks, 5% of Italians, 4% of French and 3% of Spanish, being insignificant elsewhere. EU addressees, however, are only relatively more prominent than EU-state addressees (3% against 2% of the sample) but, once again, addressees should be carefully read, even more when showing such low frequencies. In summary, the countries in our sample present claims with very low degrees of European visibility, despite the clear European scope that the recent crisis had. We expected more visibility of the various European scopes in the countries most affected by the crisis and austerity, particularly in Spain, Italy, and Greece.

[31] In the original LIVEWHAT EU-FP7 (2013-2016) dataset, 'national' issues represent 73% and 'other supra- or transnational' issues 8% of all claims—the latter being most prominent in Switzerland (25%) and Sweden (12%). Both categories are included in our 'non-European' scope of issues.

Figure 1. Scope of actors in each country (2008-2014) N=8,707

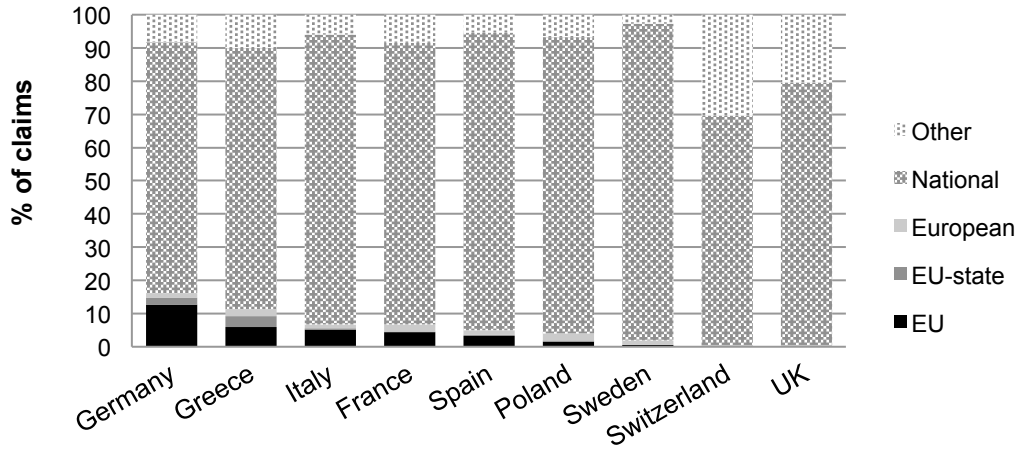


Figure 2. Scope of addressees in each country (2008-2014) N=8,707

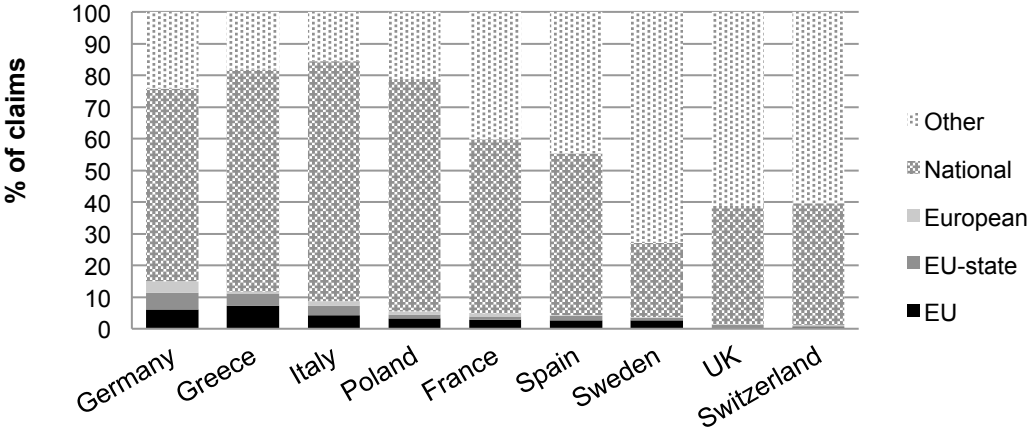
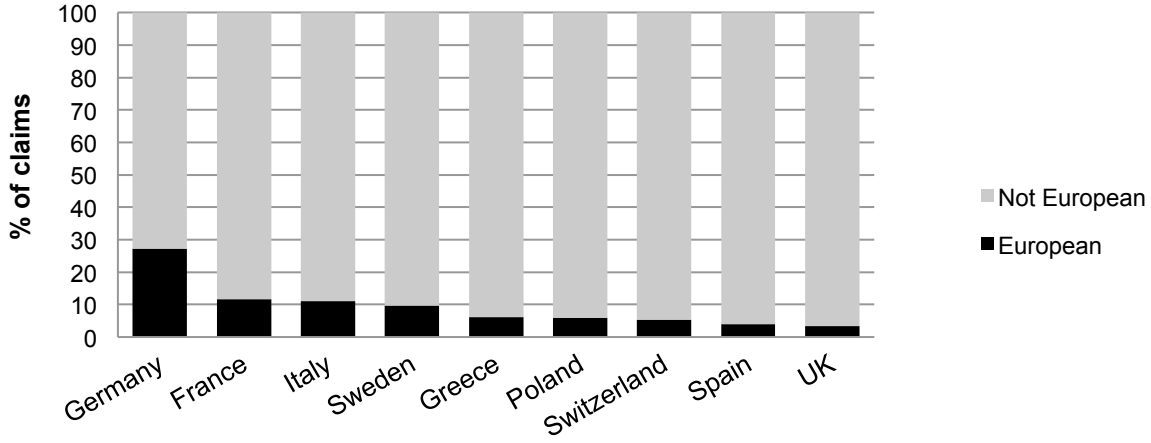


Figure 3. Scope of issues in each country (2008-2014) N=8,707



In Table 2 we examine the interrelations between different geopolitical levels that shape vertical and horizontal communicative links, considering whether the topics being discussed are European or not. Switzerland and the UK show a similar pattern of high concentration of national/other claims-making debating non-European issues—which again demonstrates their low levels of European visibility. Sweden follows presenting low amounts of EU/EU-state activity—national actors, if any, are the ones who discuss European issues. As for the rest of countries, claims display mostly national-to-national closed communications that neither confer direct visibility to the European Union nor to European subjects—as expected, we confirm the prominent national character of the national public spheres. Even so, as we are particularly interested in inspecting the European Union's claims-making communicative flows, we leave aside the UK, Switzerland and Sweden to concentrate in the European Union and EU-state actors. We aim at tracing to whom they relate at other political levels, and in particular whether the national actors address them as well. As already mentioned, EU actors are much more visible than EU-state actors. In the first place, EU actors target national addressees on non-European issues (Greece 58%, France 56%, Spain 54%, Poland 43%, Italy 29%, and Germany 24%); second, they direct claims on European issues at other addressees (Germany 21%, Poland 22%, Italy and France 19%, Spain 16%). There is no other clear pattern for the European Union or EU-state actors targeting specific addressees across countries besides the fact that they never address themselves in the first place, therefore generating open multilevel political communications. On the other side, national actors hardly address the European Union or EU-state addressees, and barely discuss European issues (only 6% of their claims)—except for Germany where they represent the highest share of national actors claims-making on European subjects (20%), perceptibly ahead from all the rest (second highest Sweden 8% and lowest Spain 2%). Nevertheless, as national actors are so overwhelming in the sample, they are the ones that convey most visibility to the European issues (59% against the EU's 16% of the sample).

Table 2. Inter-sphere communications in claims-making. Scopes of actors, addressees and issues by country (2008-2014) In percentages. In italics: no European visibility N =8,707

Actor	European issue					No European issue						
	Addressee											
	EU	EU state	European	National	Other	EU	EU state	European	National	Other	Total %	N
FRANCE (N=862)												
EU	3	8	5	27	19	8	0	3	16	11	100	37
EU state	-	33	-	67	0	-	-	-	-	-	100	3
European	12	6	-	12	41	-	-	-	-	29	100	17
National	1	1	-	3	2	1	-	-	*56*	*36*	100	729
Other	1	-	-	4	6	-	-	-	*26*	*63*	100	72
GERMANY (N=971)												
EU	11	10	15	12	21	1	2	2	24	2	100	124
EU state	5	-	16	11	37	11	-	4	5	11	100	19
European	21	-	7	-	21	7	14	-	*21*	*7*	100	14
National	3	3	1	10	3	1	1	*1*	*59*	*19*	100	734
Other	4	8	-	3	5	3	3	-	*39*	*38*	100	80
GREECE (N=984)												
EU	7	3	-	8	4	7	3	2	58	8	100	59
EU state	-	3	-	-	-	13	6	-	69	9	100	32
European	4	10	-	4	-	10	10	-	*38*	*24*	100	21
National	1	1	-	2	1	5	2	*1*	*71*	*16*	100	774
Other	1	3	-	1	1	6	5	-	*53*	*30*	100	98
ITALY (N=969)												
EU	2	16	12	16	19	2	-	-	29	4	100	51
EU state	50	-	-	-	50	-	-	-	-	-	100	2
European	50	8	18	-	-	-	8	-	*8*	*8*	100	12
National	3	1	-	2	-	1	-	-	*79*	*14*	100	847
Other	7	12	2	2	5	-	-	-	*44*	*28*	100	57
POLAND (N=985)												
EU	14	7	-	-	22	-	7	-	43	7	100	14
EU state	60	20	-	-	-	-	20	-	-	-	100	5
European	20	5	10	-	15	5	5	-	*20*	*20*	100	20
National	2	-	-	1	-	-	-	*1*	*77*	*19*	100	879
Other	5	5	3	-	-	3	1	-	*49*	*34*	100	67
SPAIN (N=1007)												
EU	6	3	3	6	16	3	3	-	54	6	100	32
EU state	20	-	-	-	20	-	-	-	20	40	100	5
European	8	8	-	-	8	-	-	-	*23*	*53*	100	13
National	1	1	-	-	-	1	-	-	*52*	*45*	100	902
Other	5	2	-	-	2	-	-	-	*36*	*55*	100	55
SWEDEN (N=984)												
EU	33	-	-	-	67	-	-	-	-	-	100	6
EU state	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
European	8	-	-	8	15	-	-	-	*31*	*38*	100	13
National	2	-	-	1	5	-	-	-	*23*	*69*	100	939
Other	4	11	4	-	15	-	-	-	*4*	*62*	100	26
SWITZERLAND (N=972)												
EU	-	-	-	50	-	-	-	-	50	-	100	2
EU state	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
European	-	25	-	-	25	-	-	-	-	*50*	100	4
National	-	-	-	1	2	-	-	-	*46*	*51*	100	671
Other	1	-	-	1	8	-	1	*1*	*18*	*70*	100	295
UK (N=973)												
EU	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
EU state	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	100	100	1
European	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	*50*	*50*	100	4
National	-	1	-	1	2	-	1	-	*39*	*56*	100	769
Other	-	-	-	1	4	1	-	*1*	*24*	*69*	100	199

These inter-sphere communications define the degree of visibility of the EU and European concerns in the debates of the different national public spheres captured by our dummy variable. Altogether, claims that convey European visibility represent 14% of the sample against the remaining 86% of non-European claims. We present the share of claims with a European scope in each country in Table 3. Once again, we need to be careful when assessing this information as our dummy variable does not define levels nor differentiates hierarchies of European visibility—i.e., we treat actors, addressees and issues as equivalent carriers of a European scope, and we do not consider how many of these variables are present in a single claim. We deal with very scarce amounts of claims that bear EU and European scopes; hence we privilege contrasting European to non-European claims, giving a single value (0/1) to each claim in the sample. This simple opposition allows for an overview of the presence of European references in the debates in each country during these years. Germany (35% of its claims) in the first place, then Greece (23%) and to a lesser extent Italy (15%) and France (14%) lead the European communicative flows. There is also evidence that corroborates the lowest visibility of the European Union and Europe in the UK (5%). Moreover, any European scope of the debates in the UK or Switzerland depended on national and other actors discussing European issues—and in fact it is still extremely low. Similarly, Swedish national actors targeting EU addressees with European issues advanced European visibility to a higher degree than the more numerous Spanish or Polish EU, EU-state and European actors in their respective public spheres.

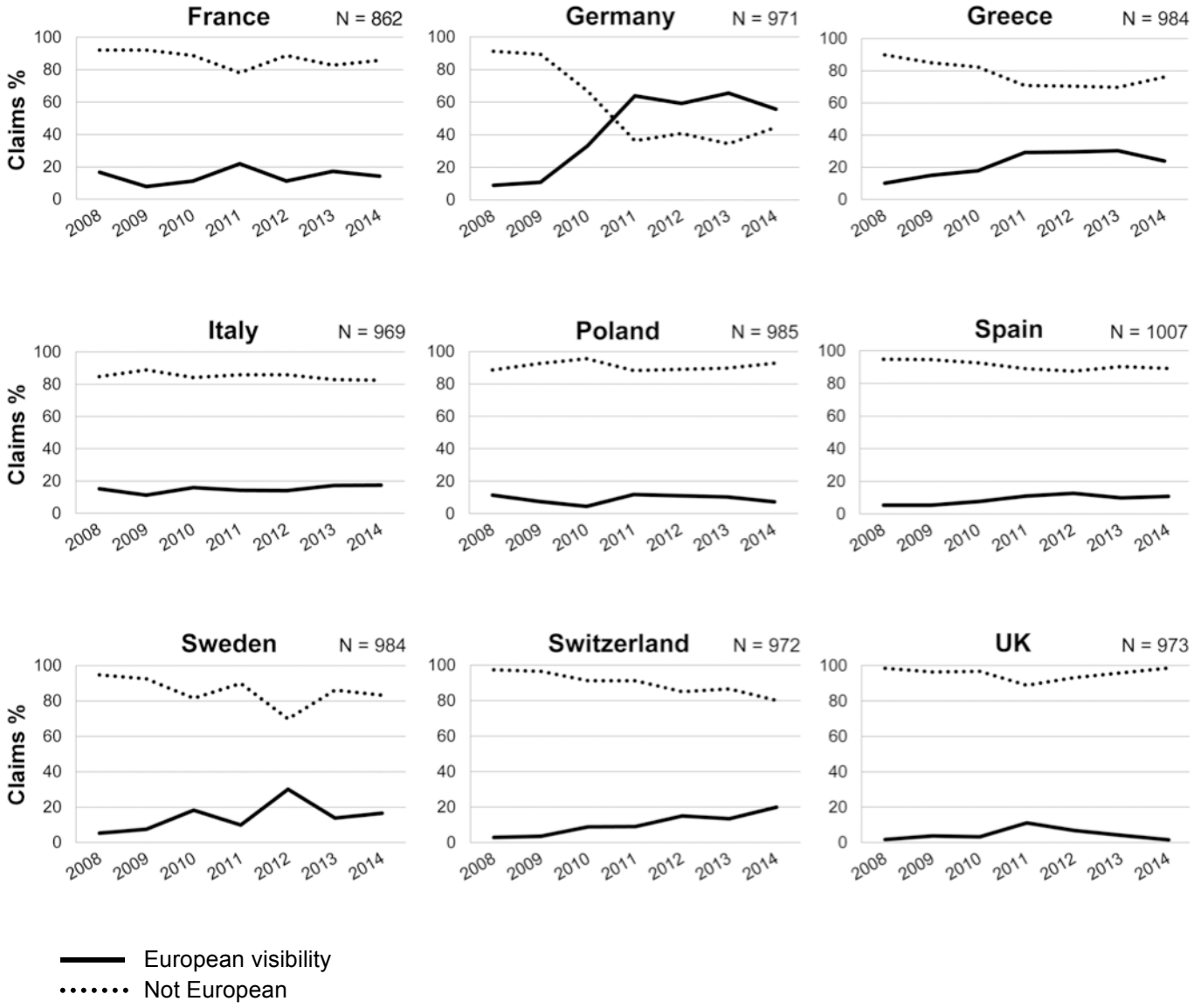
Table 3. Share of European visibility by country (2008-2014)

N=8,707

Country	Germany	Greece	Italy	France	Sweden	Spain	Poland	Switzerland	UK	**All countries**
European visibility %	35	23	15	14	11	9	9	7	5	**14**

% of total claims per country

Figure 4. European visibility by country (2008-2014)



A complementary time-series 2008-2014 presents the levels of visibility of the EU and Europe across countries (Figure 4). The differentiated pattern of German debates stands out: European claims steeply ascended between 2008 (9%) and 2013 (66%), surpassing non-European claims and remaining stable at high levels from that year onward. Greek (10% in 2008 up to 30% in 2013) and Swiss (3% in 2008 up to 20% in 2014) European claims show steadily ascending

trends. However, these figures alone do not account for the fundamental differences between both countries in the degree of European visibility—which we discussed in Table 2. Our time-series also shows peaks of European claims in Sweden in 2012 (30%) and to a lesser extent in France (22%) and the UK in 2011 (11%). For the rest, Italy, Poland and Spain present no significant variations in the low trends of European visibility. Altogether, European visibility is somehow higher in the Italian debates (fluctuating between its lowest 11% in 2009 and its highest 18% in 2014) than in Polish (lowest 5% in 2010 and highest 12% in 2011) or Spanish (lowest 5% in 2008 and 2009, and highest 13% in 2012) debates.

2.5. Conclusions

Albeit the strong European character of both the recent economic and debt crises, and the austerity policies implemented at the national level under the European Union's surveillance during the period 2008-2014, these nine countries present very low levels of European visibility in the debates of the national public spheres. Overall, these results confirm the uncontested primacy of national communicative flows in every country, leaving limited visibility for the European Union's or European protagonists and subjects. The overwhelming presence of national actors, national addressees, and national issues conform closed self-centered communicative debates that seldom transcend geographical boundaries or political levels. Hence, at first sight, it seems that the recent crisis has had no significant effect advancing the presence of the European Union and European issues in the debates of the national public spheres, although a note of caution is required considering the very low frequencies of European claims.

Once this indisputable evidence is acknowledged, a closer examination reveals interesting differences among the countries in our sample. First, considering the disparity across countries regarding the intensity of the economic crisis and the severity of the austerity policies subsequently implemented, the data contradicts our expectations. We presumed that the most

affected Eurozone countries—Greece, Italy and Spain—would present the highest levels of European visibility in the debates; accordingly, we envisaged moderate European presence in intermediately affected countries as France and the UK, and the lowest European visibility in those countries with weaker, lateral crisis effects—Germany, Poland, Sweden and Switzerland. However, our examination reveals that Germany clearly stands out from the rest displaying the most visible European debates in the sample while Greece presents second highest. Next, Italy, France and Sweden occupy middle-low ranges, completed in descending order by Poland and Spain, Switzerland and, finally, the UK.

Second, weighing the scope of the actors that initiate the debates, we found none, or negligible, amounts of the European Union's and European actors, addressees and issues in the UK, Switzerland and Sweden. In these countries, the EU and European concerns are being carried by national and other trans- or supranational actors debating European subjects. In contrast, although Spain and Poland do show visible EU and European actors, addressees and issues, due to their small numbers, these represent lower levels than those of Sweden. In the end, it is the weight of national actors (and other actors, particularly in the case of Switzerland), always much more prominent in every country, what finally defines the degree of visibility of the European Union and Europe in the debates in the national public spheres—i.e., although the prominence of national actors prevents the direct visibility of the European Union, its institutions and member states, and of any European actor, they still bring forward European concerns. Notwithstanding, national actors perform remarkably reduced communicative exchanges with either European Union's or European addressees.

Third, the European Union's and EU-state's actors are most visible in Germany, Greece, Italy, France and Spain, in decreasing order. They direct their claims to national addressees on non-European issues in the first place, in every country of our sample except in France, where they also target national actors first but on European subjects. Considering EU and EU-state actors when targeting all types of addressees, their visibility is higher when debating non-European issues in Greece and Spain—while in Germany, Italy and France they first debate European issues. National actors respond accordingly.

Fourth, when tracing the presence of the European Union, EU-state and European actors/addressees, and European issues from 2008 to 2014, Germany again shows a completely different pattern from the rest: as from 2011, it presents more European than non-European claims. Every country begins an ascending trend in 2009, except Poland and the UK—where changes happen in 2010. In any case, the increasing amount of European claims is impressive in Germany, remarkable in Greece, quite noticeable in France, almost imperceptible in Italy and Poland, and very subtle in Spain; it presents high peaks in Sweden in 2010 and mainly in 2012, and in France and the UK in 2011, and rises in Switzerland up to 2014. In summary, we not only found scarce vertical linkages between the supranational and national spheres but even more reduced horizontal communications among different EU countries, and no similarity in the patterns of European visibility in the most affected Eurozone countries, i.e., Greece, Italy and Spain. We may infer that in every country the European Union becomes a topic for national politics and contestation in the national arena.

While some of these results appear to be quite reasonable and may find explanations if interpreted from other perspectives (e.g., the low presence of the European Union and Europe in the UK in terms of Euroscepticism or that of Switzerland due to its broader global financial interdependence), others still result rather puzzling (e.g., Spain and Italy displaying lower degrees of European presence than Sweden during 2008-2014). In any case, the visibility of the EU and European actors, addressees and concerns in the debates of the national public spheres does not seem to be *directly* related to the severity of the economic crisis nor to the harshness of public policy retrenchment in the different European countries. Particularly, we presume that the higher levels of Germany might well be linked to the country's leading role in the European Union during the recent economic crisis, to its position as creditor in the debt crisis and to the "internal use" that German national actors have made of the country's leading EU status. At this respect, we might inquire whether the moderate levels of European visibility in France reflect its difficulties in co-leading the European project during these years. Furthermore, the higher degree of European visibility presented by Germany and Greece might well respond to their prominent contending debates about austerity policies and how to deal with the crisis. Unfortunately, as it is not possible to separate crisis, austerity and recession in the data, we do not advance explanatory factors that, in any case, exceed the reach of this chapter. These might

well become the subject of further research that should also examine in detail the composition of national actors and of all issues being discussed, comparatively analyzing the cleavages present in each society. Moreover, regional/local and other trans- or supranational actors could also be assessed in detail, the former particularly in Italy and Spain, and the latter in Switzerland and Sweden. In addition, contrasting aggregated data from different sources may depict the economic context across the time-series 2008-2014, and even the inclusion of some critical political events in each country might also help to contextualize and understand the particular peaks and overall low results of European visibility that we present.

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Chapter 3

Who is in the media?
Dominant interests in times of austerity

Abstract

This chapter analyzes public claims related to the crisis, recession and austerity in nine European countries (Germany, Greece, France, Italy, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the UK) during the period 2008-2014. I inquire to what extent there has been a dominant discourse conveyed by dominant actors supporting austerity across these European countries. Who dominated the claims in the media? How successful were these actors in gaining visibility and making public their interests? Were they challenged by the visibility of alternative actors? I draw on three aspects of the literature on public opinion. First, the regard on the public sphere as an arena for contention, where social actors struggle to make visible and legitimate their own interests. Second, the view on the key function of ideas and discourses in order to validate the implementation of public policies. Third, the literature that considers availability of information as an essential constituent of opinion formation. This study contributes to fill the lack of comparative analysis at the intersection of these theoretical domains. Unlike framing or agenda-setting studies of media contents, I circumscribe the media to its function of conveying visibility (a necessary condition for attaining legitimacy) to the dominant actors and the subjects they promote. Using claims-making analysis (Koopmans and Statham 1999) and an original dataset (LIVEWHAT EU-FP7 2013-2016), I examine the claims formulated by the three main groups of political, economic, and social actors, published in the main national newspapers; and trace economic and financial issues in opposition to social and political subjects, both across countries and over time. Regardless of the contextual variations within the sample, results show the hegemony of state actors promoting macroeconomic issues. In contrast, civil society is almost absent either making or receiving claims, but its interests are greatly affected by the claims made by the other actors.

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3.1. Introduction

Having a voice in the national public sphere by appearing in the media is considered as a relative measure of power in a given context at a specific time. Visibility in the media gives political actors and the issues they advocate the possibility of being supported, contested, and legitimated. How do these relations develop during critical periods? The analysis of public discourse[32] during the recent economic crisis contributes to understanding the dynamics in which the austerity policies were implemented. This chapter examines the years of the financial and debt crises that led to implementing austerity policies in Europe. From 2008 to 2014, I compare across countries and over time who were the political actors and which were the subjects that dominated the national mainstream media of nine selected European countries.

A 'crisis' may be defined as a transitional period that "marks a phase of disorder in the seemingly normal development of a system" (Boin et al. 2005: 2) and as "a moment of decisive intervention" (Hay 1999: 317) and transformation, where the narrative of the crisis searches to mobilize public perceptions crucial to influencing the trajectory of structural transformation. Crises are both real and socially constructed: events must be recognized and defined as such. "[E]ven exogenous shocks must be endogenously interpreted" (Widmaier et al. 2007: 749). The subjective nature of a crisis as an interpreted threat implies a certain diagnosis/prognosis that needs to be socially shared. Conveying meaning and interpreting events in a particular way determines (and justifies) which are the procedures that might lead to overcoming it. Crises call into question the survival of a system, forcing political actors to act for their own stability while appearing effective in the eyes of public opinion. Crises provide political windows of opportunity. In the first place, for new actors that may advance specific interests that would otherwise remain latent or in the periphery of policy-making. Conversely, for already powerful actors that intend to implement controversial policy changes (Kriesi 2004, Saurugger 2016).

[32] In this chapter I use indistinctly 'discourse' and 'discursive' or 'debate' in their broader sense in order to embrace the diversity of verbal and textual interventions in the public sphere.

The European integration project still faces major challenges. The recent economic recession that particularly affected the Eurozone shaped exceptionally critical circumstances that jeopardized its continuity. In several countries, political crises merged with the virulence of the economic strain. Political consequences are still emerging. This turbulent period was characterized by new mechanisms of economic and political governance. It is clearly beyond the scope of this chapter to describe the policies that different European countries executed during these years. However, it is worth noticing that in response to the economic recession the European Union and European governments applied highly homogeneous policies that even partisan shifts in governments did not seem to alter (Pontusson and Raess 2012, Armingeon and Baccaro 2012, Degryse et al. 2013).[33] The initial phase (2007-2009) was characterized by expansive fiscal policies, and massive bailouts of financial institutions. From 2010 onward, fiscal consolidation became the priority. The broadened supranational level of political decision-making adapted and created new regulations imposed upon the national governments.[34] Targeting deficit control, governments reduced public spending and deepened the retrenchment of the welfare system. In the most affected countries, the harshness of these policies was followed by the enforcement of unprecedented supranational political interventions. Although there is no proof of causal evidence, studies do show that the loss of political support (both for national and European institutions) has been more acute in those countries that have undergone bailouts and, in general terms, in those under critical economic conditions, namely with unprecedented high unemployment rates (Armingeon and Ceka 2014, Roth et al. 2013). This chapter provides an overview of key political information that was available in the national mainstream media during those turbulent years.

Any kind of diagnosis/prognosis has particular implications that may affect citizens' perceptions and evaluations. If the public dominant discourses legitimate the austerity policies as a 'technical' response to an economic problem framed within a particular theory, they may cancel alternative political interpretations and in-depth discussions that involve broader social

[33] In terms of how governments effectively implemented policies in each member-state under the common supranational framework, the European Union's response to the economic crisis may be seen as differentiated, adapted to each country. These agreements and mechanisms remain beyond the scope of this research. See, for example, Weber and Schmitz (2011) and Ioannou et al. (2015).

[34] This chapter does not discuss the intergovernmental decision-making process within the European Union.

statements, leaving contestation aside and limiting the debate about social and political concerns.[35] Recent research has investigated the effects of discourse and news in the media during the crisis, namely through content and framing analyses. In the public sphere austerity policies were presented as an inevitable harsh stance required for overcoming the economic crisis. National stereotypes reinforced this explanation (Thompson 2009, Murray-Leach 2014, Mylonas 2012, Wodak and Angouri 2014). Nevertheless, as far as I know, there is not yet a systematic comparative record of which political actors addressed specific subjects in different European countries as the financial and debt crises developed, and austerity policies were introduced. This chapter offers an insight. First, by evidencing the protagonists of the dominant economic discourse. Complementary, by exploring whether alternative subjects might have also gained access to the mainstream media, where and by whom. As a result, I contribute a portrayal of interests played during the most critical phase of the financial and economic crises that led the way to the implementation of austerity policies.

The chapter unfolds as follows. First, I delineate a theoretical framework built upon three key elements: the public sphere as an arena for contention where social actors struggle to make visible and legitimate their own interests; the function of ideas and discourses used to validate the implementation of public policies; and availability of information as an essential constituent of opinion formation, crucial to facilitate deliberation and contestation. Second, I introduce the data and methodology. Third, I develop the analysis of media claims and present the results. Last, I draw the conclusions and suggest some further research.

[35] From this viewpoint, the recent crisis seems a missed opportunity for enhancing the national debates about Europe and its policies, of incorporating European civil society to the discussions, and of contributing to bridge the gap between the EU and its citizens. On the contrary, the fact of embracing citizens' participation in public debates would contribute to legitimate the European integration project.

3.2. Theoretical framework

Numerous scholars have reflected upon the role of ideas and, more specifically, discourses for decision-making and political opinion formation processes (Hay 1999). In particular, authors refer to the imperative narratives of policy-making in the context of globalization and European integration (Hay and Rosamond 2002, Schmidt and Radaelli 2004), and in the context of the financial and economic crises that recently determined the execution of austerity policies (Berry 2016, Schmidt 2014a, 2014b, Blyth 2013). An important argument that underlies most studies is that discourses in the public sphere are not only the expression of specific actors' interests but, furthermore, become a restrictive conception of what is possible, and what is not, in policy-making (De Ville and Orbie 2014). In other words, when narratives become accepted and normalized in society they function as a means for justifying policy-making—first and foremost among political actors themselves, and likewise intended to the general public. Narratives are particularly crucial in critical periods when political decisions are expected to limit a perceived threat, under conditions of uncertainty, and a sense of urgency—when citizens expect political actors to act (Boin et al. 2005, 2009).

The aim of this chapter is to contribute to the understanding of the informative contexts in which European citizens transited the last economic crisis. The dominant political, economic, and social actors played a central role in underpinning the definitions of the crisis:[36] 'economic crisis', 'financial crisis', 'debt crisis', 'euro crisis', and so forth, from which particular policy implementations derived (Blyth 2013, Schmidt 2014a, Jones 2015, Dellepiane-Avellaneda 2015, Laffan 2014). These interpretations were made publicly visible, namely through the discourses of dominant actors in the national media (Thompson 2009, Hänggli 2012, Mylonas 2012, Wodak and Angouri 2014, Schmidt 2014b). But could it be that the economic crisis altered the amounts of public visibility that different collective actors enjoyed in the national media? Did the crisis trigger civic participation in public debates? Were the social and

[36] This chapter follows Widmaier et al.'s (2007) assertion that conciliates constructivist frameworks and rationalist assumptions, as explained: "To assume that agents are strategic is simply to suggest that they have consistent preferences and make choices which advance those preferences, not that they can collectively employ all available information [as in rational choice theory]". In other words, "agents make strategic choices, given some social context" (Widmaier et al. 2007: 750).

political consequences of harsh economic policies also discussed? In an attempt to address these questions, I portray a series of pictures that illustrate the prevalence of different kinds of actors and subjects in several selected European public spheres between 2008 and 2014.

The role of the media in the process of opinion formation is well documented. An extensive body of literature analyzes the importance of public discourses and news, and documents the mechanisms of framing, agenda-setting, and priming (Zaller 1992, Hänggli 2012, Thompson 2009, Wodak and Angouri 2014). Unlike these studies, I circumscribe the media to its function of conveying visibility (required for achieving legitimacy) to the discursive activities of the dominant social actors and the subjects they put forward. To a great extent, citizens rely on the media to be informed. For ordinary people, economic subjects are usually complex and political decisions are taken far away from their everyday lives. The European Union's multilevel political system adds another layer of difficulty for assessing policy-making and political responsibilities (Hobolt and Tilley 2014). It is through the mass media that elites, large functional interest groups, political parties, and experts strongly influence citizens' opinion formation (Zaller 1992, Lee Kaid 2004). Similarly, in pursuit of public support to influence policy-making, alternative organizations, social movements, and smaller civic groups also intend to gain public visibility in the mass media. Besides, not only do the media mediate information between political actors and the general public, but also among political and social actors themselves (Binderkrantz 2012, Tresch and Fischer 2015).

Researchers on social movements have developed the notion of 'discursive opportunity' to grasp the function of the public sphere in producing, increasing and softening events. Discursive opportunity is defined as "the aspects of the public discourse that determine a message's chances of diffusion in the public sphere" (Koopmans and Olzak 2004: 202). It explains the dynamics of media attention, bridging framing and political opportunity perspectives.[37] The three elements that compose discursive opportunities are visibility, resonance, and legitimacy, taking place in this order. "Visibility is a necessary condition for a

[37] The notion of 'discursive opportunity' may answer "why certain perceptions and interpretations of political reality spread (while others do not) and why certain actors may effectively succeed in opening new windows of opportunity (when most do not). We suggest that the public sphere mediates between political opportunity structures and movement action" (Koopmans and Olzak 2004: 201).

message to influence the public discourse, and, other things being equal, the amount of visibility that [the media] allocate to a message increases its potential to diffuse further in the public sphere" (Koopmans and Olzak 2004: 203). By gaining visibility in the media, actors and subjects may either be supported or contested (resonance), opening the possibility for acquiring social legitimacy.

The public sphere is an arena for political contention that offers discursive opportunities for conflicting actors. Public discourses reflect social conflict and symbolic struggles. Discursive opportunities are part of the political opportunity structure of a given institutional setting at a particular moment. Disruptive periods in society offer a window of opportunity for political actors (being incumbent, advocacy groups or challengers) to advance their own interests, to redefine or prioritize subjects, and to put forward policy or organizational reforms that might otherwise be difficult to accept (Koopmans and Pfetsch 2006, Statham and Grey 2005, Trenz 2008, Vetters et al. 2006, Boin et al. 2009). Extraordinary events provide new opportunities for new structural alignments and new strategic alliances. Major disruptions tend to give rise to conflicting interpretations where actors compete to impose their views; economic and financial crises are particularly susceptible to political conflict (Boin et al. 2005, 2009, Olsson et al. 2015, Dellepiane-Avellaneda 2015).

The mass media constitute a prime field where political conflict takes place. In search of public recognition, contending actors intend strategic interventions and seek media attention as a means for legitimacy (Koopmans and Statham 1999, Binderkrantz 2012). As for the media, it privileges credible and expert sources—in addition to its ideological affinity and its own interests. Not all actors make it to the news. Media news reflect which actors are successful in making public their political concerns; they reproduce the dominant positions of the actors and discourses in society (Kriesi 2004, Statham and Tumber 2013). Governments, institutions, elites from business and elsewhere, powerful organizations, unions[38] and, in general, groups with more resources are more prominent in the national media. These actors are at the center of the political system; they already have access to policy-making (Thrall 2006). National

[38] The declining power of labor unions through the past decades is well documented. Even so, they still are an important interest group, particularly within the European policy-making framework.

actors overwhelm supranational actors (see the previous chapter of this thesis). In contrast, weaker actors that lack not only political power but also connections and resources rely on extraordinary events to attract media attention. Among these actors are organizations and groups that promote public interest, social movement organizations, NGOs, group-specific organizations, and civil society as a whole—i.e., all those actors that do not usually have access to policy-making and thus try to influence the system from the periphery (Thrall 2006, Binderkrantz 2012, Tresch and Fischer 2015, Hänggli 2012).

This chapter explores and maps the visibility of different types of actors, their discursive interactions, and the issues they advanced in nine selected European public spheres. I trace between- and within-country differences over the period 2008-2014. All in all, I describe who 'spoke' to whom over which subjects and affecting whose interests. How did the visibility of actors and subjects in the national media vary across European countries as the austerity policies were being implemented? Could the economic crisis have represented a discursive opportunity for weaker actors, and civil society in particular, to become visible in the public domains? I expect that civil society was more visible in those countries that were most affected by the economic crisis and the austerity cuts, and by supranational political interventions. Regarding the type of subjects made visible in the national public spheres, it seems evident that economic issues must have prevailed in every European country during the last economic crisis. Nevertheless, did the social and political consequences of the crisis and austerity become subjects of discussion as well? Once again, I expect this should be the case in those countries that were most severely affected by the crisis and austerity.

3.3. Methodology and data

This chapter follows political claims-making analysis (Koopmans and Statham 1999, Statham and Tumber 2013), a quantitative method used to retrieve political information from news coverage. It uses the selective function of the media to recover the information that has been made visible in a given country at a particular time. Political claims-making analysis retrieves

direct verbal or non-verbal statements (referred to as 'claims') that appear in the media with no interpretation on the part of journalists or editors.[39] In doing so, it considers that the claims that were published evidence the relevance of those actors and issues that have succeeded in overcoming the media filters. In other words, political claims-making analysis unveils the underlying relationships that exist in society; it mirrors social cleavages and evidences the most prominent subjects and events; and in doing so it illustrates the political climate of a given country at a specific time.

I use the LIVEWHAT EU-FP7 (2013-2016) Work package 3 "Collective Responses to Crises in the Public Domain" dataset. It covers the period 2005-2014; it contains a random selection of 1,000 claims for each country in the sample. However, I discarded those claims prior to 2008 due to the scarcity of claims referring to the crisis, austerity, or recession during the initial years prior to the burst of the financial crisis. Therefore, I selected all claims published during the period 2008-2014 (N = 8,707 claims). The claims were retrieved from news articles published by the mainstream national media of the nine selected European countries: France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the UK. These countries represent a range of political and economic contexts: EU and non-EU member states; creditors and debtors; EMU, opt out and non-euro; pro-EU and Eurosceptics; founder members and countries from subsequent accession waves; and Western and Eastern Europeans. Considering the impact of the recent economic and debt crises on the national contexts, they may be separated in three broad groups: countries strongly affected that received a bailout program or a rescue package (Greece, Italy and Spain), intermediately affected (France and the UK), and with weak or lateral effects (Germany, Poland, Sweden and Switzerland).[40]

The unit of analysis is a political claim. A political claim is a strategic intervention, either verbal or nonverbal, in the public space made by a given actor on behalf of a group or

[39] When the media is also analyzed as another political actor, editorial and opinion sections might be coded too. However, claims made by the media were not coded in the LIVEWHAT EU-FP7 (2013-2016) dataset, which focuses on other political, social and economic collective actors.

[40] For more details on this classification, see the contextual data collected in the Work package 1 of LIVEWHAT EU-FP7 (2013-2016).

collectivity and which bears on the interests or rights of other groups or collectivities.[41] Claims are statements in news articles; they report a political decision (e.g., law, governmental guide, implementation measure), a verbal statement (e.g., public speech, press conference, parliamentary intervention), or a protest action (demonstration, occupation, violent action). The news articles that contain the LIVEWHAT EU-FP7 (2013-2016) claims were first selected in each country through a keyword search ('austerity', 'crisis' and/or 'recession' pertaining to the economic crisis) from any section of the main national newspapers, excluding editorials and opinions that represent journalistic interpretations; hence, all the articles refer explicitly to these terms. The claims that were retrieved from these news articles cover a variety of issues (e.g., unemployment, recession, exclusion, welfare reforms, economic stability, budget balance, and so forth). This allows for a comprehensive analysis of the collective actors and issues in each country, which is not restricted to the policy areas that are under European competence. Unfortunately, with the available data it is impossible to disentangle the crisis from the recession, or austerity. I therefore explore the three concepts altogether.

The news articles were recovered from the five mainstream national newspapers in each country, which cover a range of ideological preferences, selected to increase the representativeness of the sample. Despite the undeniable relevance of new media and interpersonal communications for citizens' opinion formation, mainstream newspapers are still very strong influencers of public opinion that lead news agenda-setting (Statham and Tumber 2013, Vliegenthart et al. 2008, Trenz 2004). The newspapers selected for the LIVEWHAT EU-FP7 (2013-2016) dataset represent the well-established printed press of each country and reflect the views of the most important actors and subjects in society. Hence, it is particularly relevant to examine whether, during the crisis, challenging actors and alternative topics were able to make it through media biases in these particular newspapers. The newspapers are, in France: Le Figaro, La Tribune, Le Monde, Le Parisien, Libération; in Germany: Bild, Die Welt, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Frankfurter Rundschau, Süddeutsche Zeitung; in Greece: Eleytherotypia, Kathimerini, Rizospastis, Ta Nea, To Vima; in Italy: Corriere della

[41] See LIVEWHAT EU-FP7 (2013-2016: 3).

Sera, La Stampa, La Repubblica, Il Giornale, Il Sole 24 Ore; in Poland: Dziennik Gazeta Prawna, Super Express, Gazeta Polska Codziennie, Gazeta Wyborcza, Rzeczpospolita; in Spain: ABC, El País, El Periódico de Catalunya, La Vanguardia, El Mundo; in Sweden: Aftonbladet, Dagen Nyheter, Göterborgs Posten, Norbottens Kuriren, Svenska Dagbladet; in Switzerland: Blick, Le Matin, Le Temps, Neue Zürcher Zeitung, Tages Anzeiger; and in the United Kingdom: Daily Mail, Daily Mirror, The Guardian, The Sun, and The Times.

I use the following variables from the original dataset, which respond to the fundamental questions that structure the data and the interests of my research. All claims have an actor, an issue, and an object but not all claims are explicitly directed toward an addressee; hence, the variable addressee contains many unspecified values.

When and where was the claim made? Variables: country of claim, date of claim
Who made the claim? Variable: first actor
At whom was the claim directed? Variable: addressee[42]
What was the claim about? Variable: first issue[43]
Who was affected by the claim? Variable: object

3.3.1. Typology of actors, addressees, and objects

According to the interest of this analysis, I recoded the original variables that identify the actors, addressees, and objects from the LIVEWHAT EU-FP7 (2013-2016) dataset. These three variables refer to political, economic and social actors performing different roles in the flux of claims-making discursive interactions. Accordingly, 'actors' refers strictly to those who begin (make) the claim, 'addressees' relates to those who are targeted by the claims, and 'objects' indicates those whose interests are affected by the claims. These three variables—actors, addressees, and objects—are codified in the same way. However, we must keep in

[42] Many claims have no specific target (addressee): actors 'speak' in general, in an undefined way.

[43] Only 10% of claims have a second actor, and less than 50% have second issue. I therefore omit this information. From now onward, in this chapter 'actor' refers to the first actor and 'issue' refers to the first issue in the original dataset. See LIVEWHAT EU-FP7 (2013-2016) for a detailed list of all the variables in the dataset.

mind that actors hold the most visible, active role as they always appear making a claim. Addressees depend on being targeted by actors while objects are affected by the claims but not necessarily mentioned; they are both passive actors.

The typology I use to classify the LIVEWHAT EU-FP7 (2013-2016) actors/addressees/objects is adapted from previous research that analyzes the relationship between interest groups and the media (Thrall 2006, Tresch and Fischer 2015, Hänggli 2013, Koopmans and Pfetsch 2006, Binderkrantz 2012). I organized the typology in three main groups: (1) state and political; (2) interest groups; and (3) civil society. The classification criteria might result rather simplistic, but illustrates well the role that different actors play in society; most importantly, it highlights the relationship they hold with regard to policy-makers and the media. This is relevant to my research because it reveals the initial possibilities that different types of actors have for participating in, and influencing, the process of policy-making through discursive interactions in the public sphere. The first group represents the core political system and consists of state and party actors: government, parliament, courts, other state agencies, politicians and political parties. The second group corresponds to interest groups that have access to the policy-making process and tend to be mentioned by the media: market and economic actors, financial, business, employers' associations, labor unions, professional groups,[44] think tanks, and the media. Finally, the third group includes other interest groups and civil society actors that lack access to the policy-making process and are usually excluded from the media: civil society organizations, social movement organizations, and sectional groups with limited resources. For the sake of simplicity, these three broad groups are labeled as (1) 'Core political actors', (2) 'Interest groups' and (3) 'Civil society'. All negligible values in the LIVEWHAT EU-FP7 (2013-2016) dataset were incorporated into their corresponding broader categories. Table 1 presents the typology used for the actors, addressees, and objects according to this classification.

[44] LIVEWHAT EU-FP7 (2013-2016) does not indicate which professional groups are included here, but nevertheless, this category is coded under the umbrella of 'Professional organizations and groups' that includes all the other most powerful actors in the sample.

Table 1. Typology of actors/addressees/objects

GROUP 1: Core political actors (at the center of the political system)	
State actors	Executive, legislative, judiciary, economic, and others (police, military and security, welfare, and other executive)
Political parties	
GROUP 2: Interest groups (with privileged access to policy-making and the media)	
Market and finance	Market, banks, credit and rating agencies
Companies	Private companies, and employers
Labor	Unions, workers, and other work-related
Opinion leaders	Media, research institutes and think tanks, and élites
Other professionals	
GROUP 3: Civil society actors (interest groups with limited access to policy-making and the media)	
Civil society	Group-specific (women, migrants, unemployed, disabled, youth, and others), solidarity, welfare, and human rights, others (anti-austerity and occupy movements, reclaim initiatives, extreme-right, radical left, religious, and others), and citizens

Source: Adapted from Binderkrantz (2012), Hänggli (2012), Thrall (2006), Tresch and Fischer (2015).

3.3.2. Typology of issues

Based on the original LIVEWHAT EU-FP7 (2013-2016) variable of first issues my recoding defines two broad groups in order to contrast economic and financial against social and political issues. Within the group of macroeconomic and financial categories I dissect the nature of diverse subjects that are of special interest to this research. Within the group of social subjects I distinguish those issues that are more directly linked to welfare policies (housing, education, health, social policy, and labor), which were heavily hit by austerity. However, as aforementioned, the recoded categories only identify the significant data, i.e., negligible values from the original dataset were incorporated into their corresponding broader categories. The low numbers of many categories do not allow distinguishing subtopics in further detail. The implications of scarce data in particular subjects will be discussed along the analysis. Table 2 presents the typology of issues.

Table 2. Typology of issues

GROUP 1: Economic and financial issues	
Macroeconomics	Inflation, prices and interest rates, unemployment rate, monetary policy, budget and debt, taxation, industrial policy, wages, and others
Banks and finance	Banking system, bank secrecy, financial markets, credit market, insurances, and bankruptcy
Business	Competition and corporate management, small business and independent workers, copyright and patents
Others	Other economic activities and domestic commerce
GROUP 2: Social and political issues	
Labor	
Health, education, and housing	
Social policy	
Public administration	
Political activities	
Others	Agriculture, environment, energy, immigration, transportation, law, civil rights, defense, science, culture, sports, foreign trade, international affairs, lands and water, urban and regional, other fields

Source: Adapted from LIVEWHAT EU-FP7 (2013-2016).

3.4. Results and discussion

3.4.1. Descriptive statistics: Actors, addressees, issues, and objects

When analyzing this data we should always keep in mind that all the claims in the sample refer at some point either to the economic crisis, the recession or austerity. We might therefore expect an economic bias in the subjects discussed by these actors, as well as a strengthened role of economic (and executive) claims-makers. It is also evident that economics was critical at the time, ubiquitous during several years. However, social and political issues were also extremely important amid the economic context of this period (2008-2014), presumably even more in the countries that were most critically affected by the crisis and hit by harsh austerity policies. The following analysis maps the visibility of the different kinds of players and issues, tracing opposed and complementary interests in the nine selected national public spheres over

time. First of all, I present an overview of the sample for the whole period 2008-2014. I examine the three types of actors who made the claims (Table 3) and the addressees who received them (Figure 1) in each country; then, I trace in detail and over time the issues that the claims-makers proposed in each country (Figure 2 and Table 4); finally, I portray a general picture of whose interests were affected by these claims (Table 5).

Regarding the composition of actors and addressees, in both cases, civil society organizations and groups were undoubtedly the minority type throughout the whole period, far behind core political players and interest groups. For the rest, the typology of actors and addressees evidences different patterns. Overall, actors (Table 3) were quite fairly distributed between core political claims-makers (50%) and powerful interest groups (46%) while civil society was only visible in 4% of all the claims, ranging from 6% in France and 6% in Italy to 2% in Switzerland. Against my expectations of finding more civic participation in the countries most affected by the crisis and austerity policy-making, they only represented 3% of claims-makers in Greece. Considering the balance between the two dominant types of actors (core political and powerful interest groups), I identify three groups of countries. On one extreme, the first group clusters three countries where core political actors overwhelmingly dominated the media: in Germany, Greece and Spain these actors produced roughly 65% of each country's claims while interest groups made around 30%. A second group is composed of two countries that equilibrated the share of visibility between both dominant types of claims-makers. This was clearly the case of Italy (47% each type) and Switzerland (50% of core political actors against 47% of interest groups). Two other countries in this middle group were close to balancing core political and interest groups actors. On the one side, France presented 50% of core political actors against 44% of interest groups. On the other side, the other way round, the UK displayed 52% of its claims made by interest groups against 43% made by core political actors. On the opposite extreme, the third group clusters two countries where interest groups greatly outnumbered core political actors: Poland (65% of interest groups against 32% of core political actors) and Sweden (62% of interest groups against 35% of core political actors). As for civil society claims-makers, despite being a very small minority in all countries, as aforementioned, they were slightly more visible in France (6% of the country's total claims)

and Italy (6%), Spain and the U K (5%). Table 3 shows how the visibility of all kinds of actors is distributed in each country during the period I analyzed.

Table 3. Share of the types of actors by country (2008-2014) N = 8,707

Country	Actors														
	Executive	Legislative	Judiciary	Economic	Other	Political parties	**State and political**	Companies	Market and finance	Labour	Opinion leaders	Other professionals	**Interest groups**	**Civil society**	**Total %**
France	26	4	1	1	3	15	**50**	11	8	14	9	2	**44**	**6**	100
Germany	33	4	1	11	2	14	**64**	10	9	4	7	2	**32**	**4**	100
Greece	30	16	1	6	4	8	**65**	5	7	10	7	4	**32**	**3**	100
Italy	28	2	1	7	2	8	**47**	20	5	15	6	1	**47**	**6**	100
Poland	14	3	-	3	4	7	**32**	26	12	5	20	2	**65**	**3**	100
Spain	34	3	-	5	4	18	**64**	9	3	6	9	4	**31**	**5**	100
Sweden	16	2	-	7	4	7	**35**	28	24	5	3	2	**62**	**3**	100
Switzerland	13	15	-	10	3	8	**50**	20	16	5	5	1	**48**	**2**	100
UK	17	2	-	8	1	16	**43**	18	12	8	9	5	**52**	**5**	100
Total %	23	6	0,5	6	3	11	**50**	16	11	8	8	3	**46**	**4**	**100**

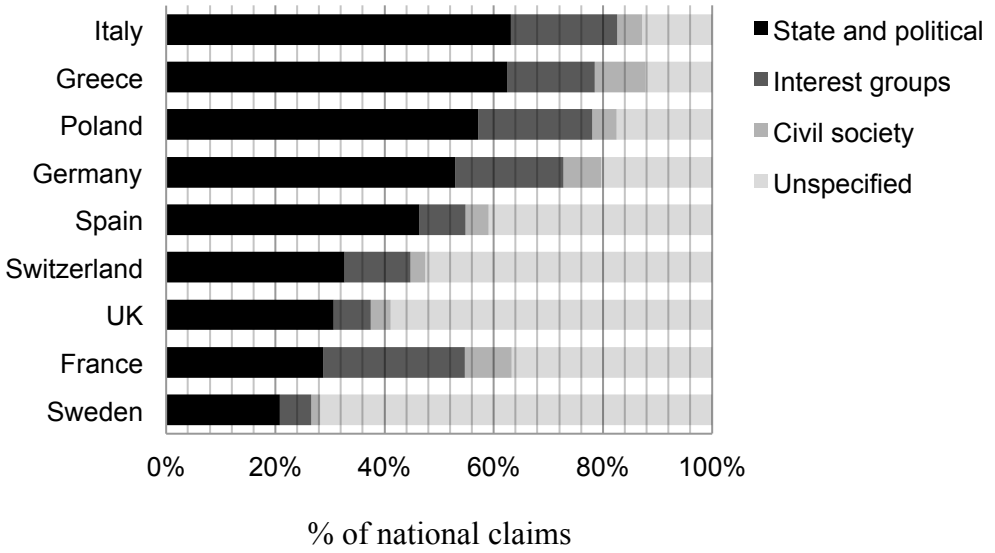
In percentages. Values below 1% are not displayed.

A more detailed decomposition of actors (Table 3) evidences that executive actors prevailed in six out of nine countries. These actors made 23% of all the claims in the sample, followed by companies (16%), then markets and financial actors (11%) and political actors (11%). Executive claims-makers were most visible in Spain (34% of the country's claims), Germany (33%), Greece (30%), Italy (28%) and France (26%). Companies, on the other hand, were the most visible actors in Sweden (28% of all the claims in the country, closely followed by market and financial actors with 24% of the national share), Poland (26%), and Switzerland (20%). Markets and financial claims-makers were particularly important in Sweden (24%); together with companies they represented 52% of all national actors. Other core political actors were especially visible in certain countries. Legislative actors were particularly significant in Greece (16%) and Switzerland (15%), but almost negligible in all the rest; economic state agencies were visible in Germany (11%) and also in Switzerland (10%);

political parties stood out in Spain (18%), the UK (16%), France (15%) and Germany (14%). With regard to interest groups, labor claims-makers were most visible in Italy (14%), France (14%) and Greece (10%); opinion leaders outstood in Poland (20%) and were quite visible in France (9%), Spain (9%) and the UK (9%).

The types of addressees that were visible across countries (Figure 1) exhibits certain similarities with the visibility of actors, and a few differences too. In the first place, civil society addressees were always the weakest type, receiving fewer than 10% of national claims in all nine countries in the sample. This is only slightly higher than the visibility of civil society as actors (claims-makers). The highest numbers of civil society addressees were visible in France (9%) and Greece (9%), followed by Germany (7%), and then the rest of countries. Second, as usual, core political addressees outstood and hence received by large the majority of claims in every country, with the exception of France. Compared to actors, the contrast between the two powerful types of addressees—core political and powerful interest groups—was much more exacerbated within countries, on the one hand, and much more even between countries, on the other hand. In descending order, striking within-country differences were seen in Spain (46% of core political against 8% of interest groups), the UK (31% of core political against 7% of interest groups), Greece (62% of core political against 16% of interest groups), Sweden (21% of core political against 6% of interest groups), Italy (63% of core political against 19% of interest groups), Poland (57% of core political against 21% of interest groups), Switzerland (33% of core political against 12% of interest groups), and Germany (53% of core political against 20% of interest groups). The only exception was France, where both types of addressees were almost balanced: core political addressees received 29% while 26% of all French claims targeted interest groups. Table 2 presents the distribution of all kinds of addressees in the sample. In this case, the data does not justify having a closer look to the different sub-types of addressees, as in the case of actors, because specific frequencies are too small. Countries are displayed in decreasing order according to the amount of core political addressees that were visible in each country during the whole period.

Figure 1. Share of the type of addressees by country (2008-2014) N = 8,707



The next step of this initial overview compares across countries and over time the two broad types of issues: economic and financial against social and political issues. Economic and financial issues made up 67% of the total amount of claims during the period under review while social and political issues represented 33% of the sample. In all nine countries, economic and financial subjects far outweighed social and political concerns. Considerable disparity appeared, in decreasing order, in the UK (81% of economic/financial issues against 19% of social/political subjects), Sweden (77% of economic/financial against 23% of social/political), Switzerland (76% of economic/financial against 24% of social/political), Poland (67% of economic/financial against 33% of social/political), Greece (62% of economic/financial against 38% of social/political), and France (58% of economic/financial against 42% of social/political). By comparison, Italy (55% of economic/financial against 45% of social/political) and Spain (54% of economic/financial against 46% of social/political) tended to balance both main types of issues in the reported period as a whole.

A close-up picture of the issues (Table 4) that these claims made visible reveals that macroeconomics was, as expected and by far, the undisputed subject throughout the whole

period. Country by country, macroeconomic issues occupied 65% of all claims in the UK, 61% in Sweden, 51% in Poland, 49% in Germany, 47% in Greece, 46% in France, 44% in Switzerland, 40% in Italy, and 39% of all Spanish claims. Banks and specific financial issues stood out in Switzerland (24%), Germany (17%), the UK (14%) and Sweden (12%); issues on businesses and other economic activities were rather relevant in Spain (11% of the country's claims). Among the social and political type of issues, labor subjects were most visible in France (15%), Italy (15%), Poland (11%) and Greece (9%). Public administration issues reached considerable visibility in 16% of Spanish claims. Health, education and housing, and social policy issues were always below 7% in all countries over the whole period.

The longitudinal patterns drawn by the data illustrate how distant the two broad groups of issues (economic/financial and social/political) were in each country over time (Figure 2). During the initial years of the financial crisis (2008-2009) social and political issues traced an upward trend in all countries except in Spain. From then onward, only in rare occasions did social and political subjects come close to economic and financial issues. This is namely the case in Italy and Spain, and to a lesser extent in France and Greece. Exceptionally, the visibility of social and political subjects exceeded economic and financial issues in Spain in 2011 and 2014, and in Italy in 2010 (in 2012 they equaled). These variations in the data have several explanations, which are developed below.[45]

Some particularities that are presented in detail in Table 4 (detail of issues) may add information to better understand the longitudinal patterns displayed in Figure 2 (issues over time). The visibility of banking and financial issues was stronger at the beginning of the period. In 2008, these issues were particularly visible in Switzerland (37%), Greece (27%), Germany (23%) and Italy (23%). The peak of social and political issues that became visible in France in 2009 was due to the rise of labor topics (which represented 22% of all French claims in contrast to the previous 8% they had reached in 2008) at the expense of macroeconomic subjects (which fell to 38% in 2009 from the previous 55% in 2008). Similarly, the rise of

[45] I do not consider relevant the case of Sweden 2014 because, despite the convergence it shows, the amount of claims is negligible that year (under 2% of the country's sample). Switzerland presents a similar drop in the amount of claims that year, and Germany is below 4% of its simple. In contrast, France (12%) still continues active, followed by Greece (9%), Italy (8%), and the UK (7% of the country's sample).

labor issues was mainly visible in Italy in 2012 (23% of Italian claims that year) at the moment when social and political issues (around 51%) only slightly surpassed economic and financial subjects (around 49%). Besides, labor issues also peaked in Greece in 2009 (14% of Greek claims that year) and in 2014 (13%). In 2009, despite the sharp increase in visibility of macroeconomic issues (up to 47% in 2009 from the previous 28% in 2008), the steep drop of banks and financial issues (which fell to 7% from 27% in the previous year) and businesses (which fell to 5% from the previous 13% in 2008) determined, together with the aforementioned rise of labor issues, the significant reduction of the gap between the two main types of issues in Greece. In Spain, in 2010 and 2011, public administration issues increased up to 20% and 23%, respectively, while business-related, and other economic activities dropped to 8% and 4%, accordingly. Also in Spain, health, education and housing subjects steeply increased up to 20% in 2014 (from the previous 4% in 2013) while macroeconomic issues decreased from 42% in 2013 to 34% in 2014. These facts inversed the trend of issue visibility in Spain: social and political subjects surpassed economic and financial issues during those years (2011 and 2014). Many more variations arise from the data, but these seem to be the most significant.

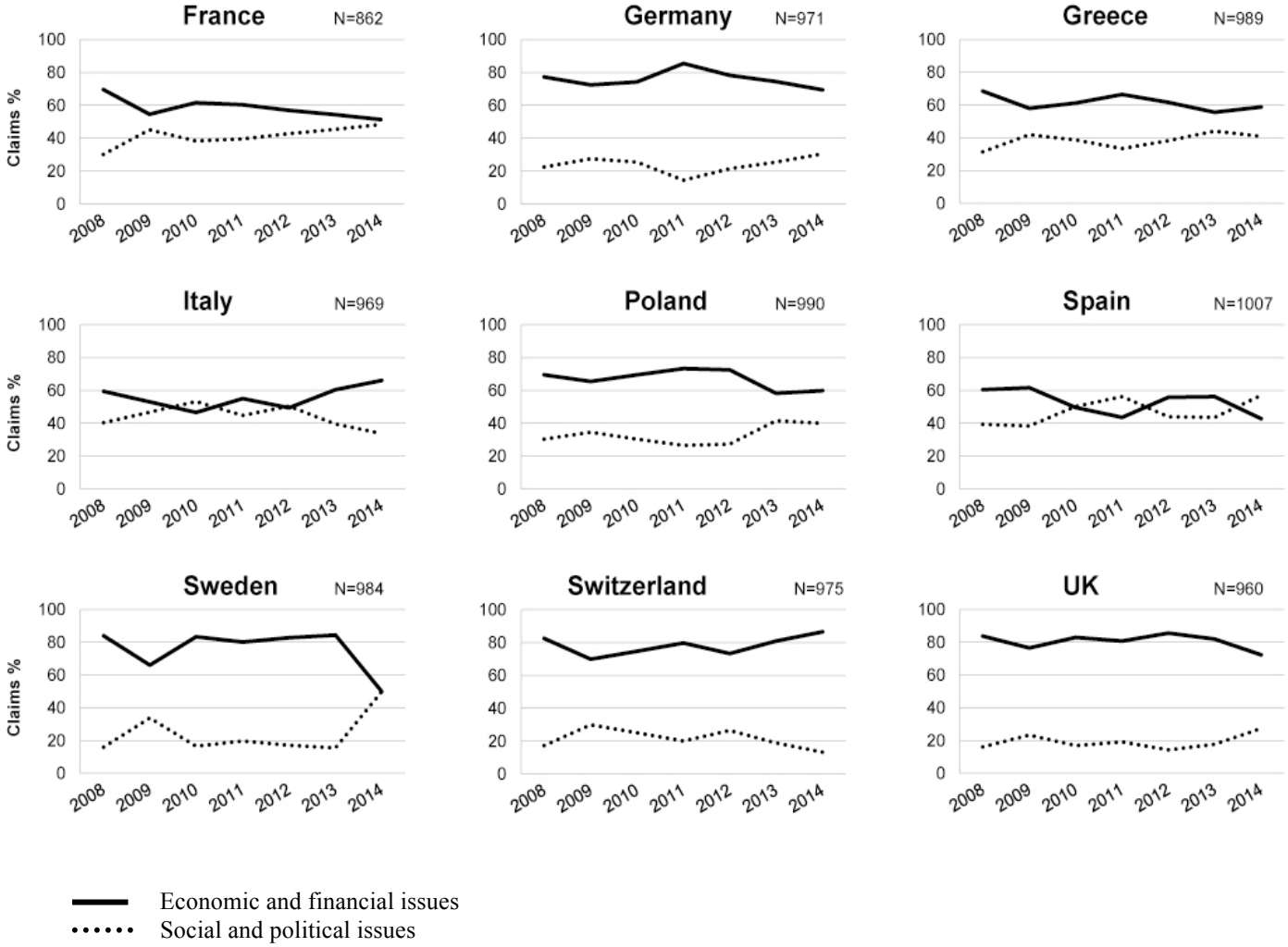
Table 4. Detail of issues by country and over time (2008-2014) N = 8,707

Issues	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	Total %
FRANCE								(N=862)
Macroeconomics	55	38	53	46	44	44	44	**46**
Banks and finance	14	8	3	11	6	4	3	**7**
Business and other	1	8	5	4	7	7	5	**6**
Labour	8	22	15	10	14	16	13	**15**
Health, edu, housing	5	1	3	4	8	4	8	**4**
Social policy	1	5	8	5	1	3	6	**4**
Public administration	-	1	3	1	4	5	4	**2**
Others	16	17	9	18	15	18	18	**16**
Total %	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	**100**
GERMANY								(N=971)
Macroeconomics	38	45	49	65	55	47	53	**49**
Banks and finance	23	15	18	14	18	22	14	**17**
Business and other	17	13	8	6	5	6	3	**9**
Labour	10	9	6	1	1	2	3	**6**
Health, edu, housing	2	2	2	-	-	-	6	**2**
Social policy	3	2	3	1	1	1	6	**2**
Public administration	-	2	2	4	3	7	3	**3**
Others	6	12	13	9	17	16	14	**12**
Total %	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	**100**
GREECE								(N=989)
Macroeconomics	28	47	51	58	49	48	36	**47**
Banks and finance	27	7	6	6	7	3	16	**9**
Business and other	13	5	4	3	6	5	7	**6**
Labour	4	14	9	6	8	7	13	**9**
Health, edu, housing	1	3	2	3	3	7	5	**3**
Social policy	4	3	6	2	5	5	1	**4**
Public administration	2	5	5	8	5	8	6	**6**
Others	19	16	17	15	18	18	16	**17**
Total %	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	**100**
ITALY								(N=969)
Macroeconomics	35	33	33	43	38	45	56	**40**
Banks and finance	23	14	10	7	5	6	5	**9**
Business and other	1	6	3	5	7	10	5	**6**
Labour	10	12	13	17	23	16	5	**15**
Health, edu, housing	10	13	7	2	6	8	5	**7**
Social policy	6	3	3	3	3	3	5	**3**
Public administration	3	5	9	9	6	7	6	**7**
Others	11	14	23	14	13	5	13	**13**
Total %	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	**100**
POLAND								(N=990)
Macroeconomics	51	49	62	59	55	45	42	**51**
Banks and finance	11	6	5	9	5	5	5	**7**
Business and other	8	10	3	5	12	8	13	**8**
Labour	12	9	8	9	12	15	13	**11**
Health, edu, housing	4	7	2	2	3	4	5	**5**
Social policy	1	4	10	5	1	6	7	**5**
Public administration	2	3	3	2	5	4	2	**3**
Others	10	12	8	9	5	12	13	**10**
Total %	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	**100**

Issues	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	Total %
SPAIN								(N=1007)
Macroeconomics	42	43	38	36	33	42	34	**39**
Banks and finance	6	7	3	4	7	3	-	**5**
Business and other	12	12	8	4	16	11	9	**11**
Labour	7	8	9	6	3	6	5	**6**
Health, edu, housing	6	3	7	5	6	4	20	**6**
Social policy	2	5	5	5	5	4	-	**4**
Public administration	12	11	20	23	15	19	20	**16**
Others	12	11	10	18	15	11	13	**13**
Total %	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	**100**
SWEDEN								(N=984)
Macroeconomics	63	52	69	62	70	69	22	**61**
Banks and finance	16	10	10	9	13	9	28	**12**
Business and other	5	4	5	9	-	7	-	**5**
Labour	5	10	4	7	5	-	6	**7**
Health, edu, housing	3	6	2	2	1	2	28	**4**
Social policy	-	2	-	2	-	2	-	**1**
Public administration	-	1	-	1	-	2	6	**1**
Others	8	15	11	7	11	10	11	**11**
Total %	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	**100**
SWITZERLAND								(N=975)
Macroeconomics	37	44	37	58	53	43	33	**44**
Banks and finance	37	18	29	15	18	27	47	**24**
Business and other	9	9	9	6	2	11	7	**8**
Labour	2	8	5	5	2	-	-	**5**
Health, edu, housing	-	2	1	2	-	-	-	**1**
Social policy	6	2	4	1	2	3	-	**3**
Public administration	4	1	3	1	-	5	-	**2**
Others	5	17	12	12	23	11	13	**13**
Total %	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	**100**
UK								(N=960)
Macroeconomics	62	61	66	69	67	74	58	**65**
Banks and finance	18	12	15	10	17	7	13	**14**
Business and other	3	3	2	1	2	1	1	**2**
Labour	1	4	6	4	2	3	3	**3**
Health, edu, housing	6	4	3	1	2	6	9	**4**
Social policy	-	-	3	1	-	1	1	**1**
Public administration	2	1	1	1	2	1	-	**1**
Others	7	13	4	12	9	6	14	**9**
Total %	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	**100**

In percentages. Values below 1% are not displayed.

Figure 2. Issues over time by country (2008-2014) N = 8,707



The last part of this general analysis illustrates whose interests were affected by these claims. These players are the objects of the claims. As aforementioned, civil society organizations and groups gained very limited direct visibility in the national mainstream media: they were neither prominent claims-makers (actors) nor received great attention (addressees). Nevertheless, as Table 5 evidences, 30% of all the claims in the sample concerned their interests. This is a significant share that almost doubles the amount of core political actors (16%) that were affected by the claims in all countries. Yet, they were clearly below powerful interest groups altogether (54%): market and financial objects were affected by 21%,

companies by 16% and labor organizations and groups by 13% of the claims in the whole sample. Table 5 presents the distribution of claims affecting all kinds of political, economic and social objects during the entire period 2008-2014.

Table 5. Share of the objects of the claims by country (2008-2014) N = 8,707

Country	State	Political parties	**Core political actors**	Companies	Market and finance	Labour	Opinion leaders	Other professionals	**Interest groups**	**Civil society**	**Total %**
France	35	4	**39**	12	16	15	2	1	**47**	**15**	100
Germany	36	1	**37**	15	26	8	1	1	**50**	**13**	100
Greece	12	1	**12**	9	16	21	0	4	**50**	**38**	100
Italy	12	1	**13**	35	9	21	3	1	**69**	**18**	100
Poland	3	1	**4**	27	6	13	0	2	**47**	**49**	100
Spain	13	3	**16**	8	6	8	1	4	**27**	**57**	100
Sweden	6	1	**6**	23	25	11	1	0	**59**	**35**	100
Switzerland	10	2	**11**	13	42	16	4	1	**76**	**13**	100
UK	10	1	**12**	5	48	4	0	0	**57**	**31**	100
Total %	**15**	**1**	**16**	**16**	**21**	**13**	**1**	**1**	**54**	**30**	**100**

In percentages. Values below 1% are not reported.

The claims affected the interests of civil society mainly in Spain (57% of the country's claims), Poland (49%), Greece (38%), Sweden (35%) and the UK (31%). The interests of markets and financial objects were particularly affected in the UK (48% of British claims) and Switzerland (42%), followed by Germany (26%) and Sweden (25%); labor interests, in Greece and Italy (21% each). Last but not least, the state's interests were mostly affected by claims in Germany (36% of all German claims) and France (35%). In contrast, political parties, opinion leaders, and other professional organizations and groups that have access to policy-making were hardly affected at all.

3.4.2. Discursive relationships: Actors and addressees; actors and issues

The second part of this description takes a closer look at how the three basic components of the claims—actors, addressees, and issues—were visibly connected in the nine public spheres. However, before advancing the analysis, a reminder needs to be made. A comparative analysis of nine countries over time cannot, unfortunately, develop in-depth and extensively all the richness of the data in a single chapter. Nevertheless, regardless of the limitations of scope, certain considerations that arise from the data are worth mentioning. The following description stems from the role of actors as active claims-makers. Actors are the ones who begin the flux of communication; they target different types of addressees and promote particular issues. Consequently, I illustrate the most relevant relationships of particular types of actors turning to particular types of addressees, on the one hand, and advancing specific issues in the national public spheres, on the other hand.[46]

In the first place, a more detailed analysis of the types of actors and addressees allows differentiating the main competitors within the broad typology that I have used so far. Within the core political group I distinguish state agents from political parties. Within the interest groups, labor from companies, market and finance players. In any case, first and foremost, all types of actors directed their claims to state addressees.[47] No other type of addressee received such attention. Particularly, the state/state relationship (state actor/state addressee) was by far the most visible one in all countries—apart from a negligible difference in the UK, where state/state represented 6% of the British sample while political parties targeted the state in 7% of British claims. In descending order, state/state claims were most visible in Greece (33% of all Greek claims), Germany (22%), Italy (20%), Switzerland (18%), Spain (16%), Poland (14%), France (10%), Sweden (7%), and the UK. The state also directed its claims to civil society (6% in Greece, 5% in France). Other actors that addressed the state during the period were companies (14% of claims in Italy and 13% in Poland), labor actors (10% of claims in

[46] I do not discuss figures below 5%.

[47] When the addressee is explicit in a claim. Although I maintain the representativeness of the sample including unspecified addressees in the data, I do not comment here on those claims directed to unspecified addressees, which surpass other sorts of addressees in Sweden, Switzerland, and the UK.

Italy, 5% in Greece), opinion leaders (10% of claims in Poland), political parties (9% of claims in Germany, 9% in Spain, 6% in Italy, 6% in Poland, and 5% in Greece and Switzerland), and market and finance (6% of claims in Poland and 5% in Sweden) claims-makers. There is hardly any other data worth stressing. However, this is neither to say that actors did not target other addressees nor that the remaining types of actors were not active—only that they represent either too small, sometimes negligible amounts of claims when analyzed targeting particular addressees.

In the second place, I highlight certain information about the actors/issues relationship. In this case, state actors advancing macroeconomic issues dominated by far the claims in all countries. In decreasing order, they represent 30% of the claims in Greece, 27% in Germany, 22% in Spain, 21% in Switzerland, 20% in Sweden, 19% in the UK, 18% in France, 16% in Italy, and 15% in Poland. Other types of actors that also introduced macroeconomic subjects were market and finance players (15% of claims in Sweden, 8% in Poland, 7% in the UK, 6% in Switzerland, 5% in France), companies (14% of claims in Sweden, 13% in the UK, 9% in Italy, 8% in Poland and Switzerland, 5% in Germany), political parties (11% of claims in the UK, 8% in France, 6% in Germany and Spain, 5% in Poland), opinion leaders (6% of claims in the UK), and labor actors (5% of claims in the UK). For its part, state actors also proposed other kinds of issues. The most visible were banking and financial subjects (11% in Switzerland, 8% in Germany, 5% in Italy and 5% in the UK) and public administration topics in Spain (6% of all Spanish claims).

3.5. Conclusions

This chapter contributes to illustrate the communicative relations developed by contending actors in the national public spheres over the period 2008-2014 in a selected sample of European countries. I presented an examination of 8,707 claims published by the most important national mainstream media. I basically considered whether the exceptional circumstances of those years opened up the possibility for visualizing a variety of actors and

issues in the national public spheres. Specifically, I explored whether social and political concerns that derived from the economic crisis coexisted with more technical economic or financial subjects that I expected to prevail. The map of successful contenders in the media mirrors their relationships in society. The results I introduced show an overwhelming preponderance of economic matters at the expense of all other kinds of interests in all the countries of the sample.

The crisis went through different phases over the seven-year period under review. The data presents some evidence of these changing phases. Social and political concerns gained increasing visibility in the media during the initial phase of fiscal expansion (2008-2009). From then onward, the forcefulness of the usual dominant actors and the monotony of recurrent economic subjects crystallized a uniform picture. Consequently, alternative social and political perspectives lacked visibility. The claims published by these mainstream media provided information to European citizens in different countries, who were directly or indirectly exposed to it, and contributed to signify the complexity of extremely critical circumstances. Published issues were made visible by actors who, in turn, gained themselves visibility in the media, and affected the interests of specific groups. Furthermore, the great amount of visibility that state actors and macroeconomic issues enjoyed in the mainstream media increased the potential to spread their messages even further. This chapter does not analyze the resonance and legitimacy that these claims produced in the national public spheres. However, the exploration done so far reveals that state actors that advanced economic subjects largely fulfilled the first necessary condition required to influence the public sphere: visibility in the media. From this perspective, the economic crisis did neither represent a discursive opportunity for peripheral actors and challengers nor for social and political concerns.

The data shows that state actors were the most visible claim-makers in every country over the whole period, except in the UK, where they were slightly outnumbered by political parties. Quite the contrary, civil society actors were the real missing players in this story. State actors were extremely prominent in Greece and Germany, capturing over half the total amount of claims in each country, followed by Spain and Switzerland. In any case, state actors

consistently proposed economic and financial issues far beyond any other subject. The dominant group that was structured around the state incorporated political parties, companies, market and financial players, and eventually opinion leaders too, with slight variations across countries. All these actors clearly advanced economic and financial issues, with two noticeable exceptions: political parties in Spain and companies in Poland, to a lesser extent. On the other hand, in the case of addressees, core political addressees (particularly, the state) were always, and by far, more visible than interest groups—except in France, where both types shared similar visibility. In other words, all kinds of actors addressed the state.

Undoubtedly, the state/state link (a state actor targeting a state addressee) was the most visible relationship in every country. In specific countries, other particular actors that addressed the state also had a rather significant share of visibility in the media. This was the case of business groups in Italy and Poland, labor groups in Italy, opinion leaders in Poland, and political parties in Spain and the UK. Besides, labor organizations and groups (including labor unions) gained noticeable visibility in France and to a lesser extent in Greece, but remained scarcely visible in all the remaining countries. The data thus reflects the declining power of labor unions, even amidst the steep deterioration of labor conditions that followed the economic recession and the implementation of austerity policies. Namely in the countries most affected by unemployment, lowered wages, job insecurity, welfare retrenchment, and so forth, the critical social conditions of those years did not represent a discursive opportunity neither for labor groups nor for civil society organizations and groups. Labor actors, however, proposed social and political issues mostly in Italy, France, and Greece, but also economic and financial subjects. Conversely, they privileged economic and financial subjects in Sweden, Switzerland, and the UK (the amounts of visible claims are sometimes quite negligible in these cases and hence we must be cautious in drawing conclusions). The state played a double role regarding the issues it promoted. Although, as aforementioned, being the first actor and the first addressee too, it mainly advanced economic and financial subjects, it also played an important role in posing social and political concerns. Nevertheless, these were always far below the amount of economic and financial matters it made visible in the media.

Lastly, I explored whose interests were affected by the claims in order to complement the picture of these discursive relationships. Overall, the interests of civil organizations and groups were affected by a third of all claims, which represents a considerable share. These organizations have neither access to policy-making nor the media, and were in fact unable to surmount the extremely low visibility that they enjoyed as actors and addressees. Their interests were mainly affected in Spain (where claims affecting them doubled the average in all countries), Poland, Greece, Sweden, and the UK. The second group whose interests were most affected was the one composed of market and financial players, especially in the UK and Switzerland, but also in Germany and Sweden. Next, companies, business associations and groups, who were particularly affected in Italy, then in Poland and Sweden. In the fourth place, the interests of the state were most affected, mainly in France and Germany; and lastly, the interests of labor organizations and groups were mostly affected in Italy and Greece, followed by Switzerland, France, Poland, and Sweden.

So far, I depicted the ability and capability of different actors in gaining visibility for themselves and particular issues by accessing the national media during the recent economic crisis. Further research could broaden and deepen the comprehension of these strategic alignments by tracing the resonance that these claims had among economic, political and social actors. This comprehension might lead to confirming the legitimacy of certain actors and the issues they succeed in making public. Similarly, timing the visibility of specific subjects in cross-national comparisons may reveal other patterns in the data. Moreover, contextual information, macroeconomic data, the identification of key political events and, in particular, a follow-up of the implementation of austerity policies and the execution of the new European mechanisms of financial support in each country would certainly contribute to the interpretation of these claims.

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Chapter 4

Public representations of 'Europe' and sensitive policy-making during the economic crisis. France, Spain, and the UK Compared

Abstract

This chapter explores and compares the lexicon that the mainstream national newspapers of France, Spain, and the UK used in relation to the European Union within the context of austerity policy-making during the last economic crisis, and slightly before (2007-2014). In the multilevel polity of the European Union (EU) there is a tension between the supranational level of policy decision-making and the national level of policy implementation, where citizens also get informed. The ways in which European citizens 'saw' the European Union during the last economic crisis through the lenses of their national media might have contributed to their understanding of complex, sensitive policy-making, and facilitated attributing responsibilities across different political levels.

Overall, the results present a significant lexical similarity among the three countries. There is an overwhelming amount of economic and financial terms that social and political references do not counterbalance. The articles use extremely vague words to refer to 'Europe'. They hardly ever mention any specific political actor or institution. They mention a generic crisis, but not directly austerity. In summary, there is no clear information that might help tracing political responsibilities or understanding sensitive economic policy-making that was decided at the European political level. These results contradict the expectation of divergent media discourses based on the different national contexts and the varied economic, political, and social effects that the crisis and European policy-making had in each country. Considering the magnitude of the social consequences caused by the harsh economic retrenchment, no debates seem to have guided the implementation of austerity policies. It is also doubtful whether the excess of economic jargon facilitated the comprehension of technical issues for the general public. In this sense, European policy-making in critical times appears to be a missed opportunity to engage broad segments of the population.

4.1. Introduction

Political information is not neutral: it shapes our understanding of policy-making. The mainstream mass media function as mediators of political discourses to mass publics, giving voice to national elites; they portray events, actors and issues, and communicate ideas that are part of larger public discourses. European citizens live in national information environments that affect the ways in which they perceive political actors and critical events (Vliegenthart et al. 2008). Which images of the European Union (EU) and of other EU member-states did the national media present in the national environments during the last economic crisis? Were European actors clearly identified? Was the European Union directly associated to controversial austerity policy-making? This analysis provides an insight into the national information environments and contributes to the understanding of public representations of 'Europe' and sensitive policy-making across EU member-states in critical times.

The chapter compares mainstream media content published between 2007 and 2014 by the leading national newspapers of France, Spain, and the UK, three selected countries with striking economic, social and cultural differences that became evident during the euro crisis and beyond. This chapter aims to:

- Identify the European political actors, institutions, and member-states;
- Examine whether, or not, the European Union was linked to austerity policy-making;
- Explore whether, or not, social and political issues were also addressed, somehow counterbalancing the predominance of economic subjects;
- Inspect the language used in European-related news articles; assess whether it facilitated citizens following and understanding complex policy-making in the multilevel polity.

During the Great Recession, the European Union monitored the implementation of national austerity policies with dire socio-economic consequences for citizens' everyday lives. Living in national information environments and being informed by the national media, citizens tried

to make sense of sensitive public policies that were decided far from home. The crisis was strongly shaped by supranational policy-making and supranational political interventions that were presented to the national publics by the national media. What relevant political information was available at the time in the national contexts? The overall convergent pattern of European economic policy-making was evident: austerity[48] (Wren-Lewis 2016, Magalhães 2016, Pontusson and Raess 2012, Armingeon and Baccaro 2012), but national political and economic differences persisted too, even aggravated by the way in which the European Union managed the crisis (Costa Lobo and Lewis-Beck 2012, Scharpf 2012, Armingeon and Baccaro 2012). This chapter inquires whether different national mainstream media discourses[49] followed a similar pattern when presenting the European Union and public polices or if, on the contrary, they presented different representations according to national specificities.

Political information flows in dynamic interactions where traditional quality newspapers are still influential players in the national domains; they give voice to certain political actors and focus the attention on particular subjects, often performing agenda-setting for the general public, the other media outlets, politicians, and policy-makers (Damstra and Boukes 2018, Picard 2015, Vliegenthart et al. 2008). Based on different research designs, previous studies of media contents conducted during the recent economic crisis ended up with two main results. On the one hand, they found an overarching discourse across European countries, which legitimated austerity policy-making. On the other, they revealed a variety of national discourses and frames that mirrored national differences. Many of these analyses are individual case studies; others cover short time spans or small samples. Several rely on human coding, and most of them examine the role of particular media outlets in framing, agenda-setting or priming in news coverage (Murray-Leach 2014). Altogether, they give insights on how, here and there in Europe, the mainstream press presented the crisis to its national publics.

[48] Government policy responses to the Great Recession were notably uniform across European countries. At the initial phase in 2008-2010, governments implemented 'new keynesian' policies of moderate fiscal stimulus combining tax cuts and some spending increases with monetary easing, scarce compensations toward the unemployed, and massive financial bailouts. As from 2010 onward, all European countries shifted to fiscal consolidation as their main priority and implemented severe austerity cuts accordingly. Austerity policies triggered (youth) unemployment and forced the retrenchment of the welfare system (Wren-Lewis 2016, Pontusson and Raess 2012).

[49] In order to avoid the much broader and ambiguous use of 'public discourse', I use 'media discourse' that refers specifically to discourses conveyed by the mass media (Murray-Leach 2014).

However, as far as I know, there is not yet a comprehensive quantitative lexical analysis that compares mainstream media discourses across different European countries during the whole period. In this chapter I contribute to fill the gap.

Therefore, this research differs from, and complements, previous studies on the subject, playing a part in advancing research. I analyze and compare the supply of political information at the aggregate level in times of crisis. The Great Recession was an extraordinarily critical case that evidenced deep differences among the member-states of the European Union. The political and social consequences of the management of the crisis are still noticeable today (e.g., unemployment, Euroscepticism) (Wren-Lewis 2016, Hobolt and de Vries 2016). This chapter aims at contributing to capture the national information environments where European citizens lived throughout the crisis, recognizing that the supply of political information in the national domain is central to the process of opinion formation (Hobolt and Tilley 2014, Rorschneider 2002, Curran et al. 2014, Lee Kaid 2004). I state that we do not necessarily need to consume particular news contents to be influenced by the national mainstream information environment in which we live (Vliegenthart et al. 2008). Therefore, in this study, I am neither concerned with the analysis of particular media outlets nor with the effects of citizens' direct exposure to news frames.

The particular news articles that I analyze contain claims made by the most prominent political actors in the national public spheres; they also contain direct references to the economy, austerity, and European political actors. These claims have been previously analyzed using claims-making analysis (see the previous chapters 2 and 3). I now propose to advance a step further. I intend to unveil hidden structures in the data that may evidence political responsibilities and associations that we may have not been able to detect so far; specifically, whether the European Union was related to austerity policies in different EU member-states. I therefore use a quantitative text methodology that reveals latent relationships in the data: latent Dirichlet allocation (LDA) unsupervised topic modeling. First, I expect that using this methodology on a very particular sample that already contains key references of interest to this research (European, 'austerity', economic, financial or debt 'crisis' and/or 'recession') will uncover meaningful relationships among these references in the texts. Second, the

methodology is suitable for an individual researcher because it does not rely on a subjective process of coding textual data in the initial phase of analysis.[50] As far as I know, this methodology has only recently been used in the same subject in a policy brief (Müller et al. 2018). I argue that this is a promising line of research that may also be used to supplement other research methods in order to achieve a more comprehensive analysis of media portraits in particular places at specific times. To the best of my knowledge, my research is the first of its kind to use LDA unsupervised topic modeling in a cross-country sample of news articles from mainstream quality newspapers covering the broad ideological spectrum of each country throughout the whole economic crisis, and slightly more.

The findings of this study present a significant lexical similarity among the three countries I analyzed (France, Spain, and the UK). The preponderance of economic and financial terms is not counterbalanced by political or social references discussing the consequences of austerity policy-making, which were acute concerns at the time. Mentions of the European Union are extremely vague. Similarly, the articles do not refer directly to the austerity policies, seldom to 'cuts', and mostly to a generic crisis. They hardly ever identify specific political actors or institutions, whether supranational or national. There is therefore no clear information that might help to trace political responsibilities and to understand sensitive economic policy-making decided at the European political level. This is not only a comprehensive portrait of the availability of political information in critical times, but also a portrait of the lack of it. The implications that in such extraordinary circumstances omitting relevant political information might have for the legitimacy of the European Union is beyond the scope of this study. Yet, the results I present already draw attention to this question.

[50] If we are interested in naming the topics or if a topic results in a particular cluster of words that we cannot decipher straightforwardly, they will need interpretation at the end of the process. See the methodological section in this chapter.

4.2. Theoretical framework

4.2.1. News coverage of the economic crisis

Several studies assess how national quality newspapers across different European countries covered the economic crisis, the euro crisis or the austerity policies. Their aim is to understand how European citizens perceived the events and/or the European Union, and which was the role played by the national media in presenting the news at the time. They use different methodologies and samples, and cover distinct time spans; their research questions are not quite the same, but they all approach the object of study and provide hints for my own research design. Murray-Leach (2014), in particular, shares a concern that is perfectly in line with my research: that a distant and ambiguous representation of the European Union, and a depoliticized crisis that rules out political alternatives in the absence of debates in the national public spheres may alienate European citizens from the project of European integration. Below I present a summary of several studies.

Barnes and Hicks (2018) analyze how two major British newspapers portrayed fiscal policies in times of austerity (2010-2015). The UK is a particular case where austerity policy-making was not dictated by supranational institutions, but rather pursued by domestic actors. This quantitative content analysis of news coverage is part of a research design that also includes survey experiments. Their main argument is that the provision of news shapes how voters understand austerity: people's preferences change with information. All of which is confirmed in their study. In the first part of news content analysis, they perform a structural topic analysis (stm) to define the words that cluster together in the articles; they analyze the topics and the extent to which they are present in each document within the corpus of text. They find that each newspaper uses different language and presents different frames according to its ideology; besides, broadsheet newspapers provide more substantive information about economic issues. However, newspapers may have tailored their coverage according to their readerships, which they test with a survey experiment. All in all, this study reveals that attitudes are susceptible to media influence: people tended to think of austerity as necessary

and accept it even if they did not like it. I hold that this kind of studies should be extended to other countries where austerity was imposed by the European Union and international organizations or decided at the interplay of the national and supranational political levels; it should also cover a greater representative sample of the mainstream media. Unfortunately, such an in-depth and ample research that first describes and then tests causality in several countries is beyond the scope of this doctoral thesis. My study lays the foundations for further research. The conclusions of Barnes and Hicks (2018) echo the study that Berry (2016a) carried out within the British context too. Berry (2016a) inquires how BBC news covered the initial phase of the British deficit in 2009. He applies a thematic content analysis to answer how the BBC explained the origins, consequences and potential policy responses to the deficit. The study describes that political and financial elites dominated the news presenting arguments of an imminent threat that was endorsed by journalists. Austerity was unchallenged; oppositional voices, debates about the implications of austerity and alternative policy options were extremely scarce.

Picard (2015) presents a comparative study that aims at revealing how newspapers across Europe covered the euro crisis, and how citizens perceived it (2010-2012). The analysis does not approach empirically this second question; neither does it address the question of austerity. This is a qualitative and quantitative content analysis of news coverage around 11 critical European events during the euro crisis; the sample covers 10 European countries, four national newspapers in each country. While providing a comprehensive comparable sample across a range of countries, the study is limited by the narrow and somehow arbitrary selection of news articles during specific events. The research identifies in each country the main characteristics of the news coverage; the salience and framing of the euro crisis; responsibilities, diagnosis and prognosis; particular winners and losers (countries and types of actors); and portrayals of the European Union and its member-states. Overall, the euro crisis is depicted as a European problem rooted in national economies that the European institutions are expected to address. However, on the one hand, the dominant frames differ across countries, but on the other, certain kinds of newspapers present similarities (e.g., financial vis-à-vis tabloid). The results are acute; they emerge from a detailed qualitative frame analysis that aimed to answer very specific questions, but these do not often compare to my research.

Moreno et al. (2017) compare how the news agencies of France (AFP) and Spain (EFE) covered the economic crisis (2008-2014). Their aim is to reveal the information provided by the press agencies at the intermediate phase of news generation, and assess whether national differences prevailed over news standardization. Applying a quantitative lexical analysis, they track words that refer to the economy and politics, and then cluster them in two main, opposed groups. They find that the nation still has a significant impact on framing the information due to national cultural specificities and to the fact that the economic crisis affected particular sectors in each country: France framed the economic crisis as a financial international problem while Spain related it to socio-political national concerns (Catalan conflict and corruption scandals) and to Europe. The question of austerity only emerges laterally in their results in EFE's information about demonstrations of trade unions in Spain. However, both countries changed from economic to political frames presenting the information over time: France in 2010/2011 and Spain in 2011/2012; these are moments around which peaks of unemployment occurred and the national executives changed or were to change (Hollande in 2012, Rajoy in 2011). These results are insightful, but news agencies do not equate to quality newspapers.

Bayley and Williams (2012) report several multilingual analyses of news discourses during two short periods in 2007 and 2009. They are part of a major project on European identity, but yet provide insightful results on their own. These studies draw theory and methodology from linguistics. Several researchers explore four corpora of print and electronic news media from four EU member-states "in order to construct a profile of how Europe, its institutions, and its people were represented" to its national publics (Bayley and Williams 2012: 3). They perform a lexical, qualitative and quantitative media content analysis that does not address the question of austerity. Bayley and Williams (2012) argue that press media discourses are the reflection of shared social meanings, shared representations of events; they aim at tracking and comparing these representations with regard to the European Union across different countries. They hold that readers share the main features toward the European Union that the newspapers present, and later check this assumption with surveys and interviews. The researchers track European actors and their role as agents (who does what to whom) and categorize the issues. Overall, they find a common, loose idea of Europe in every country, which is systematically referred to in vague and ambiguous terms, remaining distant and ignored. There are many

'Europes' in Europe: geographical, cultural, and political; we do not always know which one we are talking about. The Commission is the most relevant European actor, illustrated as an active agent. The UK represents itself in ambiguous ways, often not sharing a common identity; other countries also depict the UK in this way. These very insightful, rich results go beyond the research interests of my thesis in order to capture the various meanings of European identity.

Finally, Müller et al. (2018) present a policy contribution paper. Their aim is to identify how narratives of the economic crisis developed from 2007 to 2016, namely considering where blame for the crisis laid. They state that economic analyses usually ignore the European public sphere, and intend to inform policy-makers in order to contribute to the discussions on euro-area governance reforms. They perform a quantitative media analysis in five European countries using a narrow sample of one opinion-forming newspaper in each country. They apply LDA unsupervised topic modeling to identify the key crisis-related topics. They picture different national narratives, different topics and different blame attributions across countries, which nevertheless "left systemic euro-area issues largely unmentioned" (Müller et al.: 2).

4.2.2. Quality newspapers in hybrid media systems

The literature reckons the importance of the mass media as main suppliers of political information and active agents in constructing the public discourses. "[T]he media can serve simultaneously as the *channels* through which information is transmitted and received, as the *source* of particular kinds of information, and, increasingly, as the *public space* in which democratic engagement actually occurs." (Delli Carpini 2004: 398). Scholars agree that media discourses have direct and/or indirect effects on the process of opinion formation both by putting forward particular contents (i.e., generating, or omitting, political information) and through the ways in which they present political news. Although they cannot affect citizens'

beliefs without interacting with many other individual and contextual factors,[51] it is difficult to imagine that citizens may access political information that was not, at least, originated in the mass media (Chadwick 2013, Semetko and Scammell 2012, Lee Kaid 2004).

The amounts of different media outlets that interact in an information environment build a complex flow of information. Information feeds from online to offline media, and vice-versa. In a hybrid media system, all media content is produced as reusable pieces of information. The relevant 'pieces of information' will transit, sooner or later, through different media outlets. Therefore, rather than assessing the relative influence of particular media outlets, it might be worth thinking in terms of *transfers of information* (Delli Carpini 2004). Altogether, these dynamic interactions across different media convey a particular political 'mood' to the information environment in which citizens live. The information environment may be defined at different levels (Chadwick 2013). European citizens get informed in their national public sphere. Accordingly, defining the information environment at the national level follows the limits of the national media system that corresponds to the national cultural and socio-economic context (Azrout et al. 2012, Hallin and Mancini 2004, Vliegenthart et al. 2008).

In the complex context of media systems, the national quality printed press is still regarded as a very influential source of political information for citizens' opinion formation (Barnes and Hicks 2018, Damstra and Boukes 2018, Statham and Tumber 2013, Picard 2015, Vliegenthart et al. 2008, Walgrave and Van Aelst 2006, Habermas 2006, Lee Kaid 2004, Trenz 2004). Mainstream quality newspapers publish the major stories and report the elite discourse that is dominant in society. They are powerful agenda-setters. Most of their contents feeds back into alternative media and social networks; inversely, they recover news that are widely reported by alternative media and followed on online platforms.[52] In addition, media companies invest their efforts across multiple channels (e.g., printed press, website, social platforms,

[51] People build their opinions from other sources too and dependent on personal traits, e.g., personal experiences and perceptions, offline and online social interactions, pre-existing conceptions, education, family, political awareness.

[52] "Within established national public spheres, the online debates of web users only promote political communication when news groups crystallize around the focal points of the quality press, for example, national newspapers and political magazines." (Habermas 2006: 423, footnote 3). Other scholars posit that the actual variety and range of media options challenges the hegemony of quality newspapers, but reckon the dynamic interactions of information across different media outlets (Weaver, McCombs, Shaw 2004).

application, newsletter) to ensure that contents get to the widest possible audience (Cherubini and Kleis Nielsen 2016).

Newspapers have been studied at length using qualitative and quantitative content analyses of news coverage, surveys for measuring news consumption and citizens' exposure to news outlets, or experiments to assess media influence on political attitudes and behaviors. Empirical research aims at understanding the effects of framing, agenda-setting and priming on the process of opinion formation, to reveal the visibility of actors and issues, the resonance of their interactions in the public sphere and how they relate to political events. Recent studies still find evidence of how political opinion reacts to economic changes and how sensible it is to the supply of ideas and information in the national public spheres (Barnes and Hicks 2018, Soroka et al. 2015). Moreover, certain analyses conclude that the tone and salience in news coverage matter beyond the specific economic conditions of a country (Boomgaarden et al. 2011, Baumgartner and Mahoney 2008, Walgrave and Van Aelst 2006).

We still need more quantitative text analyses that evidence which is the political information that European citizens may access—political information that affects citizens' perceptions of critical political events and policies (Vliegenthart et al. 2008, Picard 2015). Issues that are not debated in public give limited choices about different visions of the European Union. The European member-states conform a complexity of interests where national differences persist, and became even more evident during the euro crisis. Scholars agree on the increasing relevance of citizens' support to European integration (Hooghe and Marks 2009). After a cascade of contemporary crises—i.e., economic, migration, Brexit—the rise of challenging political parties in several EU member-states and in the European Parliament, there seems to be little room for continuing to neglect the political opinions of citizens (Hobolt and de Vries 2016, Scharpf 2012, Costa Lobo and Lewis-Beck 2012). As discussed above, citizens' political opinions are largely based on political information acquired through the mass media. Quantitative text analyses ensure precise descriptions of the political information that is available at a given time. A precise description is sound evidence from which we may derive inferences, open up the path to new questions, and develop further research (Riffe et al. 2014).

4.2.3. National differences within European policy convergence

Media discourses are a constituent and influential part of the broader national information environment in which citizens live. Azrout et al. (2012) analyze media effects on public support for European enlargement across European countries. They compare the effects of the mass media on citizens' attitudes at the individual and country levels.[53] Their findings are insightful. They conclude that media effects on citizens' attitudes are a function of the national information environment. On the contrary, they do not find media effects when assessing individual exposure to particular media outlets. These results have important implications for studying the role of the media during the last economic crisis in Europe. They point at the need to analyze media discourses at the national level in order to provide insights on how national publics *saw* European policy-making during difficult times. Previous research that analyzed newspapers' coverage of the economic crisis has found an overarching internal consensus across different media within the same country, and considerable differences from country to country in framing the events, and in explaining and justifying different causes and origins of the crisis. Nevertheless, the EU is usually seen as responsible for addressing the crisis.

Western European countries have not only different economic, political and social structures (Costa Lobo and Lewis-Beck 2012, Scharpf 2012), but also different media systems that respond to those national economic, cultural and institutional settings (Hallin and Mancini 2004). The last economic crisis impacted disparately upon the European national economies. Political and social consequences were substantially different too. European and international agencies imposed political interventions upon selected countries and varying degrees of fiscal adjustment to the EU's member-states (Pisani-Ferry et al. 2013). However, in the UK they were the national political elites who pursued austerity policy-making. National governments also often held conflicting positions in EU negotiations. The European Union's handling of the

[53] Azrout et al. (2012) build a proxy to measure the information supply of a specific media system at the country-level. They operationalize it as the average of the aggregated measures of the most prominent (operationalized as those with the widest audience) national mass media. As I will discuss in the methodology, I decided to rely on a random sample of prominent printed press that represent the whole ideological spectrum of a country.

euro crisis deepened the divide between Northern and Southern, core and periphery, creditors and debtors EU member-states.[54] From opposing viewpoints, both groups of countries contested European policy-making. The Southern economies (debtors) underwent severe austerity packages that caused a steep rise in (youth) unemployment and higher rates of poverty (Baranowska 2014, Armingeon and Baccaro 2012, Degryse, Jepsen and Pochet 2013, Scharpf 2012, Costa Lobo and Lewis-Beck 2012). In the absence of mainstream European political debates, Eurosceptic parties raised issues of defense of the national sovereignty and national identity against the EU (Hobolt and de Vries 2016, Kriesi and Grande 2014, Costa Lobo and Lewis-Beck 2012, Scharpf 2012). The countries I analyze were either deeply affected by austerity (Spain) or by Euroscepticism (UK, and to a lesser degree France). Different national media discourses might also reflect national differences. So I expect to find substantial European references in the national news coverage. In particular, I expect the Spanish national media to relate austerity to the European Union. Moreover, I expect these media discourses to present other social and political issues too, reflecting collateral aspects of austerity policy-making at the time.

Hypothesis 1 (H1): The media discourses of different EU member-states addressed different issues and presented different political actors during the economic crisis.

Conversely, from a different perspective, media discourses may reflect the overarching ideological policy-making at the time. Theoretical research points to the importance of ideas as driving forces of policy choice—particularly, economic ideas and political ideology. Ideas are expressed in public discourses in order to legitimate policy-making. Narratives are communicated indirectly while debates and policies feed back into the perceptions of the public (Soroka et al. 2015, Jones 2015, Schmidt 2014, Wolfe et al. 2013). Economic ideas have distributional effects because the theories that prevail over others define who the winners, and who the losers of economic policy-making are (Dellepiane-Avellaneda 2015). Recent discussions highlight the relevance of ideas and discourses on the implementation of austerity policies during the last economic crisis. Despite the different modes of

[54] For this analysis, I do not consider complementary explanations that point to the responsibility of mainstream political parties that were in government at the time.

implementation in each European country, EU policy-making was consistently uniform, driven by neoliberal macroeconomic ideas. National governments often followed a similar trend (Wren-Lewis 2016, Berry 2016a, 2016b, Magalhães 2016, Dellepiane-Avellaneda 2015, Schmidt 2014, Blyth 2013). This uniformity may have resulted in standardized political information across Europe.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): The media discourses of different EU member-states addressed similar issues and presented similar political actors during the economic crisis.

4.3. Methodology and data

As great amounts of news data become more and more accessible online, quantitative text analyses of news corpora become increasingly used in political science research. Analyzing news coverage based on text as data allows for an 'objective' approach to its contents: words become numbers (Grimmer and Stewart 2013). Specifically, methods that generate unsupervised statistical topic models reveal clusters of words forming topics that are not evident at first sight. Therefore "quantitative measures (that) can be used to identify the content of those documents, track changes in content over time, and express the similarity between documents" (Griffiths and Steyvers 2004: 5228).

I define the information environment at the national level, within the limits of the media system, where the process of citizens' opinion formation takes place within the European Union. I operationalize it as the aggregation of media content characteristics (such as visibility) "of some of the widely used media sources" within the national context. "These measures can be considered proxies for the information that is available in this context." (Hopmann et al. 2010: 392). I compare the lexicon used and the topics addressed by 15 national mainstream newspapers in France, Spain, and the UK, inquiring how they presented the European Union and other EU member-states in relation to the austerity policies. I aim at

uncovering in the data whether European actors were related to austerity policy-making—and hence clustered together within the same topic—and whether political and social issues somehow counterbalanced economic issues during the period.

The corpus I analyze contains 828 newspaper articles published between 2007 and 2014 in three countries: France (321 articles), Spain (295 articles), and the UK (212 articles). Although these three countries are not the most extreme players of the euro crisis (i.e., Germany and Greece) they embody three different historical, geographical, and cultural paths, and disparate economic and political positions within the European Union. They exemplify debtors and creditors, and manifest significant differences that allow for testing H1 and H2. France is a founder member, a core EU country leading discussions on EU policy-making, and central to the European integration project. In spite of presenting increasing Eurosceptic publics, France still remains a pro-European country. Spain is a Southern member-state that accessed the EU in 1986. In 2012 and 2013, it received financial assistance for its banking system, conditioned to implementing harsh austerity policies that resulted in astonishing high rates of unemployment. Once a fervent pro-EU, support for European integration steeply fell during the crisis (-25% from 2007 to 2011). Both France and Spain are part of the European Monetary Union, while the UK—that accessed the EU in the first enlargement in 1973—is a core, opt-out, highly Eurosceptic EU member-state that after the economic crisis decided in referendum to leave the EU.

I analyze a random sample used in the work package 3 "Collective Responses to Crises in the Public Domain" of the LIVEWHAT EU-FP7 (2013-2016) project. The original sample was retrieved with a keyword search ('crisis', 'recession', 'austerity') from all sections of the newspapers, excluding editorials and opinions, and coded for claims-making analysis. Hence, they cover all sorts of subjects. Claims are political actors' interventions in the public sphere that were published without any journalistic interpretation. Only the most prominent actors succeed in being published; these are salient actors in the national public sphere. Claims may be used as contextual data (e.g., complementing survey data within the European Social Survey, Statham and Tumber 2013). In this case, I recovered the whole texts of all the European-related articles in the sample for a lexical assessment. I intend to supplement with

an analysis performed with LDA topic modeling the previous results that I revealed with claims-making analysis (see chapters 2 and 3 of this doctoral thesis). All the articles in the sample explicitly refer to the economic crisis, the recession and/or the austerity policies, and to European actors or institutions as well. It seems only natural to find high frequencies of economic wording in the sample. The challenge is to find other relevant policy issues too, and to reveal the relationships between European political actors and sensitive policies, using a text analysis method that does not rely on human coding.

The unit of analysis is a newspaper article. Articles were published by the five most influential printed newspapers of each country, which represent a wide ideological spectrum. In France: Le Figaro, La Tribune, Le Monde, Le Parisien, and Libération; in Spain: ABC, El Mundo, El País, El Periódico de Catalunya, and La Vanguardia; and in the United Kingdom: Daily Mail, Daily Mirror, The Guardian, The Sun, and The Times.

I apply latent Dirichlet allocation (LDA) topic model analysis (Blei, Ng and Jordan 2003; Blei and Lafferty 2009), an unsupervised statistical generative model that evidences the hidden structure of topics in a corpus, specifying a probability distribution over all possible documents. As other models, LDA discards the ordered sequence of words, treating the text of each unit of analysis as a 'bag-of-words' and therefore ignoring the syntactical meaning of sentences. Words lose their context and become mere frequencies in order to be subsequently related and clustered into probabilistic topics. As Grimmer and Stewart (2013: 283-285) explain: "Statistically, a topic is a probability mass function over words. […] To estimate a topic, the models use the co-occurrence of words across documents. […] LDA assumes that each document is a mixture of topics. […] Within each document, the words are drawn according to the distribution of topics." I compare the relationship among topics in France, Spain, and the UK over time, and assess the trends "by analyzing topic dynamics and using the assignments of words to topics to highlight the semantic content of documents", assuming that "the observed data (the words) are explicitly intended to communicate a latent structure (their meaning)" (Griffiths and Steyvers 2004: 5228). The goal is "to maximize the likelihood (or the posterior probability) of the collection" of documents. In order to decide the correct number of topics that should be assigned to the data, I used a simple approach that consists in

finding the extremes, analyzing the metrics based on minimization (Arun et al. 2010, Cao et al. 2009) and maximization (Deveaud et al. 2014, Griffiths and Steyvers 2004). Based on these metrics (see Figure 1 in the Appendix), I defined LDA with 40 topics and determined a starting point for the reiterations ('seed') at 100.[55]

The features (i.e., words or stems)[56] that occupy the first positions in a topic define its sense and name. I identify the first 10 positions of each topic.[57] Following the previous typology I used in chapter 3, I cluster the topics in two main groups: economic/financial and social/political issues (Table 1).

Table 1. Typology of issues

GROUP 1: Economic and financial issues	
Macroeconomics	Inflation, prices and interest rates, unemployment rate, monetary policy, budget and debt, taxation, industrial policy, wages, and others
Banks and finance	Banking system, bank secrecy, financial markets, credit market, insurances, and bankruptcy
Business	Competition and corporate management, small business and independent workers, copyright and patents
Others	Other economic activities and domestic commerce
GROUP 2: Social and political issues	
Labor	
Health, education, and housing	
Social policy	
Public administration	
Political activities	
Others	Agriculture, environment, energy, immigration, transportation, law, civil rights, defense, science, culture, sports, foreign trade, international affairs, lands and water, urban and regional, other fields

Source: Adapted from LIVEWHAT EU-FP7 (2013-2016).

[55] LDA iterates the co-occurrence of features assigned to documents until it finds a stable model that best fits the data. If the researcher does not fix the seed, the random starting choices made by LDA will prevent subsequent replications of the model.

[56] A stem is a morphological root common to various words.

[57] When in doubt, I check up to the first 20 features of the topic.

On the other hand, I define a 'European' topic when it contains more than one European reference among its first 20 features.[58] Otherwise, it might just be a loose feature that has no weight defining the topic subject. The more European features a topic has, and the higher these features rank, the stronger a 'European' topic is. I do not name the topics, I just number the European topics in each country according to the amount of European features they contain; therefore, EUR-1 has more European features than EUR-2, and so forth. Finally, I trace any 'austerity' feature that appears even individually in any topic. I aim at identifying them in order to explore whether they cluster with political actors and institutions, namely with the European Union. In order to relate austerity and the European Union I follow Domke et al. (1999), who define valence based on the proximity in a text of particular words of interest.

LDA has several advantages over qualitative or quantitative discourse analysis methods. To the interest of this research, it meets two essential expectations: it reveals latent lexical relationships that make up relevant topics in this data, which would otherwise remain uncovered, and it exposes the lexica that were available during this period—and conversely, it evidences the omitted information. As a machine unsupervised method, it is accessible to one researcher working independently. Finally, topic models can be used for viewing small-scale corpora, and work well supplementing other methods of content analyses (Jacobs and Tschötschel 2019, Mohr and Bogdanov 2013).

4.4. Results and discussion

4.4.1. Descriptive statistics

Defining a number of top-features in the data is arbitrary, but it illustrates its composition at a glance, considering frequencies that are well above the rest. The top-10 features (which also trace the trends over time) and top-50 features (that consider the period as a whole) only show

[58] Due to the scarcity of European topics, I broaden the possibilities of finding relevant features and inspect the topics in greater detail. In any case, the following analysis reveals the strength of the topics.

the extremely prominent data in each country. Although these features are not interrelated, they give a clear idea of the importance of the very first ranks. Table 2 presents the most pertinent top-10 features over the period 2007-2014,[59] illustrates the year in which these features entered the top-10 ranking and the time span when they were visible. Throughout the whole period 'crisis' ranks highest in the French sample; there is no other feature in any country that compares to it. In the French sample, European features are also important. The French and Spanish data present some political and social references too (e.g., 'government', 'employment', 'social', 'political', 'public'); the British sample, 'government', 'Osborne' and 'cut'. However, these references appear intermittently along the years. The most consistent features that prevail throughout the period are: 'crisis', 'France' and European references in France; 'Spain', 'economy', and 'crisis' in Spain; and 'bank', economy', 'percentage', and 'Britain' in the UK.

Among the top-50 positions (Table 6 in the Appendix), the most prominent features are economic, financial and national references in the three countries (e.g., 'bank', 'econom', 'entreprise', 'rate', 'France', 'España', 'Britain'); political and social features are very scarce (e.g., 'social', 'public', 'politic', 'people', 'job'); 'Europe' is very relevant in France, then in Spain, but it does not appear in the UK. There are no 'austerity' references; instead, 'cut' in the UK; 'crisis' ranking high in Spain and low in the UK; and 'reform' in quite low positions in France and Spain. Finally, only the leading politician is identified in each country: French Prime Minister Sarkozy, Spanish president Rajoy, and British chancellor Osborne. There are no traces of European political actors in the first positions of any of these countries. In summary, the main difference among these three media contents relies on the absence of European features in the UK sample, and the outstanding position of the 'crisis' in France. For the rest, they all display predominant economic and financial features, and identify neither political actors nor austerity policy-making as such.

[59] I discarded the features that are not meaningful for this analysis (e.g., 'said', 'last', 'year'). See Tables 7.1., 7.2. and 7.3 in the Appendix for the complete list of top-10 features (2007-2014) by country.

Table 2. Selected top-10 features by country (2007-2014)

In frequencies.

		2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	TOTAL
	France (N = 2,274)									
1	crise	62	200	367	187	185	112	93	90	1296
2	France	-	71	141	121	107	80	102	95	717
3	pay	-	-	91	79	84	-	64	67	385
4	gouvern	-	-	85	79	-	54	77	69	364
5	euro	-	-	-	112	114	76	0	53	355
6	europ	-	-	88	76	71	62	56	-	353
7	banqu	55	80	-	-	118	88	-	-	341
8	emploi	-	-	-	105	83	-	66	52	306
9	social	-	-	87	97	-	-	66	-	250
10	politique	-	-	-	-	-	76	76	66	218
	Spain (N = 1,778)									
1	España	11	43	159	113	68	102	93	53	642
2	econom		73	86	114	106	98	62	54	593
3	crisis	13	72	130	108	74	75	-	-	472
4	gobiern	-	59	-	100	80	124	-	-	363
5	public	-	-	80	-	-	-	53	41	174
6	social	-	-	90	75	-	-	-	-	165
7	pais	-	-	86	78	-	73	-	-	164
8	español	-	-	85	74	-	-	-	-	159
9	president	-	47	-	-	76	-	-	-	123
10	banc	24	-	-	-	-	83	-	-	107
	UK (N = 1,133)									
1	bank	43	158	77	90	125	127	43	35	698
2	economi	-	-	51	58	233	76	73	25	516
3	per_cent	25	55	-	76		85	38	38	317
4	Britain	-	-	56	62	97	62	32	-	309
5	growth	-	-	-	-	128	57	38	-	223
6	UK	-	-	67	-	112	-	40	-	219
7	govern	-	-	55	54	94	-	-	-	203
8	rate	31	94	-	-	-	-	-	57	125
9	Osborne	-	-	-	-	99	-	-	-	99
10	cut	-	75	-	-	-	-	-	-	75

4.4.2. LDA analysis

The descriptive statistics introduce the LDA analysis that is meant to discover latent relationships among the features, giving visibility to probabilistic topics in this collection of news articles. The features that have a probability of co-occurring cluster into particular topics that need interpretation. This is a cross-country analysis that does not dig deep into the meaning of all topics revealed in these news articles. It is limited, on the one hand, to identifying the European and austerity features, and verifying whether they cluster in a topic establishing a close relationship (Domke et al. 1999). On the other hand, I trace economic and financial features vis-à-vis all other visible subjects, in order to assess whether political and social concerns were also relevant at the time.

4.4.2.1. Economic/financial vis-à-vis social/political topics

I have clustered the 40 topics of each country in two main groups following the typology presented in Table 1; a third category contains topics with mixed features and those unclassifiable, which I will not discuss.[60]

Table 3. Share of issues by country (2007-2014)
In percentages.

Country	GROUP 1 **Economic/financial**	GROUP 2 **Social/political**	**Mixed or unclassifiable**	**Total %**
France	70	25	5	100
Spain	42,5	47,5	10	100
UK	75	17,5	7,5	100

At first sight, the distribution of topics in two broad thematic typologies (economic/financial against social/political) seems to reveal a striking difference in Spain compared to France and the UK. The aim of this exploration is to assess whether the social and political issues

[60] See the complete list of topics by country (2007-2014) in Tables 8.1., 8.2. and 8.3. in the Appendix.

reflected the consequences of austerity policy-making, which were important concerns at the time. A closer inspection of the Spanish sample evidences that the topics clustered in group 2 (social/political) refer quite anecdotically to: energy, Catalonia and the independence conflict, education, healthcare, consumption, immigration, the government and elections, labor unions, real estate market, etc., usually not providing clear, relevant information and sometimes still linked to economic issues. Only very few topics do refer specifically to social concerns. This is quite the case of France and the UK too. A few Spanish examples in group 2 are (translated):

Topic	**Features**
Catalonia	Barcelona, Catalan, crisis, Catalonia, town hall, transact, yesterday, capital, Generalitat, contribute
Education	investigate, center, director, seat, form, situation, future, lacks, own, Europe
Politics	PSOE, PP, social, politic, vote, election, left, support, Europe, citizens
Labor	union, UGT, general, social, work, crisis, demonstration, CCOO, Méndez, year

In terms of tracking political accountability, the three countries seldom identify people, and these are almost exclusively the most prominent politicians in government or the opposition (e.g., 'Rajoy', 'Zapatero' in Spain; 'Sarkozy', 'Hollande' in France; 'Cameron', 'Darling' in the UK) that are clustered with scarce relevant information, the IMF ('Christine Lagarde') or the European Union (namely, 'Merkel' or 'Barroso'). Finally, only once is 'George Osborne' clustered with 'austerity' in the UK. This topic contains the following features:

George_Osborne, economy, chancellor, said, growth, plan, take, need, policy, *auster*, treasury, deficit

Besides this, 'austerity' is not mentioned at all in any country. Instead, the news articles refer to 'cut', 'reform', 'mesure', 'reduction' or 'adjustment', which are sometimes clustered with 'deficit', 'public deficit', 'public spending', 'unemployment', 'pensions', 'labor' or 'tax'; but in other cases it is not always clear if these are austerity measures or other type of reforms. In any case, 'crisis' is certainly much more visible than any of these features that approximate austerity.

In summary, the contents of the topics diverge in Spain due to certain specificities that in most cases are not, however, related to sensitive policy-making. Once these differences are

dissected, the lexicon is still strongly economic and financially oriented in all three countries. In the UK there is one topic that relates a national politician to austerity. Apart from exceptional cases in the three countries, very seldom do these topics refer to social policies; neither do they evidence political discussions that would have counterbalanced austerity policy-making during the period. In this sense, the mainstream media discourses in France, the UK, and Spain addressed similar issues in similar ways.

4.4.2.2. European topics

At this stage, I aim at identifying European topics sticking to description as far as possible. The 'EUR' numbering reflects the strength of the topic in relation to the amount of European features it contains (minimum two) and the position of these fetures, hence 'EUR-1' is stronger than 'EUR-2', and so forth; it does not represent the strength of the topic over time. I am cautious about the inferences I make because the sample is small. These topics are very scarce in all three media discourses; they represent 10% in France, 7.5% in Spain, and 7.5% in the UK (where only 5% have European features in the first 10 positions of a topic).

France

EUR-1 (*EU*) contains the highest amount of European features, and clearly refers to the European Union, with a focus on the 'European Commission' and one reference to 'Angela Merkel'. It is the only topic in the whole sample (France, Spain, and the UK) that refers to a specific EU official ('Barroso'). It is visible throughout the period, stronger at the beginning of the crisis (2008-2009), then decreases in 2010-2011 and finally regains importance drawing an upward slope as from 2011-2012 onward becoming again the strongest European topic in France in 2014. EUR-2 (*Eurozone/ECB*) relates to the Eurozone, contains institutional ('ECB', 'European Union'), economic and financial features ('pay', 'fund', 'currency'), the state, and 'Germany'; the 'crisis' appears in a low position. It is negligible at the beginning of the crisis, but gains preponderance as from 2009 onward, drawing an ascendant slope that peaks in 2011, then decreases again and finally disappears in 2014. EUR-3 (*Greece*) relates to banks, the

euro, debt and Greece; the 'crisis' is in a slightly higher position. This topic runs between 2010 and 2012 with a very steep peak in 2011. EUR-4 (*member-states/crisis*) refers to the EU member-states: Germany and France in the first place, and the UK and Spain in very low positions; it also evidences 'pay' and a relevant 'crisis'. It is the weakest European topic in France, running upward and downward between 2009 and 2014.

There are no 'austerity' features, not even 'cut', 'retrenchment' or 'reform' in these French European topics. In contrast, the 'crisis' is present in all four, at different degrees: it is most significant in EUR-4 (which contains European member-states), then in EUR-3 (*Greece*), and EUR-2 (*Eurozone/BCE*). In EUR-1, which involves the European Union and its institutions, the 'crisis' appears in the lowest position.

Spain

The general pattern of the Spanish European topics is similar to the French one: one European Union topic with thick traces of German features (EUR-1); another one on 'debt', 'rescue', 'help', 'Greece' that now involves the European Union and the Eurozone too (EUR-2); and a third topic on EBC, credit and monetary policy (EUR-3). Internally, the Spanish topics are interrelated to slightly different features. Germany is very strongly connected to the European Union features in EUR-1 (*EU/Germany*), which also refers to 'Spain' and 'summit'. This is the only European topic in Spain where the 'crisis' is mentioned, although in a rather low position. This topic is already prominent in 2008-2009, then decreases and stays quite stable from 2010 to 2013. EUR-2 (*Greece*) is strongly related to national features, then the 'European Union' and 'Eurozone', 'debt' and 'rescue'. It emerges in 2010, peaks steeply in 2012 to reach the highest frequencies of European topics in Spain; and finally disappears in 2014. EUR-3 (*ECB*) is related to financial features and 'Spanish'; in its lowest positions I find 'mortgage', 'interest rate', 'liquidity', 'risk'. These were meaningful features in the Spanish context of the crisis and, quite surprisingly, this is the weakest European topic throughout the period; it is more visible before the crisis (2007) and then between 2011 and 2013. As in the French case, the Spanish news articles show no trace of 'austerity' related to European features. All the features that are clustered within these European topics allude to the economy and finance.

UK

The British corpus presents three European topics, although one of them has European features in very low positions. European features are most notable in EUR-1 (*Greece/Eurozone*), a topic on the Eurozone crisis that has the highest amount of European references and frequencies along the period. It involves many European features: 'euro', 'Greece', 'Eurozone', 'European Union', in the first place; then 'Spain', 'Europe', 'Portugal' and 'Germany'. In addition it clusters 'crisis', 'fear', 'summit', 'deal', 'debt', 'bailout', etc. It appears in 2010, it gains enormous strength and peaks in 2011-2012, then descends abruptly and disappears, just to gain very low visibility in 2014. EUR-2 (*EU/Scotland*) also has European features among the very first positions: 'European Union' and a generic 'Europe', but refers to 'Scotland', 'independence', 'change', 'nation', 'UK', etc. It is only visible in 2009, 2012 and 2013, always in very low frequencies. EUR-3 (*Eurozone*) is another Eurozone topic but mixed European Union/UK. It refers to the 'UK', 'recession', 'Britain', 'predict' and 'economy' in the first place; then 'forecast', 'hit', 'danger'; and finally mentions the 'Eurozone crisis', 'debt', 'worse', 'grow', etc. There are neither references to 'austerity' nor to 'cuts' in these UK European topics.

Altogether, LDA evidences similar media discourses in France, Spain, and the UK where European topics are very scarce, political actors and austerity are almost absent, and references to cuts or reforms are not clustered together with European features. The particularity of the sample I used is that it already contained a series of key words I expected could be related (economic, debt or financial 'crisis', 'austerity', 'recession', and European references). However, although all the articles in the sample contain European references, these are not strong enough to constitute dominant European topics in each country. In this respect, the data confirms H2 (discursive similarity). On the other hand, the sample does evidence few national particularities. First, the Spanish data presents more political and social issues, which refer mostly to national politics. Second, in the UK, one topic reveals 'austerity'. It is not clear from the features, however, any discussion around these subjects. The sample is too small to draw definitive inferences. In any case, these differences do not prevail over the overarching economically and financially oriented media discourses that use generic lexicon (e.g., 'crisis', 'Europe') with very scarce relevant information in the three countries.

Table 4. European topics by country (2007-2014)

	1 to 5 features	6 to 10 features	11 to 15 features	16 to 20 features
France				
EUR-1	européen, europ, commission_eur, Bruxelles, UE	Angela_Merkel, Barroso, Paris, entr, français	membre, accord, sujet, réunion, commission	crise, commissaire, état, ministre, nom
EUR-2	Eurozone, pay, BCE, UE, état	fond, Allemagne, traité, crise, monnaie	financier, solidarité, banque_centrale, marché, dernier	pourrait, unique, intégrat, accord, internat
EUR-3	banqu, euro, plan, dett, Grèce	état, crise, MDS, européen, français	mesur, public, zone, situat, France	souverain, grec, marché, agenc, hellèn
EUR-4	France, Allemagne, pay, crise, allemand	entr, deux, économiq, rapport, françai	dernier, Espagne, Royaume_Uni, début, travail	europ, compétitivité, gouvern, parti, français
Spain				
EUR-1	UE, europ, Angela_Merkel, pais, Alemania	aleman, cumbr, español, asunto, crisis	trat, dij, Bruselas, cit, union	Berlín, miembr, pas, cancill, agen
EUR-2	pais, España, deuda, rescate, europ	UE, Grecia, ayuda, Eurozona, eur	econom, evit, riesg, ayer, situacion	condicion, Eurogrup, prim, unic, present
EUR-3	BCE, banc, mercado, dinero, credit	español, compr, pued, baj, plaz	mayor, tipo_interés, hipoteca, riesgo, liquidez	cerr, euribor, indic, financier, eur
UK				
EUR-1	euro, Greece, Eurozone, leader, EU	crisi, billion, summit, Spain, deal	fear, Europe, bailout, Greek, debt	Portug, need, Germany, fund, David_Cameron
EUR-2	EU, increas, say, Europe, one	chang, term, propos, countri, Scotland	mani, nation, huge, UK, time	place, independ, commiss, relief, polici
EUR-3	UK, recess, predict, economi, Britain	forecast, now, econom, hit, danger	Eurozone_crisis, debt_crisis, Eurozone, wors, grow	yesterday, concern, affect, September, difficult

4.5. Conclusions

The main goal of this study was to explore and compare cross-country how the French, Spanish and British mainstream newspapers presented the European Union and its member-states in relation to austerity policy-making. The random sample I analyzed contains news articles from France, Spain, and the UK with explicit mentions to the economic crisis, the recession or austerity, and 'Europe' published between 2007 and 2014. First, I analyzed the most recurrent features (individual words or stems) in the corpora of each country. These top-features give a precise idea of the hierarchical composition of the vocabulary that was used in each country. Second, I traced economic and financial features, on the one hand, and all other visible subjects, particularly political and social terms, on the other hand. I intended to assess whether economic policy-making was discussed, challenged or counterbalanced by other subjects that emerged at the time. Third, I assessed whether European features were related to austerity policy-making and clustered in the same topics. The findings reveal similar media discourses across the countries in the sample, with certain particularities that do not affect the dominant discourses. There is no direct relation between the European Union and austerity policies, political actors are not identified, and there are no discussions around economic policy-making.

The first evidence of discursive similarity relates to the use of the lexica. There is an overwhelming amount of economic and financial features in all three countries. Although this is quite natural in a crisis-related sample of these characteristics, the irrelevance of social subjects that might have accompanied harsh economic policy-making raises the question about the (in)existence of public debates in the national mainstream media. 'Job', 'employment', 'enterprise', 'housing', and 'tax' are the scarce differentiated features in the corpora; they occur in low frequencies. Exception made of very few cases, they are clustered with economic or financial terms (e.g., 'economy', 'price', 'value', 'rate', 'mortgage', 'bank', 'market', 'invest', 'deal', 'deficit'). This suggests that these issues were often referenced from economic and financial stances. The vocabulary used to refer to the European Union is either vague (e.g., 'Europe', 'Brussels', or even 'European Union' as an indiscriminate entity) or focused on economic and financial features (e.g., 'BCE', 'Eurozone', 'euro'). The only relevant

institutional actor is the European Commission, the executive branch of the EU. 'Germany' and 'Angela Merkel' dominate the European Union member-states, followed first by 'Greece', then by few other countries among which 'France' stands out, and then critical member-states (e.g., 'Spain, 'Portugal', 'Italy'). Likewise, mentions to 'austerity' are virtually absent from the sample. Instead, these articles refer to 'cuts', 'reductions', 'adjustment', 'reform' and 'measure', but they do not discuss what exactly they are about. There is not much additional information and, most of all, they present a 'crisis' of undetermined significance.

The second evidence concerns the lexical clustering in topics. These manifest strong yet latent relationships among particular features and a hidden thematic structure. Generally speaking, the clustering pattern of European features presents one institutional topic ('European Union', 'European Commission') that is strongly interrelated with German features in the French and Spanish corpora; Eurozone crisis topics that pivot around 'Greece', 'debt', 'rescue'; and one financial topic ('ECB') that is obviously interrelated with financial features, only visible in France and Spain; in addition, the UK presents a European topic related to domestic politics (Scotland). The preponderance of economic and financial features also defines economically and financially oriented topics in other policy domains, namely in France and the UK. The differences in the Spanish sample relate to political tensions with Catalonia, anecdotic references to education, energy or food consumption, and reforms in the health public system and labor sector. However, features in these topics neither explain what these reforms are about, nor discuss political alternatives or social costs.

Although the sample is too small to draw conclusions over time, some remarks may illustrate the findings, and guide further research. In all three countries, European topics are most prominent between 2010 and 2012. When the Eurozone crisis peaked, EU institutional topics decreased and gave place to the financial rescue, expressed in technical terms. Besides, France presents significant and constant European topics throughout the whole period, even before the burst of the economic crisis.

In summary, this study confirms the strong economically oriented discourses found by previous research on mass media outlets across Europe during the economic crisis. In

particular, the findings corroborate the claims-making analyses presented in the previous chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis. In France, Spain, and the UK—three countries with very different contexts—the mainstream media discourses present minor traces of policy domains other than the economy. Social and political subjects did not reframe these texts, therefore excluding debates about the political choices being made. In addition, the lack of clear identifications of European actors prevented the assignment of political responsibilities. The excess of economic jargon does not facilitate citizens' comprehension of complex policy-making. This is a distant image of European policy-making that does not consider discussing in-depth sensitive issues that affect European citizens. From this perspective, it seems a lost opportunity to engage in European debates that might otherwise bring closer wide segments of the population.

This portrait of media discourses opens up the question of what really constituted the economic crisis represented in the mass media. Was it all about debt, bailout, Greece, budgets…? Pressing issues that arouse with austerity cuts, as foreclosures, poverty risk or social exclusion, seem to have happened from nowhere and under nobody's responsibility.

4.6. References

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Appendix

Pre-processing of texts

Pre-processing follows a strict order: tokenising (splitting the text into units, as words); lowercasing; removing punctuation, numbers and special characters; recognising entities (e.g., proper names, 'European Union'); removing stopwords (most common words with no informative value); stemming (converting inflections into their basic stem, e.g., convert 'house', 'houses', 'housing' into 'hous', 'hous', 'hous'); and finally relative pruning (eliminating both extremely frequent and very rare words) (Maier et al. 2018, Welbers et al. 2017, Grimmer and Stewart 2013). These steps reduce considerably the amount of words. Table 3 shows the features (words or stems[61] in the matrix) that remained in the sample after pre-processing the original texts. The final document-feature-matrix[62] (dfm) of each country is used to perform the descriptive statistics and LDA analyses (Table 3).

Table 5. Document-feature-matrix by country (2007-2014)

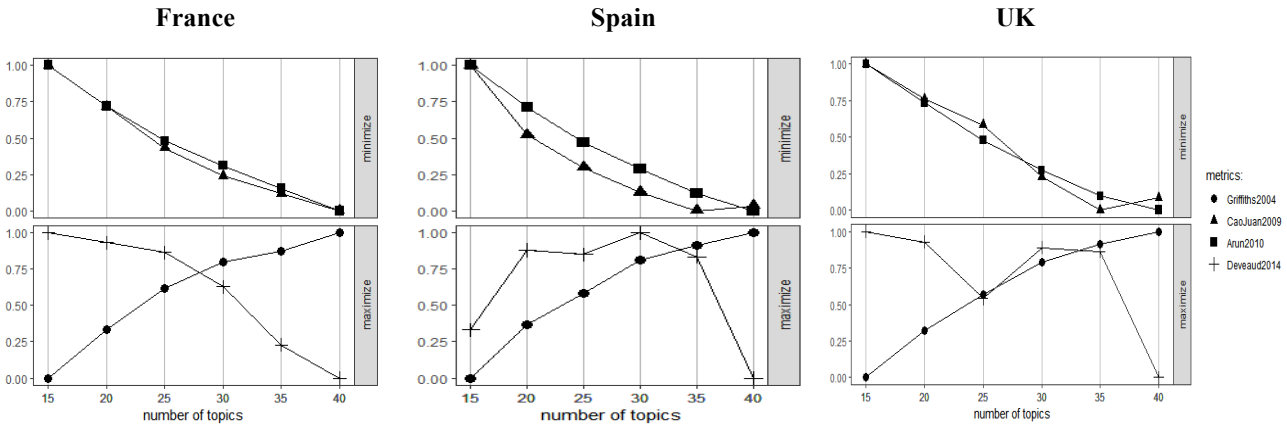
Country	Documents	Features	Sparse [63]
Spain	295	1,778	90.3%
France	321	2,274	91.5%
UK	212	1,133	87.5%

[61] Stems may sometimes be difficult to decipher when they undergo an extreme reduction of letters in order to leave the common morphological root. Lemmatization is another technique that is usually regarded as more refined because it identifies verbal inflections that vary as belonging to the same cluster (e.g., 'stand' and 'stood'). Unfortunately, there are not many single software packages that treat several languages. In this analysis, I used quanteda package for R, which is widely used in empirical research, because it worked in English, French and Spanish, but it only applies stemming.

[62] A document-feature-matrix (dfm) is a table (matrix) that contains rows of documents' names and columns of features (i.e., words or stems). Each cell indicates whether the feature exists in the document, or not (1/0).

[63] Sparsity is the proportion of empty cells (0) in the matrix. Due to pre-processing (namely, removing stopwords and most frequent words, stemming, and entity recognition), sparsity may be high.

Figure 1. Metrics used to define the number of topics



Deveaud 2014 is not informative in these cases while the other measures tend to converge.

Table 6. Top-50 features by country (2007-2014)

	France	freq.	**Spain**	freq.	**UK**	freq.
1	crise	1296	España	642	said	923
2	France	1151	econom	599	bank	698
3	europ	1002	hac	551	year	645
4	économi	647	crisis	540	economi	463
5	banque	522	europ	500	per_cent	403
6	gouvern	479	gobiern	495	Britain	381
7	politique	478	part	437	rate	375
8	entreprise	474	pais	414	UK	367
9	pay	470	millon	405	govern	338
10	faut	469	pued	387	growth	324
11	fair	467	año	373	last	318
12	an	448	español	372	month	309
13	emploi	448	nuev	370	econ	280
14	social	414	public	357	cut	270
15	president	400	polit	355	recess	270
16	san	387	ant	354	market	267
17	disc	373	president	349	also	234
18	entr	373	pas	349	yesterday	233
19	marché	360	ayer	342	rise	230
20	deux	352	social	341	George_Osborne	226
21	euro	351	deb	338	warn	213
22	grand	344	merc	331	time	209
23	croissanc	315	trabaj	325	job	206
24	état	298	eur	309	quarter	205
25	bien	296	sol	306	increas	201
26	financ	296	banc	282	countri	200
27	etat	294	med	272	tax	194
28	Nicolas_Sarkozy	290	ahora	267	figur	190
29	milliard	290	ultim	262	expect	188
30	mesure	288	Mariano_Rajoy	254	now	185
31	contr	284	mayor	253	next	183
32	plan	268	ser	251	send	181
33	travail	263	empresa	249	people	179
34	va	260	sector	241	price	178
35	risqu	255	cambi	238	busi	178
36	reform	255	reform	234	new	175
37	doit	225	cre	230	plan	173
38	dett	216	cas	220	pound	171
39	nouvell	213	dos	216	sinc	167
40	question	208	baj	215	one	164
41	million	203	PP	214	need	160
42	pouvoir	202	segun	210	week	158
43	temp	201	lleg	207	back	155
44	Euro_zone	200	mejor	206	like	154
45	situat	198	mism	201	debt	153
46	fond	196	emple	200	recoveri	152
47	man	190	men	198	crisis	149
48	grou	189	pasa	197	first	148
49	fair	188	distan	195	espe	146
50	nom	186	otro	194	trend	145
		N = 2,274		N = 1,778		N = 1,133

Table 7.1. France: Top-10 features in chronological order from 2007 to 2014

In frequencies. N = 2,274

		2007		2008		2009		2010		2011		2012		2013		2014		TOTAL	
Initial yr.		**Feat.**	**Doc.**	**Feat.**	**Doc.**	**Feat.**	**Doc.**	**Feat.**	**Doc.**	**Feat.**	**Doc.**	**Feat.**	**Doc.**	**Feat.**	**Doc.**	**Feat.**	**Doc.**	**Feat.**	**Doc.**
2007	crise	62	13	200	35	367	59	187	49	185	50	112	33	93	33	90	32	1296	304
	banqu	55	10	80	21					118	26	88	11					341	68
	crédit	39	7															39	7
	marché	37	11	82	25					78	27							197	63
	américain	32	10															32	10
	grand	31	10	56	31													87	41
	entrepris	27	7			132	33							81	20			159	60
	risqu	26	12															26	12
	taux	26	5															26	5
	États_Unis	25	10															25	10
2008	françai			78	29													78	29
	faut			75	27	109	38					59	22					243	87
	France			71	26	141	45	121	38	107	40	80	22	102	25	95	26	717	222
	fair			62	28	100	42					63	22			55	20	280	112
	san			59	27									52	20			111	47
	état			57	21	96	23											153	44
	an							167	63							70	29	237	92
	prim							60	12									60	12
2009	euro							112	29	114	36	76	18			53	15	355	98
	pay					91	31	79	28	84	33			64	17	67	22	385	131
	europ					88	35	76	33	71	27	62	25	56	18			353	138
	social					87	29	97	30					66	17			250	76
	gouvern					85	37	79	33			54	16	77	21	69	17	364	124
2010	emploi							105	27	83	13			66	23	52	13	306	76
2011	dett									78	28							78	28
	zone									68	25							68	25
2012	politiqu											76	22	76	21	66	21	218	64
	croissanc											62	14					62	14
2014	entr															51	20	51	20

Feat.: frequency of the feature.

Doc.: frequency of the documents in which the feature appears.

Table 7.2. Spain: Top-10 features in chronological order from 2007 to 2014

In frequencies. N = 1,778

		2007		2008		2009		2010		2011		2012		2013		2014		TOTAL	
Initial yr.		**Feat.**	**Doc.**	**Feat.**	**Doc.**	**Feat.**	**Doc.**	**Feat.**	**Doc.**	**Feat.**	**Doc.**	**Feat.**	**Doc.**	**Feat.**	**Doc.**	**Feat.**	**Doc.**	**Feat.**	**Doc.**
2007	merc	36	4															36	4
	banc	24	3									83	21					107	24
	viviend	19	2															19	2
	crisis	13	3	72	29	130	50	108	45	74	35	75	42					472	204
	nuev	13	3	42	19					66	27							121	49
	valor	13	4															13	4
	preci	13	4															13	4
	BCE	12	3															12	3
	España	11	3	43	20	159	37	113	38	68	27	102	39	93	22	53	16	642	202
	inmobiliari	11	3															11	3
2008	econom			73	19	86	33	114	39	106	33	98	33	62	19	54	15	593	191
	hac			61	18	87	32	102	44	71	24	101	39	60	18	64	15	546	190
	gobiern			59	21			100	34	80	21	124	31					363	107
	millon			58	15							98	22	51	14			207	51
	ayer			53	23													53	23
	president			47	20					76	24							123	44
	año			42	17					69	21			54	21	42	13	207	72
2009	trabaj					93	25											93	25
	social					90	28	75	26									165	54
	pais					86	32	78	33			73	31					164	65
	español					85	34	74	29									159	63
	part					80	42	94	38			73	31	51	22	40	15	338	148
	public					80	30							53	16	41	7	174	53
2010	merc							68	30									68	30
2011	pas									74	26					36	16	110	42
	pued									67	25					42	13	109	38
2012	euro											88	24					88	24
2013	impuest													57	8			57	8
	polit													51	18	53	14	104	32
	emple													50	15			50	15
2014	ser															35	10	35	10

Feat.: frequency of the feature.

Doc.: frequency of the documents in which the feature appears.

Table 7.3. UK: Top-10 features in chronological order from 2007 to 2014

In frequencies. N = 1,133

		2007		2008		2009		2010		2011		2012		2013		2014		TOTAL	
Initial yr.		**Feat.**	**Doc.**	**Feat.**	**Doc.**	**Feat.**	**Doc.**	**Feat.**	**Doc.**	**Feat.**	**Doc.**	**Feat.**	**Doc.**	**Feat.**	**Doc.**	**Feat.**	**Doc.**	**Feat.**	**Doc.**
2007	market	64	7															64	7
	bank	43	8	158	19	77	16	90	24	125	30	127	21	43	9	35	9	698	136
	said	37	8	140	25	118	30	152	31	180	43	160	34	76	17	60	13	923	201
	rate	31	7	94	15											57	8	125	22
	hous	29	6															29	6
	price	29	6															29	6
	per_cent	25	5	55	15			76	15			85	19	38	7	38	6	317	67
	year	22	7	95	25	105	27	95	25	118	33	100	27	56	15	54	14	645	173
	mortgag	20	5															20	5
	last	15	4	55	20	49	22	37	19									156	65
2008	cut			75	19													75	19
	pound			68	10													68	10
	peopl			51	16													51	16
	month			48	12	55	21	47	16	80	27	62	23					292	99
2009	UK					67	23			112	38			40	16			219	77
	recess					67	26											67	26
	Britain					56	19	62	24	97	34	62	27	32	14			309	118
	govern					55	19	54	21	94	33							203	73
	economi					51	20	58	23	233	66	76	21	73	31	25	11	516	172
2010	tax							68	14									68	14
2011	growth									128	34	57	23	38	11			223	68
	Osborne									99	26							99	26
2012	quarter											50	18			24	7	74	25
	sinc											49	22	27	12			76	34
2013	time													30	8	22	10	52	18
2014	interest															27	9	27	9
	rise															26	8	26	8

Feat.: frequency of the feature.

Doc.: frequency of the documents in which the feature appears.

Table 8.1. France. List of topics (2007-2014)

Nº	Group		Contents
1	0		faut, *crise*, fair, demand, va, vont, bien, situat, entr, comment, exist, solut, mettr, doivent, chose, augment, continu, doit, urgenc
2	1		port, personn, deux, san, commerc, bon, font, rest, premier, an, limit, heur, ouvert, dimanch
3	1		premier_ministre, sein, ministr, financ, ancien, nouvel, va, ailleur, budget, haut, emprunt
4	1	EUR-3	banqu, euro, plan, dett, Grèce, état, *crise*, MDS, européen, françai / mesur, public, zone, situat, France
5	2		gauch, PS, socialist, europ, campagn, candidat, François_Hollande, élection, présidentiel, control
6	1		marché, prix, États_Unis, *crise*, taux, bull, dollar, crédit, devrait, problèm
7	2		politique, président, françai, gouvern, san, *crise*, rien, premier, entr, fort
8	2		salarié, social, syndicat, accord, gouvern, CFDT, France, fair, CGT, contr
9	1		pouvoir, relanc, achat, plan, *mesur*, consomm, investiss, plan_relance, moi, grand
10	1		banqu, bancair, activité, financ, marché, économi, risqu, *réform*, deux, fair
11	1		press, vent, titr, lign, an, concurr, baiss, affair, internet, site
12	2	(*)	retrait, *réform*, an, travail, génération, vie, systèm, compt, âge, local
13	1		euro, million, milliard, France, aid, état, coût, deux, pert, pay
14	2		logement, loi, gouvern, contr, vert, encadr, projet, construct, social, travail
15	1		risqu, mise, politiqu, place, mettr, entrepris, oeuvr, contr, norm, institut
16	1		entrepris, dossier, plan, tribun, actionnair, août, moi, salarié, procédur, septembr
17	1		état, san, argent, temp, fiscal, toujour, droit, financi, place, contr
18	2		prix, agricole, agricultur, produit, agriculteur, premièr, fruit
19	1		dirig, patron, trop, bonus, opinion, ancien, grand, britanniqu, an, conseil
20	2		UMP, ministr, député, Christine_Lagarde, loi, parlamentair, text, majorité, gouvern, Bercy
21	1	(*)	social, impôt, fiscal, *mesur*, gouvern, question, retrait, hauss, augment, tax
22	2		transport, post, défens, entr, industriel, rapport, industri, devrait, blanc, suppress
23	0		*crise*, anné, pari, fin, an, point, dernier, directeur, moi, loin, heur, bien, toujour, total, foi, situat, rest, cabinet, continu, note
24	1		assur, président, cour, fédération, société, an, économi, rapport, françai, septembr
25	2	(*)	emploi, chômage, jeun, *crise*, travail, contrat, *mesur*, pay, embauch, OCD
26	1		social, politique_économique, partage, secteur, ceux, économiqu, mouvement, privé, modèl, pay
27	1		entrepris, action, PME, patrón, MEDEF, caiss, livret, grand, travail, fair
28	1	EUR-2	Eurozone, pay, BCE, UE, état, fond, Allemagne, traité, *crise*, monnaie
29	1	EUR-4	France, Allemagne, pay, *crise*, allemand, entr, deux, économiq, rapport, françai
30	2	EUR-1	européen, europ, commission_eur, Bruxelles, UE, Angela_Merkel, Barroso, Paris, entr, françai
	1	(*)	politiqu, gouvern, croissanc, doit, France, fair, budget, *réform*, faut, objectif, nouvel, dépense_publique, François_Hollande, économique, compétitivité, européen, effort, *réduir*, agir
32	1		état, an, troi, term, pay, économi, croissanc, États_Unis, deux, besoin
33	1		France, entrepris, société, san, fair, princip, mieux, françai, sen, vie
34	1		banqu, *crise*, crédit, américain, financ, marché, économi, risqu, bancair, milliard
35	1		*crise*, mond, état, économiqu, systèm, mondial, grand, capitalism, idé, financièr
36	1		Nicolas_Sarkozy, président, *crise*, chef, discour, état, jour, semain, foi, critiqu
37	1		fond, investiss, term, financ, offr, AMF, exempl, premier, gestión, long
38	1	(*)	déficit, dett, PIB, *crise*, déficit_public, budgétair, compte, *réduction*, faut, croissanc, politiqu, point, finances_publiques, *réduir*, public, gouvern, baiss
39	1		usin, group, product, site, automóvil, Renault, constructeur, salarié, marché, direct
40	1		croissanc, France, entrepris, trimestr, niveau, économict, an, premier, hauss, repris

(*) Cuts, reforms, measures, etc. that might be related to austerity. 1 economic/financial 2 social/political 0 mixed issues/unclassifiable

Table 8.2. Spain. List of topics (2007-2014)

Nº	Group		Contents
1	2		Mariano_Rajoy, president, Zapatero, gobiern, ayer, PP, presidente_gobierno, ejecut, ministr, España
2	0		aunqu, moment, año, cuatr, tiemp, buen, hech, qued, tres, dar
3	1		impuest, fiscal, sub, tip, rent, recaud, ingres, IRPF, public, baj
4	2		verd, contrari, trabaj, vam, negoci, ahor, emple, dic, person, pregunt
5	2		cambi, aument, internacional, ultim, activ, efect, polit, emision, ahor, increment, energi, carbon
6	1		merc, bols, EEUU, caid, valor, preci, ultim, especul, seman, inversion
7	0		madr, eur, sal, ultim, sol, dos, cost, dia, baj, mayor
8	2	(*)	*reduc*, afect, servici, cad, ahorr, pued, *recort*, activ, sanid, ejemplo, direccion, medic, hospital, asegur, sanitari, efect
9	0		España, pais, español, europ, *crisis*, EEUU, explic, period, comun, present, amenaz, proxim, mundial, encuentr
10	2		Barcelona, catalán, *crisis*, Catalunya, ayunt, oper, ayer, capital, Generalitat, aport
11	2		investig, centr, direct, plaz, form, situacion, futur, falt, propi, europ
12	2		trabaj, program, music, formacion, director, pais, proyect, año, escuel, famili
13	2	EUR-1	Unión_Europea, europ, Angela_Merkel, pais, Alemania, aleman, cumbr, español, asunto, *crisis*
14	1	(*)	gobiern, econom, plan, mimistr, med, nuev, aprob, *reform*, prim, vicepresident, ejecut, deficit
15	1	(*)	public, gast, deficit, deb, presupuest, objet, inversion, PIB, *reduc*, deud, result, estabil, ingres
16	1		empres, president, compr, negoci, dej, ahor, accion, sector, grand, lleg
17	1	(*)	*recort*, med, men, cuent, ahor, par, dos, dij, debate, mes, *reduc*, *ajuste*, apoy, anunc, cambi
18	2	(*)	trabaj, emple, *reform*, España, pais, par, social, desp, Unión_Europea, desemple, *reforma_laboral*
19	2		comun, autonom, administr, part, junt, puert, regional, proyect, president, Andalucía
20	2		aliment, product, fech, consum, inform, pued, men, expert, limit, tip
21	1		hac, futur, mejor, confianz, gener, permit, ofrec, super, colect, discurs, *crisis_económica*
22	2		part, catalan, CIU, social, PP, independent, candidat, Cataluny, debat, dej
23	1		millon, eur, pag, año, según, ayud, anunci, recib, credit, pas
24	2		gobier, deb, acuerd, part, consider, pued, hac, lleg, pact, nacional, cambi, reforma, propuest, moment, señal
25	1	EUR-2	pais, España, deuda, rescate, europ, Unión_Europea, Grecia, ayuda, Eurozona, eur
26	1	(*)	econom, crecimient, España, FMI, *crisis*, prevision, *ajuste*, economía_española, trimestr, PIB
27	2		social, person, public, *crisis*, España, ayud, servici, situacion, lleg, inmigr
28	1	EUR-3	BCE, banc, mercado, dinero, credit, español, compr, pued, baj, plaz
29	2		PSOE, PP, social, polit, vot, eleccion, izquierd, apoy, europ, ciudadan
30	0		hac, pued, cre, ser, *crisis*, pas, sol, habl, mayor, va
31	2		sindicat, UGT, general, social, trabaj, *crisis*, manifest, CCOO, Méndez, año
32	1		industri, desarroll, coch, infraestructur, tecnolog, moment, vehicul, actual, movil
33	2		estudi, univers, sistem, nuev, medi, alumn, universitari, vid, ahor, educ
34	1		banc, entidad, caj, capital, Banco_de_España, activ, ayer, entid, bancari, perd
35	2		polit, usted, pod, derech, bas, part, econom, ley, decid, socied, constitu, democraci, trabaj
36	1		nuev, pag, empres, tas, año, ley, sector, gobiern, public, cambi
37	1		econom, polit, asegur, europ, añad, mejor, jos, Guindos, Galicia, galleg
38	1		marc, merc, grup, product, pes, director, vent, vari, caden, negoci
39	1		año, preci, sub, pas, mes, aument, ultim, caid, baj, rebaj, inflacion
40	2		años, viviend, sector, inmobiliari, construccion, dec, nuev, produc, primer, suel, *recesion*

(*) Cuts, reforms, measures, etc. that might be related to austerity. 1 economic/financial 2 social/political 0 mixed issues/unclassifiable

Table 8.3. UK. List of topics (2007-2014)

Nº	Group		Contents
1	1	AUSTER.	George_Osborne, economi, chancellor, said, growth, plan, econom, take, need, polici, *auster*, treasury, deficit
2	1	EUR-3	UK, *recess*, predict, economi, Britain, forecast, now, econom, hit, danger, *Eurozone_crisis*, *debt_crisis*, Eurozone
3	1		govern, help, scheme, car, Alistair_Darling, insur, firm, offer, busi, get
4	2	(*)	unemploy, peopl, rise, job, work, number, million, *cut*, employ, year, time, young
5	1		tax, come, economi, make, just, made, firm, support, allow, social
6	1		financi, one, way, us, need, review, system, *crisis*, regul, interest
7	1		market, yesterday, global, us, point, also, fall, said, stock, FTSE
8	1		said, compani, busi, intern, well, challeng, much, new, back, impact
9	1		growth, year, forecast, recoveri, UK, economi, export, next, continu, expect
10	1		two, increas, cap, averag, euro, staff, show, high, communiti, ad, earn, pay, private_sector
11	1		rate, credit, warn, UK, agenc, debt, downgrad, yesterday, grow, one
12	0		say, now, also, peopl, think, may, go, like, work, way, director, mean, becom, great, just, account, less, thing, stay, whether
13	2		hous, price, market, rise, properti, home, time, fall, mortgag, level
14	1		bank, said, England, economi, inflat, king, governor, time, eas, MPC
15	1		per_cent, trade, rise, annual, good, sinc, share, still, fallen, may, nation, account
16	2		said, immigr, Britain, year, last, time, British, figur, like, popul, country, increas
17	1		quarter, growth, economi, figur, third, GDP, show, recess, second, output, data, economist
18	2		tori, said, labour, David_Cameron, leader, brown, econom, LibDem, parti, elect
19	1		sale, retail, spend, price, like, year, recent, consum, custom, profit
20	1		tax, year, budget, pay, increas, rise, borrow, George_Osborne, said, levi
21	1		sector, manufactur, servic, UK, survey, report, expect, construct, said, activ
22	2		job, worker, British, said, union, employ, next, yesterday, axe, major
23	1		busi, invest, new, job, help, econom, need, welcom, energi
24	1		billion, million, make, year, total, fear, first, share, boost
25	1		bank, mortgag, loan, lend, cash, credit, borrow, point, lender, new
26	0		warn, last, *crisis*, go, said, night, problem, seen, ad, market, back, face, situat, came, like, turmoil, soar, get, one, plung
27	1		bank, RBS, taxpay, loss, profit, share, Lloyd, chief, bonus, busi
28	1		rate, interest, increas, said, low, sinc, household, next, may, one
29	1		month, said, year, three, last, figur, two, record, rose, fell, juli, economist, sterling
30	1		Britain, countri, said, world, govern, econom, put, follow, Germany, *financial_crisis*
31	1		IMF, Britain, said, risk, warn, Christine_Lagarde, report, plan, week, told
32	1	EUR-1	euro, Greece, Eurozone, leader, EU, crisi, billion, summit, Spain, deal, fear, Europe, bailout, Greek, debt, Portug, need, Germany, fund, David_Cameron
33	2		govern, minist, econom, public, say, ad, tri, fail, new, admit, make, get, take, already, build, former, attack, spokesman, come, million
34	1		bank, financi, fund, banker, capit, London, industri, system, top, credit_crunch
35	1	(*)	govern, spend, deficit, fiscal, budget, *measur*, *reduct*, labour, target, plan
36	1		pound, year, peopl, *cut*, get, said, go, pension, famili, chancellor, cost, money
37	0		*cut*, week, last, month, year, first, six, citi, announc, confid, *reduce*, world, decis, earli, sharply, base, *reduct*, big, made
38	1		cost, price, inflat, year, figur, month, mani, wage, food, remain
39	2	EUR-2	EU, increas, say, Europe, one, chang, term, propos, countri, Scotland, mani, nation, huge, UK, time, place, independ, commiss, relief, polici
40	1		*recess*, year, economi, level, recoveri, also, claim, report, prospect, low, Britain, dollar

(*) Cuts, reforms, measures, etc. that might be related to austerity. 1 economic/financial 2 social/political 0 mixed issues/unclassifiable

Chapter 5

Conclusions

5.1. Relevance, limitations, and further research

To conclude, I will summarize the main findings and the relevance of this investigation, delineate its limitations, and propose further lines of research.

The analysis of mainstream political information in the national environments is particularly relevant in the current context of European politics, when contestation of, polarization around, and disengagement from the European project abound. Political information becomes crucial in times of crisis. The European Union is a distant policy-maker that affects every sphere of citizens' lives. Notwithstanding, it remains highly unknown. Economic policy-making is complex and involves taking decisions that impact upon key social areas. This became evident in the way the European Union responded to the last economic crisis. Although individual studies have analyzed how particular media outlets covered news about the economic crisis in specific countries and at certain points in time, we do not yet have—as far as I know—an exhaustive analysis of this kind. The information environment approach is novel and promising. We need further empirical research that may relate the findings to normative standards and propose concrete lines of action to reduce the information deficit and improve citizens' participation in the European Union.

The aim of this thesis was to provide an in-depth record of the availability of key political information in the national public spheres related to the European Union and its sensitive policy-making during the economic crisis (2008-2014). I argued that the economic crisis posed an additional threat to the project of European integration, calling further into question the legitimacy of the European Union (Smismans 2013, Scharpf 2012, 2014, Jones 2009). In

particular, I considered three points: (1) legitimacy is fundamental to the project of European integration; input legitimacy, in particular, is increasingly important (Scharpf 2012, Schmidt 2010); (2) the accountability of policy-making, and the participation of civil society in the process of decision-making are both central to legitimacy (Meyer 1999); and (3) legitimacy is greatly built through discursive interactions in the public sphere (Schmidt 2015, Koopmans 2004, Statham and Trenz 2015, Eriksen 2005). I limited my research to identifying the most salient, pertinent political information that is relevant for European citizens in order to legitimate the European Union.

In the first chapter of this doctoral thesis, I presented three theoretical assumptions that, altogether, highlighted the relevance of undertaking a comparative analysis of national information environments within the European Union during the last economic crisis. First, the information provided by the most influential national newspapers contributes to build up a general political climate, which is expected to affect the process of opinion formation regardless of citizens' direct exposure to particular news coverage (Vliegenthart et al. 2008). Second, the information that identifies the interactions among the principal actors, and the main issues they discuss in the national public sphere is essential to tracking political responsibilities in the multilevel polity (Meyer 1999). Third, the economic crisis represented an opportunity to bridge the information gap between the European Union and its citizens. Moreover, the crisis might have contributed to legitimate the project of European integration by including European citizens and their concerns in the discursive interactions that took place in the national public spheres (Schmidt 2015). These theoretical assumptions guided my research. The three main empirical chapters of this doctoral thesis (chapters 2, 3 and 4) provide a descriptive diagnosis that reveals who the most visible political actors were and which issues they advanced in a sample of selected national public spheres during extremely difficult times. These are dominant discourses that referred directly to the crisis, recession, austerity, and the European Union in the national public spheres. I explored them in-depth from supplementary perspectives throughout the chapters of this thesis.

The second chapter inquired whether the economic crisis enhanced the visibility of the European Union, its member states, and European issues in the national public spheres. I

revisited the degree of visibility that they benefited in the mainstream national press of nine selected European countries vis-à-vis their national counterparts. Overall, European visibility was scarce over the period, and economic issues were unchallenged, as expected. Discursive exchanges took place within the same polity level (European/European or national/national), which evidences a clustered communication pattern. Differences across countries regarding the amounts of European visibility reflected the weight that Europe had in national politics at the time. European visibility was neither linked to the impact of the economic crisis nor to the effects of austerity policy-making or supranational interferences in national decision-making (e.g., in Italy or Spain). Rather, visibility followed the conflicts that occurred at the time (e.g., Germany and Greece), confirmed the extremely limited visibility of European politics in certain contexts (e.g., the UK), and the difficulties in co-leading the European Union (particularly for France). Very clearly, European issues benefitted of an increasing visibility in Germany since the economic crisis; they exceeded national issues as from 2011 onward. This is exceptional in the sample. It echoes the leading role played by Germany in European policy-making during the period as well as the ever-increasing relevance that European politics has for German national politics. Under this light, the economic crisis appears as a German opportunity.

The third chapter asked whether the economic crisis opened up a window of opportunity for political and social actors that have limited access to policy-making and the media, in particular civil society. Using the same dataset and sample of nine selected European countries, I traced the typology of actors in three main groups: core political actors (state and political parties); interest groups with privileged access to policy-making and the media (market and finance, companies, labor, opinion leaders); and civil society with limited access to policy-making and the media. Similarly, I defined the typology of the issues that were discussed at the time: economic and financial, on the one hand; political and social, on the other. Civil society was virtually missing from these discursive exchanges in all nine public spheres. It neither emitted claims, nor received direct attention from the other collective actors. However, civil society's interests were significantly affected by the claims of all the actors in every country. In fact, they were the most affected group in Spain and Poland; and strongly affected in Greece, Sweden, and the UK. This is not surprising. The claims concerned a mass

of unspecified 'citizens' who undoubtedly suffered the effects of economic policy-making at the time (e.g., increased taxes, retrenchment of the welfare system, labor market and pension reforms). This is evidenced by the predominant discussion of economic and financial issues that outpaced political and social issues in all nine countries. Among these, two countries sporadically diverged from the dominant pattern. Political and social issues predominated in Italy during 2010—the year preceding the replacement of an elected president by a technocrat with the mandate of implementing economic and social reforms—and in Spain during 2011—the first year of a new presidential mandate that resulted from early elections; also the year preceding the first support package for recapitalization of the Spanish bank system. These are the only evidences of certain struggles that state actors might have had in order to cope with the political and social consequences of the European handling of the crisis. That is all. Overall, we may infer from the data that the dominant political actors (the state and companies) did neither consider the 'side effects' (i.e., social costs) nor the political responsibilities associated to the management of the economic crisis, the recession and the austerity policies that deeply affected the lives of European citizens at the time.

The fourth chapter questions whether the information provided in news articles facilitated tracking political responsibilities in the multilevel polity and understanding complex policy-making. The results confirm the main findings revealed in the preceding chapters. First, an excessive, predominantly technical jargon of economic references with very limited traces of social or political concerns. Second, the lack of identification of political actors at any political level. Third, no associations between the European Union and austerity policy-making. Fourth, the absence of civil society in these public debates.

I assessed these findings using Meyer's (1999: 622) three dimensions of the political process that should be made public in order "to facilitate public participation and accountability":

1. The issues dimension: Overwhelming preponderance of macroeconomic, banks and finance, and business issues; use of technical language without making explicit what is about to be decided. Hence, we lack pertinent information that is a prerequisite for

informed public debate and the possibility of feedback into the decision-making process.

2. The procedural dimension: No information about the stage of the process, the means, actors and access points to influence the outcome. Hence, politics is not made visible and accessible to the public.
3. The accountability dimension: No information on who is responsible for the decisions being taken or the implementation of a policy. Hence, there is no personal accountability vis-à-vis the public.

I also contrasted the results with the normative conditions of deliberative democracy. In this respect, two points need clarification. First, deliberative democracy is just one model of democracy. There are other models where these findings might match the theoretical expectations held regarding the role of the media and citizens' participation in the political process—particularly, representative democracy (Ferree et al. 2002), pluralism or elitism (Althaus 2012), procedural or competitive democracy (Strömbäck 2005). Overall, these models also recognize the value of deliberation, but they do not consider it *the* central aspect of democracy. In other words, all democracies present a deliberative component; deliberative democracy is intended to supplement these other models. In this regard, paying attention to, and promoting, the deliberation of critical policy-making within the European Union may still be considered beneficial to democracy from other theoretical perspectives. However, I have argued that *deliberation is fundamental in order to legitimate the project of European integration*. The legitimacy problem of the European Union and of the project of European integration itself might be partially overcome if European citizens participate in deliberations on sensitive policy-making in the national public spheres. Or, the other way round, that inclusive, public deliberation in an arena where civil society is linked to the state and other relevant political actors (i.e., the national public sphere) might contribute to shorten the gap between European citizens and their representatives, inasmuch broader segments of the populations participate in European decision-making (Eriksen 2005, Meyer 1999). Deliberative democracy is the theoretical model that best matches this analysis of the public sphere. It entails perceptions of legitimacy of decision-making; furthermore, even beyond perceptions, the process in itself is inherently legitimizing (Mutz 2008).

Second, deliberative democracy is a broad concept that is not without ambiguities with regard to what exactly qualifies as deliberation. Deliberation is assumed in theory to provide benefits for the democratic process; empirically, it becomes difficult to circumscribe the necessary conditions and measure the outcomes (Mutz 2008, Delli Carpini et al. 2004). Besides, the model sets very high normative standards for citizens and the media (Strömbäck 2005). The ideal conditions where discursive deliberation takes place may never exist in the real world. Therefore, the normative expectations might be almost impossible to achieve. We need realistic demands if we want to improve somehow (Zaller 2003). In any case, we may advance in the direction proposed by the normative standards of deliberative democracy if we focus on certain aspects of deliberation that are of interest to our research, thus abandoning the pretension of achieving at once all the goals theoretically proposed by deliberative democracy (Mutz 2008). In this sense, deliberative processes are not a failure even if they do not necessarily achieve the full normative model (Hutton Ferris 2019).

I have centered my analysis of the national information environments on the kinds of actors that participated in discursive interactions (who) and the contents provided in the claims and in the whole news articles (what). As aforementioned in the first chapter of this thesis, actors and issues are central to legitimate the European Union and its policy-making in the public sphere. They are also fundamental to deliberative democracy. Economic policy-making during the crisis might well be described as "an aspect of social life that has become problematized" (Dahlberg 2004: 7), which demands ample participation in the deliberative process. My normative assessment of the national information environments is based on the proposals that Ferree et al. (2002), Dahlberg (2004) and Bennett et al. (2004) define for these two elements in particular. From this viewpoint, the process of deliberation was neither inclusive nor deliberative in the national mainstream media I have analyzed.

1. Who (identification of the actors; access, participation, recognition; formal inclusion and discursive equality; popular inclusion): Alternate dominance of core political actors (state and political parties) and interest groups with access to policy-making and the media. Civil society has minimal, insignificant representation. Hence, "all those affected by the claims under consideration […] that are equally entitled and enabled to

participate in deliberation" (Dahlberg 2004:7) and *must* be addressed, whether present or not, are invisible. They were excluded from these discursive interactions.

2. What (content of the process; all relevant information is put forward honestly; reasoned, understandable arguments; revision and critical examination that recognizes and incorporates the arguments of others and justifies one's own; better ideas should prevail; transcend narrow self-interest; consensus-seeking): Overwhelming preponderance of macroeconomic, banks and finance, and business issues. Very limited social and political issues. Use of technical economic and financial language. Alternative policies were not presented. The consequences of austerity policy-making were not deliberated. The process of policy-making was not explained.

In summary, the empirical evidence presented in this thesis reveals a lost opportunity for the European Union to bridge the information gap with its citizens, and to engage them in discussing the project of European integration. Furthermore, the political information provided by these very influential national newspapers contributed to build up a general information environment where, we may assume, mis- or uninformed citizens were unable to allocate political responsibilities within the multilevel polity *by themselves* with certain degree of precision—simply because the information they needed was not there. Thus, in the immediate term, European citizens seem to have been left with few options at hand. They might have formed political opinions without any pertinent first-hand information; rely on shortcuts (e.g., from political parties, experts, opinion leaders, other forms of alternative communications) and therefore follow potentially distorted or biased messages they could not filter through argumentation; or disengage from the project of European integration. From the viewpoint of legitimacy within the current, uneasy European political context, it seems at least dangerous to have overlooked citizens' participation and concerns in times when the economic, political and social issues at stake were extremely critical. Sooner or later, somehow or other, citizens provide feedback into the political system.

The shortcomings that my research reveals in the national information environments regarding the process of European policy-making—namely, it lacks essential political information and omits the participation of citizens—should not be exclusively attributed to 'the media's fault'.

This is not to say that the media does not have its considerable share of social responsibility. But pointing to its weaknesses without providing clues that might facilitate a positive change will not contribute to alter the political information deficit within the European Union; nor will the media include citizens *per se*. I do not intend to provide definite answers to such a complex problem, which I believe can only arise from those directly involved, i.e., the institutions (media included) and citizens themselves. However, I have stressed throughout this thesis the systemic, interconnected character of the national public sphere and society at large that deliberative democracy explains. At first sight, what we (do not) find in the media could be supplied, in part, by political institutional actors themselves (Hutton Ferris 2019, Nabatchi 2010). In this case, the European Union and national institutions, which might enjoy higher credibility in providing political information to their national publics within certain contexts that are not pro-European Union (Hobolt et al. 2013). In the end, developing improved public spheres in which European citizens exchange well-informed arguments is in the interest of the European project. As I have emphasized, both supplying pertinent information and promoting citizens' participation in the process of policy-making are necessary in order to bridge the democratic deficit gap and build the much-needed political legitimacy. Moreover, if we borrow insights from the literatures on European politicization, voting behavior, and Euroscepticism we should consent that European issues are already at the core of the political conflicts in our societies. They are here to stay (Hooghe and Marks 2009, Schmidt 2010, De Wilde and Zürn 2012, Statham and Trenz 2015, Hobolt and de Vries 2016b, Kriesi 2012, Kriesi and Grande 2014). Ignoring the problems that derive from omitting key political information that citizens need to form their opinions, and continuing to transfer decision-making power to the supranational polity without incorporating the perspectives of European citizens can only alienate them from the project of European integration and make the European Union lose further touch (de Vries 2018, Scharpf 2012). The void will continue to be filled by political opportunists that exacerbate the gap intending to perpetuate a feedback loop of dissatisfaction, disengagement, and political ignorance.

The real concern should therefore be how to induce a gradual positive change that redounds in the benefit of European integration, in the benefit of its citizens (Schmidt 2015, Hobolt and de Vries 2016a). This may only be accomplished acting from a diversity of institutions and public

spaces. What needs to be clear from the start is that public communication "needs to be treated as an integral part of policy-making and implementation itself" (Meyer 1999: 623). The supply of pertinent political information that bridges policy-makers and European citizens is central to respond to the public criticism that inevitably results from sensitive policy-making and from the transfer of policy competences to the supranational level. Yet, in order to avoid negative spillover effects citizens must be effectively incorporated into the policy-making process too. Awareness is the first step toward change, but action should follow to make it effective. Academic research may offer insights and guide concrete lines of action posed by multiple institutional and social actors. Proposals should be feasible within each institutional context. In principle, if we analyze the process of decision-making of a specific policy applying the deliberative perspective to build legitimacy through inclusive, argumentative, discursive interactions in the national public spheres, we should be able to produce precise recommendations for the media, European institutions, civil society organizations, and European citizens at large. Concrete recommendations may only stem from the results provided by further, targeted research, which could either supplement the data I present, or build new projects capitalizing the exploration I conducted and the methodology I propose. In order to contribute to society at large, further research should be framed within very specific, clear objectives; it should define and guide the necessary phases toward attaining those goals.

So far, my findings contribute to advance academic research in several different ways. They provide solid foundations to build up research projects that relate the national information environments to the legitimacy of the European Union. A step forward, identifying who participated and what they discussed in the mainstream media during the economic crisis may interest several branches of political science and political communication research. This analysis is descriptive, and covers a set of European countries over a limited time span. Complementary data and facts (e.g., critical political, social, and economic stances during the crisis) would contribute to draw significant inferences. Longer national trends would contextualize the findings within the history of European integration. This research does not address causal mechanisms. The effects that the overarching national political information might have upon citizens' political attitudes and behaviors still need consideration. The most promising results would stem from an approach that combined descriptive and causal analyses

at the aggregate and individual levels. The normative implications that derive from my research could be examined against other models of democracy too.

Further research could extend the analysis of national information environments through the migration crisis, Brexit, or an even longer time span that considered the evolution over time of Eurosceptic attitudes, European voting behavior, citizens' political participation, and the politicization of the European Union in different countries, to name just a few possibilities. Most important, this kind of research should inquire whether there are cumulative effects spilling over from one crisis to the next one, and from one member-state to another. Research on citizens' political attitudes and behaviors toward the European Union could take advantage of the data I present incorporating the political information environment as an independent variable at the aggregate level. Similarly, analyses of public opinion and public policy could use the data when comparing trends of policy responsiveness, policy feedback, and policy mood across European countries over time.

In political communication research, a thorough timing of critical events across the two main avenues of information supply (mainstream media and the internet, e.g., social networks or alternative media) would advance our understanding of how information flows within the media system, how it relates to political events, under which conditions certain media take the lead, and the impact that different media have in boosting a political event, opening the path to political legitimacy. This is a new, promising line of research that needs investigation. Communicative interactions and media systems are in constant change. This should be acknowledged by further research. Another approach could supplement data on the national information environments with data from discursive interactions in other public spaces (e.g., the Internet, civic associations, institutional settings). Gaining insight into multiple discursive interactions might reveal the participation of informed civil society in other instances of the policy-making process. This fact would not alter the critical absence of civil society and key political information in the influential mainstream media, which constitutes the core of the national information environment. However, it might reframe the weight we grant to different instances of political deliberation. This line of research could investigate the causal effects of the information environment upon the process of political opinion formation. Experimental

research could analyze the interactions between the information environment, interpersonal discussions, and personal experience. Similarly, it could study the interactions of different instances of discursive deliberation (e.g., controlled face-to-face or Internet groups) with particular information environments, and its effects on citizens' accuracy in assessing the supranational policy-making process, and their evaluations of the European Union. These experiments could greatly contribute to disentangle the role of first-hand political information vis-à-vis the use of shortcuts and cues.

My study is also in line with the media analyses that are part of the research about the politicization of the European Union. The research design and findings I present may be very useful to this research as they offer an exhaustive yet targeted approach to analyzing the salience of core political actors and subjects, and their expansion (visibility gains), in the mainstream media of a country during a given period.

Finally, particularly important is the relationship between normative discursive deliberation and empirical analyses of political communication with regard to the legitimacy of the European Union. Media analyses are very seldom framed within normative theory (Ferree et al. 2002, Strömbäck 2005). Consequently, their empirical results compose isolated pictures of particular moments of European integration. Empirical studies should first decide which aspects of normative deliberation are of interest to their research (Mutz 2008). Comparative analyses of different European public spheres should also be as specific as possible and assess particular issues or concrete policies. Then, framing research within a guiding theory of democratic deliberation, it would gain consistency, point at precise questions about the benefits and pitfalls of deliberation for European legitimacy, and greatly facilitate comparisons across studies.

5.2. References

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