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The lack of a European public sphere in the debate on the European sovereign debt crisis

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The lack of a European public sphere in the debate on the European sovereign debt crisis

Kim Otto & Andreas Köhler

Summary:

The present article examines the coverage of the European actors in the Greek national debt crisis in the German daily newspapers “Die Welt”, “Bild”, “Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung”, “Süddeutsche Zeitung” and “Die Tageszeitung”, as well as on the online platform “Spiegel Online”. The aim is to capture the extent to which the national German media are Europeanized within the context of coverage of the Greek national debt crisis. The study’s results show that it is not really possible to speak of a Europeanized national public sphere in Germany as far as the coverage of the Greek national debt crisis is concerned. In the German media, the European debate was portrayed as a bi-national conflict between the German and Greek governments.

1. Introduction

Not only banks have been toppled since the onset of the financial crisis; the European sovereign debt crisis has caused entire states to totter. This period of upheaval has led to great insecurity in Europe. The population is losing its trust in the actors of the economic system – especially those of the financial industry – and the actors of the political system. Citizens feel poorly informed, and their distrust is growing (Mast 2012: 16ff.). In times of global markets and increasingly complex economic systems, competent economic journalism – especially the coverage of economic-political issues – is becoming ever more important.

The abovementioned complexity has been increased by the European sovereign debt crisis. Many governments and institutions are involved in finding solutions to the existing problems. Given that more and more political decisions are being taken at a European level and European developments are highly relevant, a public sphere needs to be created at this level. A European public sphere and a European discourse will increase the public’s understanding of European decisions, while by contrast the lack of a European public sphere will create distrust among the population and diminish the legitimation of European decisions, institutions and actors (cf. Gerhards 2002). The European population’s trust in states, governments and European institutions is needed particularly when states are liable for one another with large amounts of tax money.

Against this backdrop, the question arises of whether public discourse on the Greek national debt crisis lives up to these standards of Europeanization in economic-political journalism. To investigate this question, the present research project examines the extent to which the German media’s coverage of the Tsipras government’s reform politics during the first half of 2015 can be seen as Europeanized, using the example of in the German daily newspapers “Die Welt”, “Bild”, “Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung”, “Süddeutsche Zeitung” and “Die Tageszeitung”, as well as the online platform “Spiegel Online”. The intensity of coverage, the events, actors and evaluations are captured through quantitative content analysis of the articles on the Greek national debt crisis. The project aims to make qualified statements on the European actors mentioned and thus on the Europeanization of the public sphere created.

2. The Greek national debt crisis of 2015

On 25 January 2015, Greece elected a new parliament and a new government. The election was won by left-wing Syriza, headed by party leader Alexis Tsipras. Tsipras wanted to break with the politics of previous governments. He announced that he would reduce the international money lenders' budget cuts, end the austerity policy, stop privatisation and renegotiate the credit agreements (Kotius 2015: 82). In a keynote speech equivalent to an election manifesto, Tsipras also announced the adoption of a two-billion-Euro social programme, the raising of the minimum wage that had been lowered at the urging of the Troika (EU, ECB, IMF), a five-billion-Euro package to stimulate the Greek economy (to be funded with EU money), the reversal of cuts to pensions and civil servant salaries, and the writing off of the majority of Greek debt (to be achieved in negotiations with the money lenders). However, the government in Athens was forced to agree to budget cuts and reforms as well as to further cooperation with the European Union (EU), the European Central Bank (ECB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in order to be granted the further loans already planned in the second Greece rescue package at the end of February 2015. On 24 February, the Greek government presented the President of the Eurogroup with a list of reforms, following which the Eurogroup agreed to the payment of further loans up until the end of June. Among other things, the Greek government promised to fight tax evasion, to undertake privatisation, to modernise its financial administration and to eradicate tax privileges. Until then, the Greek government had to persuade the governments of the EU States and the IMF to pay Greece the last instalment of the second rescue package. Without the second rescue package, Greece would have been unable to cover the loan repayments due to international money lenders, in particular the IMF: on 1 May 2015, 200 million EUR were due for payment to the IMF, and 770 million EUR were due on 12 May 2015. Between 12 June and 20 July 2015, Greece had to repay 13 billion EUR to its creditors. Accordingly, during the first six months of 2015 the possibility of Greece becoming insolvent arose several times, and the consequences of this, such as the country leaving the Euro – the so-called Grexit –, were discussed. Expectations of the negotiations between the Greek government, the EU Commission, the ECB, the Eurogroup and the IMF were correspondingly high.

As the highest lender within the Eurogroup, Germany played a special role in the conflict with Greece. In the second bailout package, 142.7 billion EUR were paid to Greece. Of these, 11.8 billion came from the IMF, the remaining 130.9 billion from the European bailout fund. As Greece, Ireland and Portugal were unable to act as guarantors, the German share rose to around 29 percent – corresponding to almost 38 billion EUR in the second Greek bailout package (German Federal Ministry of Finance 2015).

In the negotiations, the German government took a hard line, demanding that national debt be reduced through cuts, privatisation and tax increases. At times, Wolfgang Schäuble, the German Minister of Finance, even argued in favour of a temporary exit from the Euro. The majority of European States in the Council of Ministers followed the political line taken by the German government, which focused on austerity policy to resolve the sovereign debt crisis. Both the EU Commission and the French government definitely wanted to keep Greece in the Euro and were thus ready to make greater concessions. The IMF's stance towards the Greek government was tough, demanding extensive structural reforms as the basis for further loans.

3. State of research

The German media's coverage of the national debt crisis in Greece and the efforts of the European States and European and international institutions to find a solution to this crisis provide a suitable context for examining the Europeanization of the media's public sphere. In concrete terms, we can identify how national mass media depicted European actors in their coverage and thus represented a Europeanized national public sphere.

Journalism and Communications Studies have only been engaging with the question of a European public sphere and its systematization for around twenty years. Accordingly, this is a very new field of research (cf. Risse 2002).

There are a few scientific studies that write from varying points of view about the media coverage of the most recent financial and debt crises in the German public sphere. Most surveys related to the 2010 Euro crisis or the financial crisis of the preceding years (cf. Schlosser 2013; Schranz/Eisenegger 2012; Seifert/Fähnrich 2012). The Europeanization of the coverage was only seldom the main focus of the study.

One study on the European sovereign debt crisis deals with aspects of the Europeanization of the public sphere. Fähnrich and Seifert (2013) examined the pan-European media coverage in four European online media in regard to the evaluation of the position of the German federal government in a European public sphere. 121 articles on the Greek national debt crisis were analysed as part of this study. The position taken by the German government was closely linked with the development of the Eurozone and the development of the European Union overall. While connotations were more frequently negative than positive, on the whole they were neutral. The study reveals that the most important topic was the communitisation of debts. In the coverage, the future of the Union was often linked with this topic and the sovereign debt crisis. This shows that the investigated pan-European media also focus upon European questions in their coverage. Based on these findings, the question arises of how and indeed whether national media deal with Europe and European institutions in the European sovereign debt crisis. This question will be investigated here, using the example of the analysis conducted of the coverage on the Greek national debt crisis. To date, an analysis of the extent of Europeanization is still lacking. The present study aims to close this gap in the research.

Other studies seek to capture the scale of a European public sphere beyond the financial crisis. For example, Eilders and Voltmer (2003) analysed newspaper commentaries. They found that only few newspaper commentaries dealt with the European Parliament. The attention paid to the European Parliament in newspaper commentaries is at the level of tenths of a percent (Eilders and Voltmer 2003: 261). Using media content analysis, Koopmans (2010) investigated whether debates on European politics were dominated by the supranational EU and its actors or by the national governments; he ascertained that the EU was present in the media, but that nation states' government politicians played a greater role in the coverage.

Alongside themes, the relative presence of EU actors in media coverage is seen as an indicator of the degree of Europeanization. Lauf and Peter (2004) studied the presence of EU representatives as the main actors or persons quoted in television news programmes on various thematic fields in 13 EU Member States. Using these data, they determined a relative degree of attention to European actors in various thematic fields. This indicator of attention sheds light on the extent of the Europeanization of the media. They found that there were significant differences between the countries investigated.

Using 17 existing studies from a range of countries that analysed media content, Machill, Beiler and Fischer (2006) systematically evaluated the empirical research in English, French and German

from the early 90s onwards. Their meta-analysis showed that tendencies towards a Europeanization of the national public spheres had developed to different extents in the 15 Member States of the European Union prior to the expansion of 2004. The authors made a distinction between a high, a medium and a low degree of Europeanization in regard to the coverage of EU actors, European topics and other EU States. Germany, Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden and Finland had a high degree of Europeanization, Spain, France and Austria a medium degree, and the United Kingdom, Belgium, Ireland and Italy a low degree of Europeanization. Overall, in all States EU topics only made up a small proportion of what was covered. Actors on the EU level only played a minor role compared to national actors.

In summary, it can be seen that studies to date have perceived the extent of Europeanization, especially concerning themes and actors, to be low. Against this background, the present study also investigates to which extent German national media coverage during the Greek national debt crisis makes reference to European events and actors. Thus we hope to identify whether media coverage of the Greek national debt crisis is purely national in nature or whether European references mean that a Europeanized mass media debate emerges that can be seen as an expression of a Europeanized national media.

4. Models of a European public sphere

The question of a European public sphere only became significant following the development of Europeanized politics. After the population's support for European integration dwindled during the 1990s, underdeveloped European news coverage and an associated lack of public discourse and opinion formation on European topics was identified as one of the underlying problems. The lack of a European public sphere was diagnosed (cf. Gerhards 2002).

A European public sphere is relevant to the legitimation of political decisions. As the European Commission does not have a direct mandate from the people of Europe via elections but its decisions affect EU citizens directly – in the area of economic policy in particular, more than 80 percent of laws derive from the EU Commission – it has a special interest in creating legitimation in order to gain the support of the population. In the long run, a lack of support and legitimation will lead to the rejection of these institutions, placing the European Union at risk. Following a deliberative model of democracy, public discourse is able to legitimate decisions in Europe. Accordingly, a European public sphere is a precondition of legitimate European politics (cf. Offerhaus 2008: 4053ff.). However, a public sphere cannot be created mechanically from necessity, Kleinsteuber (2004) explains, but emerges where there is polarisation. On the European level, this still occurs too seldom on the level of politics. For example, the European Parliament has little public significance as it does not create polarisation due to its consensual manner of working, its multilingualism and its lack of political clout (Kleinsteuber 2004: 37).

Three different models of a European public sphere form the theoretical basis of these reflections. By and large they follow a representative, liberal approach to the public sphere, in which citizens are able to observe their elected representatives and their rivals through the media and are thus able to form an opinion that enters into the political process through elections (cf. Gerhards 2002):

In the first model, a transnational European public sphere (cf. Scharnow 2005), Europe is seen as a political community in which political actors communicate with citizens via unified mass media.

However, the basic conditions for this concept do not exist in reality, nor will they in the foreseeable future (cf. Gerhards 2000). There are no European mass media, nor is there a European people with its own identity and language (cf. Eilders/Voltmer 2003; Scharnow 2005).

As a second approach, the idea of a segmented transnational thematic public sphere has gained some currency as an alternative model (cf. Eder 2000; Scharnow 2005). This approach assumes that thematic communicative communities made up of concretely affected actors are formed as a result of the specific structures of European deliberative processes and the competences in multi-level Europe. They do not communicate via mass media, but in direct conversation and through specialist media. Even though this process mirrors some real communication processes well, its publicness is limited. Dispensing with discourse in the mass media means that a large part of the population are excluded (cf. Eilders and Voltmer 2003: 253).

In light of the shortcomings of the approaches described above, a third model has become established in the research. It no longer assumes a transnational European public sphere, but instead focuses on the Europeanization of national public spheres (cf. Scharnow 2005). As political actors and many EU structures are national in orientation, and functioning national public spheres exist in the individual EU States, this model can be used as a basis for investigating to which extent the national mass media address European topics and actors. The degree of Europeanization in national news coverage is thus measured here (cf. Scharnow 2005). In this context, “Europeanization” refers to the thematisation of European topics and actors and their evaluation from a non-national perspective (cf. Gerhards 2000: 293). The second perspective in particular is frequently seen as overly restrictive and implausible, and should thus be discarded (cf. Koopmans/Erbe 2003; Risse 2002). Given the segmented interests in the union of nation states, there can be no general shared European perspective.

5. Research question and research design

Given the significance of European institutions and connections in economic policy, a European perspective is particularly important in economic-political journalism. This applies especially in the Greek national debt crisis, where political decisions on financial support to bail out Greece – support that derives from the European citizens’ tax monies – are made by European institutions such as the European Commission, the European Central Bank or the Eurogroup. The creation of a European public sphere would contribute significantly to public understanding of European decisions and thus to their legitimacy. Therefore the aim is to examine whether such a European public sphere was created in the German economic-political coverage of the Greek national debt crisis. We specifically ask: what role do European actors and events covered play?

In order to answer our principal research question, the extent of the coverage of actors during the Greek national debt crisis in public discourse in German daily newspapers and an online portal will be described and analysed.¹

The investigation period starts with the formation of the new Greek government under Alexis Tsipras on 29 January 2015 and ends with the expiry of the rescue programme on 30 June 2015. Thus the study consciously focuses on the economic journalistic coverage of the Tsipras government and its work during the second Greek rescue programme.

¹ This analysis forms part of a study commissioned by the Institute of Macroeconomics and Economic Research (IMK).

The study examines journalistic articles in German daily news coverage. The evaluation is not restricted to daily newspapers only, but also includes a relevant online medium. The national daily newspapers “Die Welt”, “Bild”, “Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung”, “Süddeutsche Zeitung” and “Die Tageszeitung” are covered, as is the online news magazine “Spiegel Online”. The selection was made based upon the respective newspaper’s position within the political spectrum from left to right. One requirement was that tabloid papers, quality newspapers and an online news portal be included in order to cover a range of different media. The selection of the newspaper articles on the Greek national debt crisis was made using the database “ARD Pressearchiv”. The database saves all the articles of the newspapers examined in their entirety. All the articles of the selected newspapers that had a thematic link to the Greek national debt crisis and could be found using the search term “Greece” were identified. In the case of “Spiegel Online”, all articles that could be found using the search term “Greece” in the online archive for the study period were identified. Individual articles that only referred to sports events were not included. Apart from this exception, ours is a full survey of all articles in the abovementioned papers and “Spiegel Online” for the investigation period.

The analysis was conducted through a quantitative content analysis (cf. Kromrey 2009). The features to be analysed were recorded in a system of categories. The coding was carried out by six trained coders in July 2015.²

In the structure of its category system, the present study follows the investigative structures of Eilders and Lüter (1998) on capturing themes and opinions in press commentaries as well as of Gerhards et al. (2004) on the categorization of attributions in the mass media in a Europe-wide comparison. The latter’s operationalization of attribution transmissions and constellations of actors is largely adopted here.

The following sections will present the results of our content analysis concerning the intensity of coverage and the actors identified.

6. European meetings as motivations for coverage

In total, 1442 articles referring to the Greek national debt crisis were identified in the analysed media “Die Welt”, “Bild”, “Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung” (“FAZ”), “Süddeutsche Zeitung”, “Die Tageszeitung” (“taz”) and “Spiegel Online”.

Over the time period in question, there were phases of very intense coverage with 20 articles a day shortly after the Tsipras government took office and during the ensuing negotiations over further payments from the second Greece rescue package in February 2015. After this, coverage became less intense from March to May 2015, increasing once more to over 50 articles per day with the renewed negotiations in June 2015 until these were broken off on 27 June 2015.

In most cases, the peak coverage intensity can be traced to individual events, mostly meetings of the Eurogroup, the Euro finance ministers or the heads of the EU States and governments. The meetings before the expiry of one stage of the rescue package in February and those in June 2015 attracted significant journalistic attention, increasing coverage. These events included meetings of the finance ministers of the Euro countries in particular. On 11 and 20 February and 18 and 24 June 2015, these meetings gave rise to very intense coverage. On 9 March and on 24 April 2015, for example, the response was much lower. The summits of the EU heads of state and heads of government also followed this pattern, giving rise to intense coverage on 12 February and 21 June

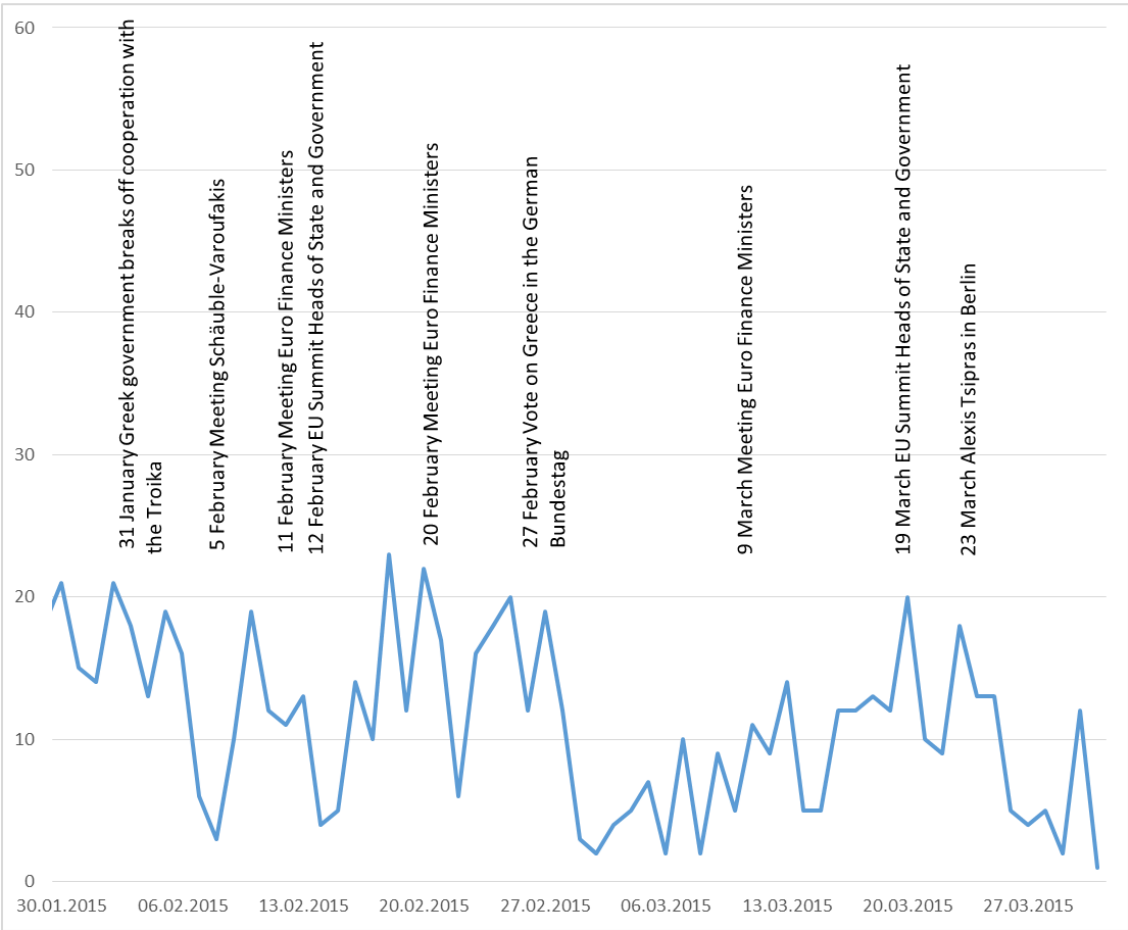
² Many thanks to Jan Schübler, Katrin Mertens, Timo Müller, David Patrick Hahn, Tim Kronner and Stefan Titze.

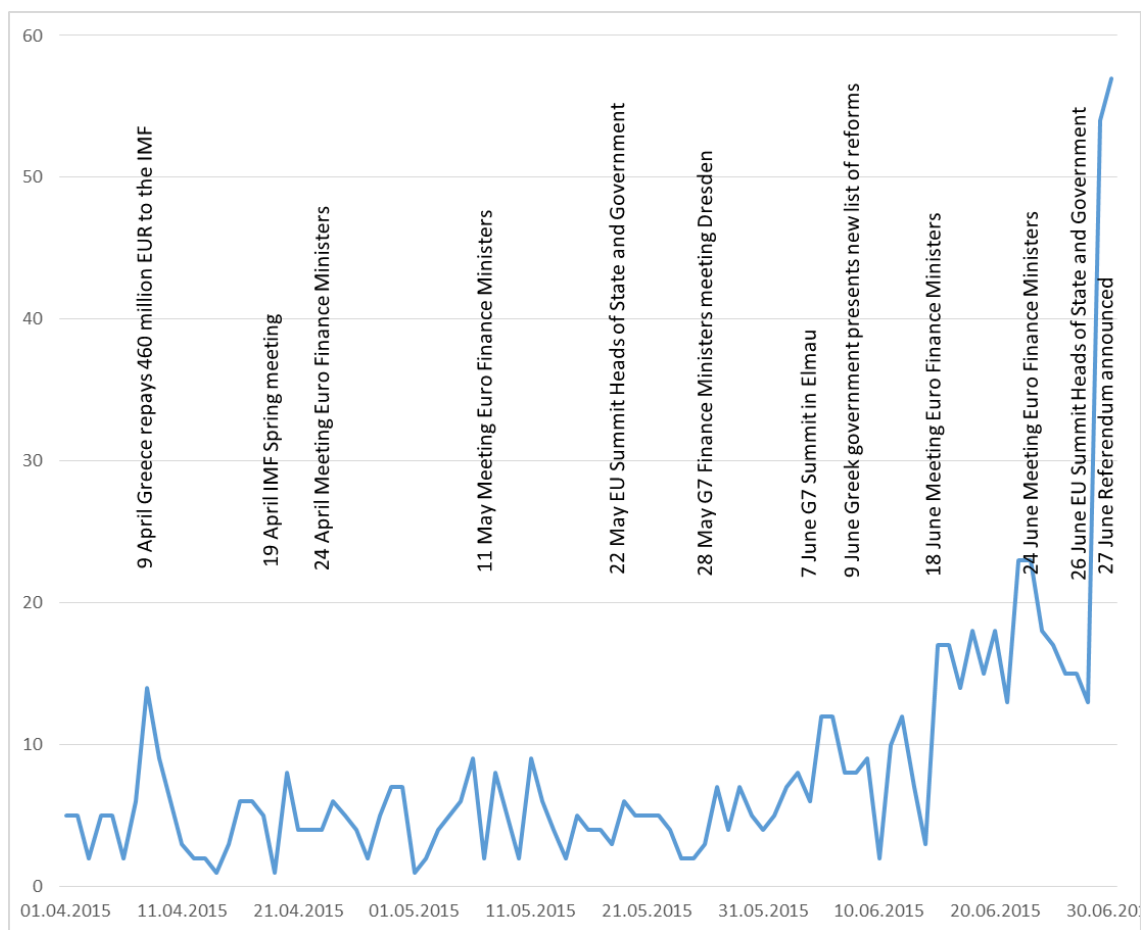
2015. These summits and the expiry of repayment deadlines coincided with intense coverage of the Greek national debt crisis.

After the Greek Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis presented a list of reforms on 24 February 2015 and the German Bundestag voted in favour of extending the second rescue package on 27 February 2015, the topic lost its relevance for economic-political journalism. The highest coverage during this phase, with a lower intensity of coverage up until mid-June 2015, could be traced back to the Greek Prime Minister Tsipras’s visit to Berlin.

The failure of negotiations on a last payment from the second rescue package and the announcement of a referendum by Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras led to a massive rise in the intensity of coverage at the end of June 2015. On 30 June 2015, the last day of the period under investigation, 57 articles on the Greek national debt crisis were published in the media analysed.

In summary, the chronology of the coverage intensity reveals that political events on a European level, such as European meetings, deadlines and referenda determined the intensity and timing of the media’s engagement with the Greek national debt crisis. The online portal “Spiegel Online” had a particularly high level of intensity as compared to the newspapers. The reasons for this are the technical possibility of constant updates via the Internet as well as the recipients’ high expectations that information will be updated continuously and passed on directly.

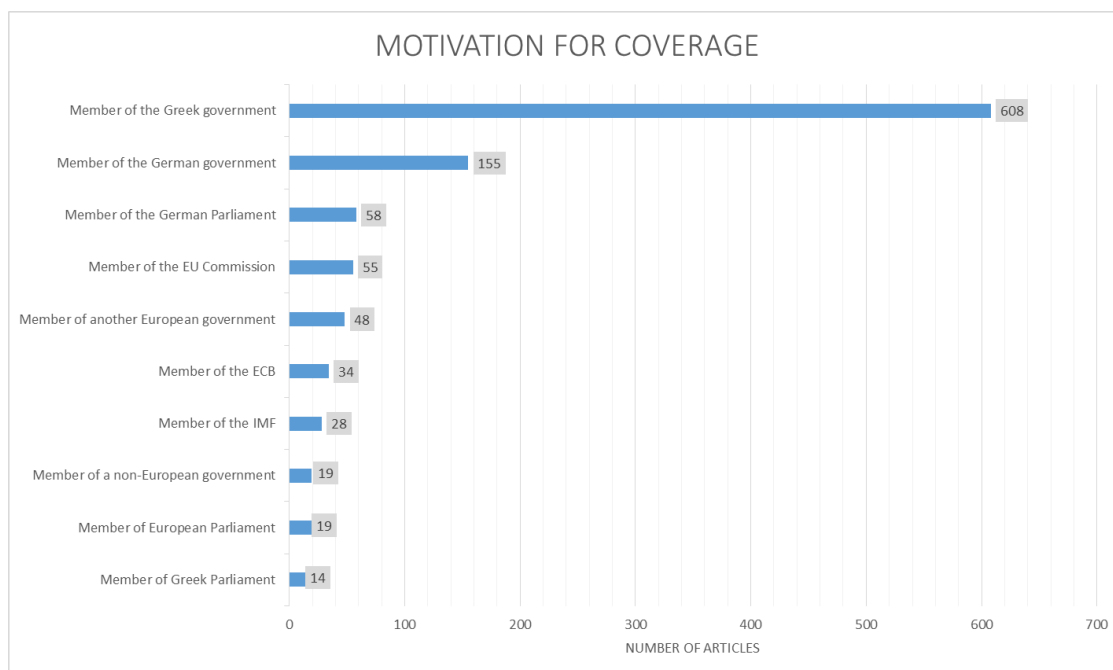




7. European actors in economic-political news coverage

Actors played a large role in the German economic-political coverage of the Greek national debt crisis. They provided the motivation for economic-political coverage, transmitted positions on other actors via the media, were quoted and led journalists to focus on individuals in their economic and political reporting.

Nearly all of the articles analysed referred to one or several individual or collective actors. Only in 404 articles (28 percent) were we unable to identify an actor as the motivation for the article. Some of these articles dealt purely with stocks, while others focused on individual businesses or were motivated by actors who were not part of current politics, such as the former German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer or media representatives such as Günther Jauch and Jan Böhrermann. Actors were selected as motivators if a statement of theirs was recognisably the reason for the article. The same goes for visits, meetings, speeches and events that could be traced back to actors.



Motivations for coverage

Most of the articles were motivated by statements and activities of the Greek government, in most cases those of Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis and Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras. 58.6 percent of articles with actors as the motivations for coverage could clearly be traced back to these two. Members of the German government came second with 14.9 percent of articles.

Members of other European governments, including the Euro finance ministers for example, only occurred as the motivation for reporting in 4.6 percent of articles. Within this group, the Eurogroup President and Dutch Minister of Finance Jeroen Dijsselbloem, the British Prime Minister David Cameron and the French President François Hollande appeared most frequently as motivators. Articles were more frequently linked to statements and activities of members of the EU Commission: this was the case in 5.3 percent of articles. Here, the President of the EU Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, and – after a significant gap – the Commissioner for Economic and Financial Affairs, Pierre Moscovici, were mentioned most frequently.

Only 1.8 percent of articles motivated by actors referred to members of the European Parliament. The highest democratically elected body of the European Union and its members clearly only played an insignificant role in the coverage of the Greek national debt crisis. Likewise, the European Central Bank (ECB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the institutions that played a key role in the Greek national debt crisis alongside the EU, only seldom motivated any coverage in the media analysed. 3.3 percent of articles were motivated by activities or statements of the ECB, and only 2.7 percent by those of the IMF.

This reveals on the one hand that the coverage was dominated by governments. 79.9 percent of articles referred to the statements and activities of governments, only 8.7 percent to parliamentary actors. In contrast to their role in the Greek national debt crisis, European actors and central institutions such as the ECB and IMF were strongly underrepresented. The economic and political coverage focused very clearly upon two national actors, the Greek and the German governments. Through this bi-national coverage, the media investigated presented a bi-national conflict. It is not really possible to speak of a Europeanized public sphere in light of the motivations for reporting chosen by the media.

When comparing the analysed media, this bi-national representation could be seen particularly strongly in the case of the “Bild”, which also referred back to the German government most frequently in 23.6 percent of its articles. The two Springer publications “Bild” and “Welt” also referred most frequently to members of the German Bundestag in 9.7 and 10.7 percent of their articles, respectively. Statements and activities of the German government were most seldom the motivation for reporting in the “Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung”. Of the media investigated, “Die Welt” referred most frequently to international and European actors, such as the EU Commission, ECB and IMF.

Across the study period, these percentages, especially those of the Greek and German governments, remained mostly homogeneous at a high level. Overall, the proportion of the Greek government as a motivator for reporting declined slightly from more than 60 percent in February to 50 percent in June 2015. The percentage of international actors as motivators, especially that of the EU Commission, increased slightly over the same time period to 10 percent in June 2015. This goes back to the fact that Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker became more strongly involved in the negotiations from June onwards when these began to stall, and tried to mediate leading up to the special meeting of the EU heads of state and heads of government in June 2015.

We can note that the statements of European actors, especially of the European Parliament and its members, were paid scarcely any attention and were hardly ever the motivation for reporting. The European Commission and the European Central Bank were also only seldom the motivation for economic and political news coverage. This suggests that there is only a limited European public sphere in the German coverage of the Greek national debt crisis.

The following step identified who made statements about whom in the coverage on the Greek national debt crisis. The actor making the statement is referred to as the attribution transmitter, and the actor about whom a statement is made is referred to as the attribution addressee. Here, statements are understood not only as literal quotes, but can also occur indirectly within the text of an article (e.g. “Schäuble showed a lack of understanding for Tsipras’s performance.”). This was captured with an individual variable for the government leaders and finance ministers of Greece and Germany, Alexis Tsipras, Yanis Varoufakis, Angela Merkel and Wolfgang Schäuble, and as a collective variable for all other actors.

		Attribution transmitters					Total
		Alexis Tsipras	Yanis Varoufakis	Angela Merkel	Wolfgang Schäuble	Others	
Attribution addressees	Alexis Tsipras	76	38	43	77	434	484
	Yanis Varoufakis	21	52	9	71	181	209
	Angela Merkel	31	21	17	14	119	138
	Wolfgang Schäuble	11	30	5	34	64	76
	Others	115	76	30	56	545	618
	Total	138	109	55	124	865	997

Attribution transmitters and addressees
(multiple answers, observed frequencies)

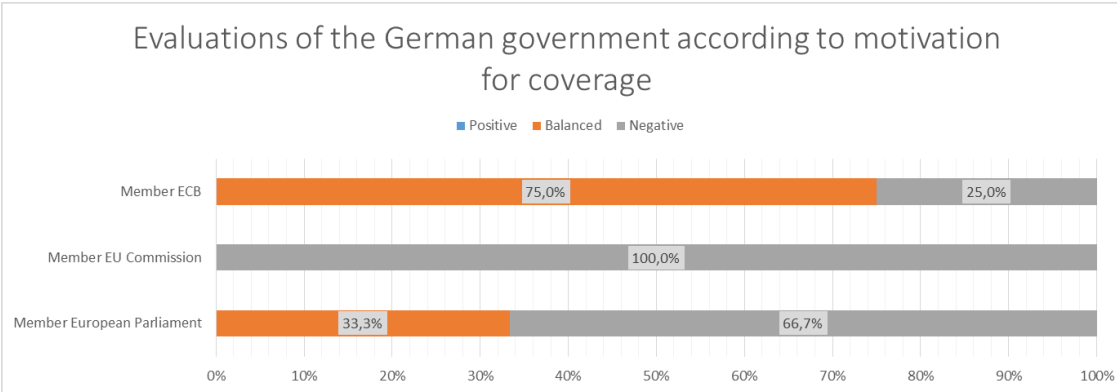
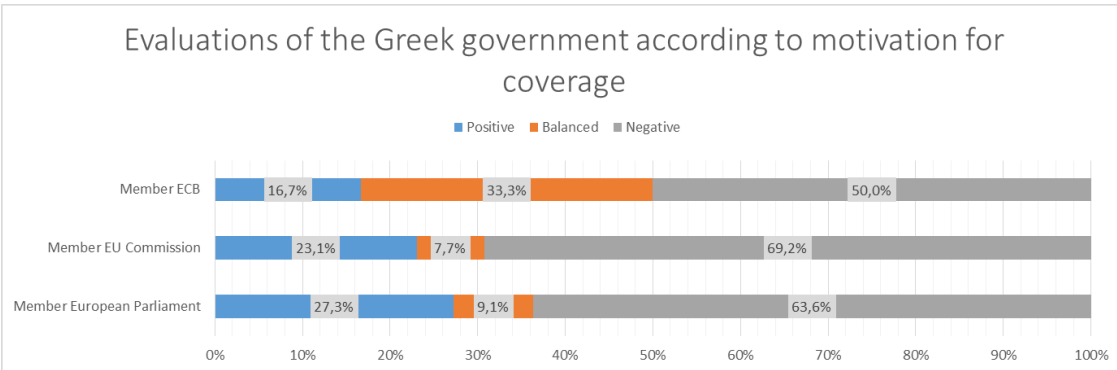
In total, other actors – including the European actors – appeared 865 times as attribution transmitters and 618 times as attribution addressees. The four abovementioned actors from the German and Greek governments achieved a striking 426 mentions as attribution transmitters and were addressed 907 times. Accordingly, overall they were addressed much more frequently than they transmitted themselves.

The data shows that the German media analysed constructed a conflict between the Finance Ministers Yanis Varoufakis and Wolfgang Schäuble. Between Angela Merkel and Alexis Tsipras, statements made about each other occurred less frequently (74 times) than between Yanis Varoufakis and Wolfgang Schäuble (101 times). In the German coverage, the conflict between the finance ministers played a greater role than statements between the two heads of government.

Other actors, especially European actors, were often able to make statements, but in most cases these referred to the four main actors Angela Merkel, Alexis Tsipras, Wolfgang Schäuble and Yanis Varoufakis. They were addressed much more seldom than the national heads of government and finance ministers.

Evaluations of individual actors were not measured. However, we were able to capture how the Greek and the German government were evaluated in the articles when certain actors were the motivators for an article or were mentioned. This shows how actors formed or supported evaluations. If we differentiate according to the motivation for coverage, we can see that the Greek government was evaluated predominantly negatively for all coverage motivations.

Among the European actors of the ECB, EU Commission and European Parliament, the members of the European Parliament tended to motivate positive coverage of the Greek government more than the other actors.



*Evaluation according to motivation for coverage
(Percentages refer to the motivator, separately for Greece and Germany)*

The EU Commission also motivated coverage in the case of articles that were critical of Germany's government. Articles that were based on the EU Commission as their motivator were noticeably more positive and balanced towards the Greek government than towards the German government. The fact that the EU Commission as the representative of all EU States, including Greece, and its President Jean-Claude Juncker attempted to adopt a neutral, mediating position during the negotiations, is seen as the reason for this.

8. Conclusion

The example of the Greek national debt crisis reveals the high number of national, European and international actors affected by the crisis and involved in its solution, and thus also demonstrates the complexity of economic and political decisions on a European level. These decisions involve billions of Euros that come from the European population's taxes. It is the task of economic-political journalism to provide the population with comprehensive information about the developments and decisions in this sovereign debt crisis. A European perspective created through the establishment of a European public sphere is required so that the complex relations, results and developments can be portrayed appropriately.

Thus the present study investigated the key question: does the German economic-political coverage of the Greek national debt crisis create a European public sphere?

In total, 1442 articles reported on the Greek national debt crisis. Coverage was particularly intense when the repayment of instalments was due, negotiations on the extension of the second rescue package were imminent and European summits took place. Thus coverage on the Greek national debt crisis was highly intense, but dependent upon particular events.

European actors, especially the EU Commission, the European Parliament and the European Central Bank, hardly played any role in reporting on the crisis. They rarely motivated coverage and only seldom made statements. The coverage presented a line of conflict between the German and the Greek governments, and other actors did not often appear. The journalists of the media investigated thus clearly focused upon a conflict between the German and the Greek governments.

The Greek national debt crisis revealed the complexity of European economic politics. Economic journalism needs to explain this complex network of relations while maintaining standards of journalistic quality so that no sense of insecurity arises in the population during this European sovereign debt crisis, exacerbating these crises and conflicts. While the majority of the [German?] population was in favour of Greece remaining in the Euro at the beginning of the year, in June 2015 the majority was against Greece remaining in the Euro and a clear majority against further concessions to Greece. The German population's necessary trust in the Greek government shrank noticeably during the first half of 2015, and insecurity increased.

The study's results show that it is not really possible to speak of a Europeanized national public sphere in Germany as far as the coverage of the Greek national debt crisis is concerned. In the German media, the European debate became a bi-national conflict between the German and Greek governments. While European events, such as crisis summits or meetings of the finance ministers, motivated coverage and increased the intensity of coverage, they were rarely the subject-matter covered. Thus reporting on this European sovereign debt crisis also shows that the German media are still far from Europeanized. The identified lack of a European public sphere creates distrust among the population and threatens to diminish the legitimation of European decisions, institutions and actors. However, this legitimation is needed – after all, up to 80 percent

of all economic-political laws are already determined on a European level. By neglecting to refer to European actors, the German media coverage contributes to the lack of mutual trust of the European population in states, governments and European institutions. This trust is necessary, however, in light of the political challenge of mutual financial liability. If the six countries in crisis – Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Spain, Italy and Cyprus – could no longer act as guarantors, Germany alone would be liable for 533 billion Euros, France for 409 billion and Austria for 57 billion. Given these vast liabilities, a European understanding of relations, background, efforts and developments is imperative.

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