

Mourlon-Druol, Emmanuel; Müller, Henrik; Porcaro, Giuseppe; Schmidt, Tobias

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## You'll never talk alone: What media narratives on European reforms reveal about a polity in the making

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# YOU'LL NEVER TALK ALONE: WHAT MEDIA NARRATIVES ON EUROPEAN REFORMS REVEAL ABOUT A POLITY IN THE MAKING

EMMANUEL MOURLON-DRUOL, HENRIK MÜLLER, GIUSEPPE PORCARO AND TOBIAS SCHMIDT

This paper analyses the discourse since 2001 in three leading national business newspapers about reforms in the European Union: *Handelsblatt* (Germany), *Il Sole* (Italy) and *Les Echos* (France). We collected and organised a large dataset of articles published in these three newspapers. We used topic modelling to identify latent topics across articles. Based on this database, we then addressed four research questions and found: a relative degree of synchronisation of reform debates across the three countries; comparable reporting patterns, especially around the main crises; a greater degree of direction of the debate towards European issues over national issues in Germany than in France and Italy; and the tentative emergence of a shared narrative about crises. Finally, we highlight that bringing conflict and contestation back into European discussions may help stimulate wider interest in European matters.

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Emmanuel Mourlon-Druol ([emmanuel.mourlon-druol@bruegel.org](mailto:emmanuel.mourlon-druol@bruegel.org)) is a Non-Resident Fellow at Bruegel.

Henrik Müller ([henrik.mueller@tu-dortmund.de](mailto:henrik.mueller@tu-dortmund.de)) is the Chair of Economic Journalism at TU Dortmund.

Giuseppe Porcaro ([giuseppe.porcaro@bruegel.org](mailto:giuseppe.porcaro@bruegel.org)) is Head of Outreach, Governance and Human Resources at Bruegel.

Tobias Schmidt ([tobias3.schmidt@tu-dortmund.de](mailto:tobias3.schmidt@tu-dortmund.de)) is a research associate at TU Dortmund.



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## 1 Introduction

A regular feature of research on the European Union is the study of Europe as a polity in the making (Kaiser *et al*, 2009). The EU is not only an evolving institutional construct. It can also be seen as an attempt to build an imagined community (Anderson, 1983) that transcends the national sphere but is not yet mature, implying that its future direction is still undetermined. In that sense, the European Union is a political system that has been shaped and re-shaped continuously since 1957 (Warlouzet, 2022).

Since the EU is a political system encompassing national governments, national parliaments and EU institutions, the debate about the future of the European Union is intertwined with debates about reforms at both national and European levels. However, perspectives on this can vary greatly. It is possible to view the EU and its member states as separated or as competing spheres, or simply stacked on top of one another. In other words, it can be asked whether the EU is moving towards more differentiated integration or towards differentiated disintegration (Fossum, 2022).

This paper provides an empirical contribution to this framework by analysing the discourse about reforms in the EU, as it appears in leading national business newspapers in the biggest EU countries. Business newspapers can be expected to be the most Europeanised parts of media landscapes, since economic integration has been at the heart of the European project ever since its inception in the 1950s. The issue of reform, in turn, is of particular relevance, because it clarifies how the direction of European integration is perceived publicly. As reforms are linked both to previous reforms and reforms deemed necessary in the future, this perspective can provide an understanding of perceptions related to scenarios in which differentiation is seen as supportive of democracy, or associated with dominance.

To be sure, there is a broad consensus that the European Union in its current state is vulnerable. Thus, the need for reform is widely acknowledged, though the types of reforms required are contested. Should the EU become more federal by bolstering the role of common institutions, and if so, should it be by technocratic rule or by democratising 'Brussels'? Should rules apply uniformly? Should there be (more) room for differentiation? Or is it foremost the member states that need to enact reforms to become more competitive, fiscally sustainable and compliant with democratic and rule-of-law standards?

In this paper, the analysis of media coverage is used as a proxy for narratives prevalent in the broader public debate (Müller *et al*, 2018a; Müller *et al*, 2018b). We also use source material that allows us to

adopt an historical approach to the coverage of Europe in national newspapers (Bergamini and Murlon-Druol, 2021). A large-scale content analysis is conducted by applying a mix of keyword matching, natural language processing and topic identification to a corpus of 700,000 news articles published between January 2000 and February 2022 in three leading business newspapers in Italy (*Il Sole 24ore*), France (*Les Echos*), and Germany (*Handelsblatt*). This period encompassed crucial developments including the debates on the EU constitution and its ultimate failure, the adoption of the euro in everyday life, accessions to the EU, the Global Financial Crisis and European debt crisis, Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic (the Russian assault on Ukraine and the ensuing energy crisis lie outside of the observation period). By disentangling discursive patterns over time, we shed additional light on the concept of differentiation between the national and European levels, the perception of dominance of one level over the other, or simply the instrumental use of the European level by national actors. Finally, we challenge the idea that, when speaking about reforms and the future of Europe, we discuss only EU governance, multi-speed Europe, etc. Instead, according to the theory of differentiation proposed by the EU3D project, we can speak about reforms at multi-territorial levels and across sectors, and still link those to the debate about the future of Europe.

By analysing leading business newspapers in the three largest EU countries – arguably the media most likely to transcend the national level and include a European or international perspective – we shed light on four research questions:

- First, to what extent are the needs for reforms addressed over time? The political economy of reforms implies that strong forces of resistance clinging to the *status quo* must be overcome. To achieve change in democratic systems, the public needs to be primed for the unsustainability of the way things are. Hence, the media play an important role. A general precondition is that the European dimension of policy issues be addressed at all. Since national media dominate media landscapes, it's important whether common institutions (vertical European public sphere, EPS) and other member states (horizontal EPS) are covered in the context of reforming the EU.
- Second, what are the patterns of media coverage in the three newspapers? If reform debates occur in similar or even synchronised ways (intersectional EPS), country-to-country narrative spillovers are possible, inspiring or critically reflecting, the developments elsewhere in Europe. In contrast, idiosyncratic national debates would hint at a deep fragmentation of public spheres, where little attention is paid to politics elsewhere.
- Third, is the coverage of reforms primarily directed at the national or at the European level? With Europe being hit by recurring common crises (financial, euro, refugees, COVID-19), the need for

reforms is widely acknowledged. To move them onto the political agenda, continued media attention on the need for reform would appear to be warranted.

- Fourth, are there shared narratives about reforms at the EU level? The way reforms at the EU institutional level are reported or framed is informative concerning the general perceptions related to the circulating proposals. If national narratives about Europe's future path overlap or gradually converge, this would indicate that the EU is indeed a polity in the making, a fundamental precondition for democracy to be feasible at the European level.

This paper is organised as follows: section 2 provides an overview of the relevant literature on the European public sphere and narratives in public discourse. Section 3 introduces the methodology and the data base. Section 4 presents the results. Section 5 draws some conclusions. An annex provides details of the text-mining exercise.

## **2 European debates in the absence of European media – review of the literature**

This section sets out in four steps the context of our exploration of the discourse about reforms in the EU since 2000, in the three leading national business newspapers. First, it recalls the EU3D project's purpose. Second, it introduces the notion of the European public sphere. Third, it discusses the notion of narratives in public discourse. Fourth, it briefly reviews the major developments that have taken place since 2000.

### **2.1 EU3D project**

The overall purpose of the EU3D project<sup>1</sup>, to which this paper contributes, is to clarify the conditions under which *differentiation* is supportive of *democracy*, and the conditions under which *differentiation* is associated with *dominance* within the EU's multilevel setting. Much of the EU literature is focused on differentiated integration (and differentiated disintegration), tailored to the specifics of the EU. That is fine as far as it goes. EU3D's theoretical framework works from a broader understanding of what differentiation means within a political system. Such a conceptual understanding of course includes reference to differentiated integration (eg multiple-speed Europe, opt-ins and outs, à la carte approach, etc), but also underlines that all modern political systems are differentiated along territorial and functional lines. Nevertheless, the EU, being less than a state but more than an international organisation, is distinctly differentiated. Fossum (2021) addressed this by disentangling key

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<sup>1</sup> EU3D is a Research and Innovation Action funded by the EU's Horizon 2020 programme. EU3D examines the increasingly differentiated European political order.

differentiation dimensions from the nation-state context and applying them to the EU. He identified at least four of these dimensions: lawmaking differentiation; functional differentiation; territorial differentiation; and people's access to and incorporation in the political system. These dimensions make up the institutional preconditions for functioning democracy today. The analysis of the EU as a democratic experiment must be done in terms of whether it innovates and improves (substitutes, or complements), or undermines, the particular differentiation configuration (combination of territory, function and hierarchy), which we associate with the model of the democratic constitutional state.

Accordingly, the EU3D project aims at clarifying what is meant by differentiation, and how that relates to the concepts of democracy and dominance, where democracy is characterised by the rule of the people (eg through representative institutions), and dominance refers to arbitrary and unjustified forms of rule, including imposing policy changes by exploiting imbalances in power (eg big versus small member states, executive versus legislature). In this paper we focus on how dominance may be portrayed from the perspective of big countries, rather than small states. That suggests that dominance will figure less prominently in our analysis than if we had analysed small states.

## **2.2 European public spheres**

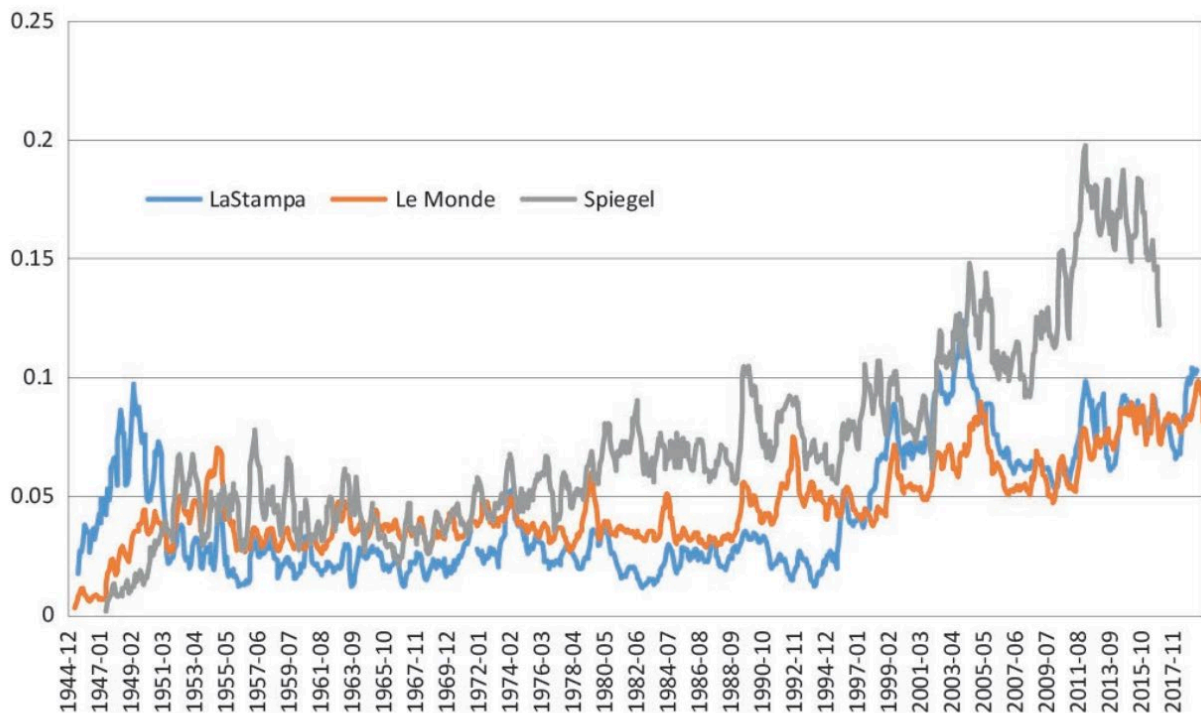
The notion of the EU as a polity in the making brings up the question of the requisite democratic requirements. The ability to establish democratic arrangements in the process of European integration is closely related to the prospects for developing a European public sphere (EPS). Further political integration at the European level may be deemed imperative in a growing number of policy areas, ranging from enhanced risk and burden sharing within the euro area to common defence structures, energy and climate-change mitigation policies. Yet, a major obstacle to further integration has been the absence of a true EPS, or a sufficient degree of Europeanisation of national public spheres (eg Brüggemann, 2005; Habermas, 2014; Hennen, 2016). Transnational media play only a minor role in the EU's media landscapes, and national media mainly focus on national perspectives. In these circumstances, any attempt to further centralise competences and powers at the European level may run up against basic requirements of popular participation, for democracy is hardly conceivable without a viable public sphere. Therefore, the emergence of a public sphere is widely seen as a pre-condition for establishing more democratic decision-making structures (eg Habermas, 2011: 17-19; Federal Constitutional Court, 2009: 68-69). Ideally, before decisions are taken at EU level, they should be discussed across borders, based on commonly accepted facts and evidence, revealing dispersed knowledge and opposing interests, ultimately leading to widely-accepted compromises.

In the absence of a true EPS, ie transnational mass media, it is crucial for national media to cover common issues to trigger citizens' awareness of the European dimension by taking into account perspectives, interests and arguments prevalent in other member states and at the EU level (Koopmans and Erbe, 2004; Pfetsch *et al*, 2008). A narrow national perspective, in contrast, is detrimental to finding some kind of transnational consensus. While the enduring existence of national media spheres can be considered as a differentiating impetus, a convergence of media coverage at the national level can be seen as a precondition for the democratisation of European integration. Koopmans and Pfetsch (2006) referred to this process as the “*transnationalization of public debate*”. In the literature, three dimensions of Europeanisation of public spheres are frequently referred to (Koopmans and Erbe, 2004: 101): vertical, horizontal and intersectional – ie national media reports on EU institutions and the EU level in general; national media reports on developments in other member states; national media in different member states reporting on the same issues at the same time within the same frame of reference, hence, without national bias.

Hence, the media represents crystallisation points of public discourses. It is where narratives prevalent in the political sphere can be found in condensed form. As the media contributes to the collective perception of social reality, it enables societies to formulate political priorities. That is why an analysis of journalistic media content allows a glimpse at these complex communicative relationships.

As there are no genuine European newspapers or TV programmes, in part because of language differences, previous research analysed the frequency of European issues in national newspapers as indicators of the prominence of European matters in national settings and, more generally, of a fledgling Europeanised public sphere (De Bruycker, 2020). A large research project (Bergamini *et al*, 2021; Bergamini and Murlon-Druol, 2021) gauged the frequency of articles dealing with EU-related news compared to the total number of articles from 1945 to 2018 in three national newspapers (*Le Monde*, *La Stampa* and *Der Spiegel*). It showed that the most important events in post-war history are clearly identifiable and that European issues have gathered substantially greater attention since the early 1990s. An overall finding of this exercise was a significant increase in the frequency of European news since the 1940s in all the three newspapers, with a particular increase in the past twenty years (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Frequency of European news relative to total news, selected European newspapers, 1945-2018**



Source: Bergamini and Murlon-Druol (2021). Note: E/T = European news as a share of total news.

In this paper, we advance this approach in several ways: we narrow it down to the question of reforms; employ a text mining approach allowing us to identify evolving reporting patterns over time; use business newspapers as a database, media that can be expected to be among the most Europeanised; and alter the time frame to cover a period from January 2001 to February 2022.

### 2.3 Narratives in public discourse

The term ‘narrative’ has proliferated in recent years to the extent that it can easily be mistaken for a buzzword with little explanatory value. As the concept is an important instrument in our analytical tool box, it needs some clarification.

Narrative-building is a complex process. It involves public opinion, media and politicians, among others (private sector, civil society, academics, etc). As argued by Shiller (2017), popular stories affect individual and collective economic behaviour. Studying these linkages – in the context of what he calls “*narrative economics*” – has the potential to vastly improve economists’ ability to predict, prepare for, and reduce the damage of financial crises, recessions, depressions and other major economic events.



According to Shiller's analysis, narratives can be considered as central, though broadly disregarded, factors in forming economic behaviour in a social context. Because of the highly complex nature of social systems, the virtue of common narratives lies in their capacity to reduce complexity, to the effect that underlying developments become fathomable and discussable. By connecting events and establishing a causes-consequences nexus, narratives help humans and entire societies to make sense of an overly complex world (Roos and Reccius, 2021). Being social phenomena, shared economic narratives enable large groups of individuals to coordinate the processing of information. They can be interpreted as a specific form of social capital in an intangibles-rich economy (Haskel and Westlake, 2017). In a political context, narratives enhance the collective perception of social reality, thereby enabling societies to formulate political priorities.

Discourses typically comprise a set of competing narratives. Over time dominant narratives tend to emerge, influencing the way a society views itself and forms its policy agenda. A discourse can thus be seen as an ensemble of ideas, concepts and categories through which meaning is added to social and physical phenomena, and which is produced and reproduced by means of an identifiable set of practices (Hajer and Versteeg, 2005). The discourse around migrants and refugees in Europe, for example, has translated into varying public attitudes and policy responses, and a general perception among the public that over-estimates the real number of refugees (Batsaikhan *et al*, 2018).

Therefore, the narrative structure of discourses comes at a cost. Two types of problems arise. First, like formal economic models, economic narratives focus on certain relationships while neglecting parts of the larger picture. If problematic developments occur outside the scope of dominant narratives, they may not be detected, and dealt with, in a timely fashion. Second, if different social groups are linked by common public goods while pursuing distinctly different or even contradictory narratives, they might find it hard to manage those public goods effectively. Take the case of net neutrality in the United States. One might think this would be a relatively benign, technocratic issue, but the polarisation of the positions around the topic has led to a sort of tribalisation of the debate. As Ostrom (1990) showed, communication between users of common resources is a key precondition for the development of institutional arrangements to overcome the 'tragedy of the commons', or the pursuit of raw, narrow-minded self-interest. To have a positive effect on the cooperative abilities of groups of individuals, communication has to be based on a set of shared convictions, typically taking the form of economic narratives.

Operationalising the concept of the narrative for the analysis of media content, we refer to the definition proposed by Müller *et al* (2018a, 2021). Accordingly, a *media narrative* consists of six

elements: a) problem definition, b) problem diagnosis, c) moral judgement, d) possible remedies, e) protagonists, and f) a series of events.

Note that elements a) to d) constitute the definition of a *media frame* (Entman, 1993), a concept commonly used in communication science. The other two categories add to the dynamic qualities of a narrative. Events are points of culmination that structure the underlying story. What's more, events take place at distinct locations that become integral parts of the narrative. Protagonists, in turn, tend to be portrayed as being in dispute.

The results of Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) topic models lend themselves to be interpreted in terms of the six elements of a narrative: *events* are associated with peaks in frequency curve; *protagonists*, as well as locations, can be derived from the lists of top words LDA produces. As far as the four frame elements a) – d) are concerned, qualitative analyses of the top words and the top articles provide valuable information. DiMaggio *et al* (2013) argued that LDA-generated topics can be interpreted as frames (see section 3).

## **2.4 Key developments and events during the observation period**

During the period covered by our data, several major debates and reforms captured the EU's agenda. The EU constitution, the Lisbon Treaty, the euro crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, to name but a few, sparked intense discussions about how to make the EU fit to confront the challenges it faces.

These events are well-known. Here is a brief summary: The European Council of Laeken in December 2001 called for a debate on the future of Europe. A so-called European Convention, chaired by former French president Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, was set up shortly after and drafted a 'European Constitution' (Fossum and Menendez, 2011). The text was signed in October 2004, but only 18 EU members ratified it. Dutch and French voters rejected the text in referendums held in 2005. The Treaty of Lisbon was agreed to replace the rejected text. The Treaty was signed in 2007 and entered into force in 2009.

The Great Financial Crisis and the euro-area crisis dominated the 2010s (Tooze, 2018). The bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers on 15 September 2008 marked a climax following the bursting of the US housing bubble. In late 2009, the Greek government disclosed that its budget deficit was higher than previously announced, which sparked doubt on its ability to repay and refinance its debt. The crisis then extended to other euro-area countries, with differing circumstances, including Ireland, Portugal, Spain and Cyprus. Several emergency meetings of euro-area heads of government were held to tackle

the crisis, and a whole set of new institutions and programmes was created to address some of the causes of the crisis (European Financial Stability Facility, European Stability Mechanism). From 2020, the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic challenged again the EU, and led to the creation of the ambitious NextGenerationEU (NGEU) programme. NGEU is a €750 billion instrument designed to support the economic recovery of EU member states from the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In sum, institutional-political issues dominated debates about EU reform in the first decade of the twenty-first century, while institutional-economic issues attracted most attention in the second decade.

### **3 Methodology**

The empirical study of social narratives is complicated by the fact that often they cannot be observed directly. Articles, TV programmes or speeches seldomly formulate a narrative explicitly, but do so implicitly by relying on recipients' shared perceptions. One way to gauge narratives is the analysis of reporting patterns in mass media. Since major newspapers cater to the broader public, they can be expected to reflect the prevailing economic narratives. As shown in Müller *et al* (2018a), they also take up dominant narratives from social media, albeit with considerable time-lags. The analysis of traditional newspapers therefore allows a glimpse at these complex communicative relationships. In this context, newspaper coverage is used as a proxy for narratives prevalent in the broader public debate.

The analysis does not imply any kind of judgement on the reporting itself – it should not be read as a critique of media bias, but rather as a representation of public debates.

#### **3.1 Dataset and approach**

We compare the media coverage in European daily newspapers. We deliberately focus on the media systems of the three largest EU economies, Germany, France and Italy. Specifically, we examine the largest business newspapers per country: *Handelsblatt* in Germany, *Les Echos* in France and *Il Sole24ore* in Italy. This is mainly for practical reasons: the media are comparable in popularity and thematic focus. Moreover, the three media are relatively easy to access. The data comes from the LexisNexis database for *Les Echos* and the online archives of *Il Sole* and the publishing house of *Handelsblatt*.

In their initial form, our text corpora cover the entire media coverage of the three newspapers from January 2001 up to and including March 2022. Since we are specifically interested in the coverage of Europe, we reduce the three corpora to all texts in which the pattern ‘europ’ occurs at least once. The resulting corpora are of the following sizes (Table 1). Tables 2 and 3 give a brief insight into the composition of the corpora.

**Table 1: Corpora sizes (search pattern: europ\*)**

<b>HB</b>	180028
<b>Les Echos</b>	233712
<b>Il Sole</b>	274110

**Table 2: Most frequently used words in the three corpora**

<b>HB</b>	prozent	euro	mehr	unternehmen	jahr	deutschland	europa
<b>Les Echos</b>	millions	france	pays	deuros	voir	marché	groupe
<b>Il Sole</b>	anni	mercato	milioni	euro	miliardi	parte	europa

**Table 3: Most frequently used neighbouring words to ‘europe’<sup>2</sup>**

<b>HB</b>	usa	prozent	deutschland	zentralbank	Union	unternehmen	euro
<b>Les Echos</b>	pays	france	lunion	marché	commissio n	voir	etatsuni s
<b>Il Sole</b>	paesi	mercato	commissione	anni	parte	italia	euro

To map all articles that deal specifically with European reforms, we also created a second sub-corpus. In addition to the above-mentioned condition, this sub-corpus also fulfils the condition that the pattern ‘reform’ (HB) or ‘réform’ (*Les Echos*) or ‘riforma’ (*Il Sole*) must occur at least once for a text to be classified as relevant. The text base is thus further reduced (Table 4). Tables 5 to 7 give a brief insight into the composition of the more specific corpora. As these figures show, the word ‘reform’ does indeed appear in the context of Europe and vice versa. This is of great importance for our further analysis. Relying on our simple search words could also have generated a set of texts in which *europe* and

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<sup>2</sup> ‘Neighbouring words’ are all words that appear in the same sentences in which the pattern ‘europ’ appears.

*reforms* appear together, but not in the same context. Tables 6 and 7, however, give reasons for concluding that our search word combination did indeed find texts dealing with European reforms.

The use of the word ‘reform’ of course potentially raises problems. The word ‘reform’ can be associated with morality, and can be connected to greater economic orthodoxy. We decided however to focus on this word as it allows us to better identify the relevant articles. Synonyms like ‘change,’ for instance, would capture a much broader array of articles, including many unrelated to our topic of enquiry.

**Table 4: Corpora sizes (search pattern: europ AND reform/réform/riform)**

<b>HB</b>	18382
<b>Les Echos</b>	21547
<b>Il Sole</b>	39056

**Table 5: Most frequently used words in the smaller corpora**

<b>HB</b>	prozent	deutschland	euro	europa	unternehmen	eu	deutschen
<b>Les Echos</b>	pays	france	réforme	voir	politique	européenne	faire
<b>Il Sole</b>	governo	anni	riforma	paesi	europa	politica	parte

**Table 6: Most frequently used neighbouring words of ‘europ’ in the smaller corpora<sup>3</sup>**

<b>HB</b>	deutsch*	union	reform*	zentralbank	usa	eu	ezb
<b>Les Echos</b>	pays	lunion	réform*	france	commission	politique	voir
<b>Il Sole</b>	riform*	paesi	commissione	politica	presidente	governo	crescita

**Table 7: Most frequently used neighbouring words of ‘reform’ in the smaller corpora**

<b>HB</b>	europ*	deutsch*	regierung	struktureformen	steuerreform	eu	land
<b>Les Echos</b>	europ*	gouvernement	pays	france	voir	politique	travail
<b>Il Sole</b>	europ*	governo	strutturali	sistema	mercato	anni	legge

<sup>3</sup> Again, ‘neighbouring words’ are all words that appear in the same sentences in which the pattern ‘europ’ appears. The term ‘deutsch\*’ subsumes all words that start with the pattern ‘deutsch’, including deutschland, deutsche or deutschen. Same applies to the patterns ‘europ\*’, ‘reform\*’, ‘riform\*’ and ‘réform\*’.

This corpus serves as the basis for our further analysis. Using both qualitative and quantitative methods, we take a closer look at the text basis provided by our search term, and work out similarities and differences between the three text corpora.

### 3.2 Methodology: Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA)

The main part of our media comparison is based on a prototype LDA analysis (Rieger *et al*, Blei *et al*, 2020). LDA is considered the most popular topic-modelling method and as such produces a macro-content analysis of our three text corpora. Specifically, LDA is able to identify latent topics and structures in large amounts of text by clustering words that occur repeatedly together, within and across all documents. However, the main problem of LDA is the instability of its results. Since the Gibbs sampler (Griffiths and Steyvers, 2004) assigns the initial word-to-topic relations randomly, classic LDA produces fundamentally different results at each run. A convincing method to solve this problem is presented by Rieger *et al* (2020) with the *Prototype LDA*.

Prototyping follows a typical statistical approach: for a given parameter combination, several LDA analyses are computed (usually around 100). Then, based on the deviation of strictly topic matching, the similarities between these models are calculated. The LDA model that has the highest average similarity to all other models is selected as the prototypical LDA model. This prototype shows much greater reliability than a usual LDA. The methodology is implemented in the corresponding R package *IdaPrototype* (Rieger, 2020).

To calculate our model, we subjected our three text corpora to the classical pre-processing steps of bag of words analyses. In a first step, we removed all numbers and punctuation marks from all documents, deleted special characters and converted all letters to lower case. Afterwards, we removed an individual selection of stop words per corpus. These are terms that do not add content value to our analysis, for example pronouns and linking words. Finally, all texts are tokenised and thus brought into a vector representation form.

**Table 8: Number of tokens and types after tokenization**

	Tokens	Types
<b>HB</b>	6,387,814	144,968
<b>Les Echos</b>	5,906,883	300,593
<b>Il Sole</b>	13,665,296	217,958

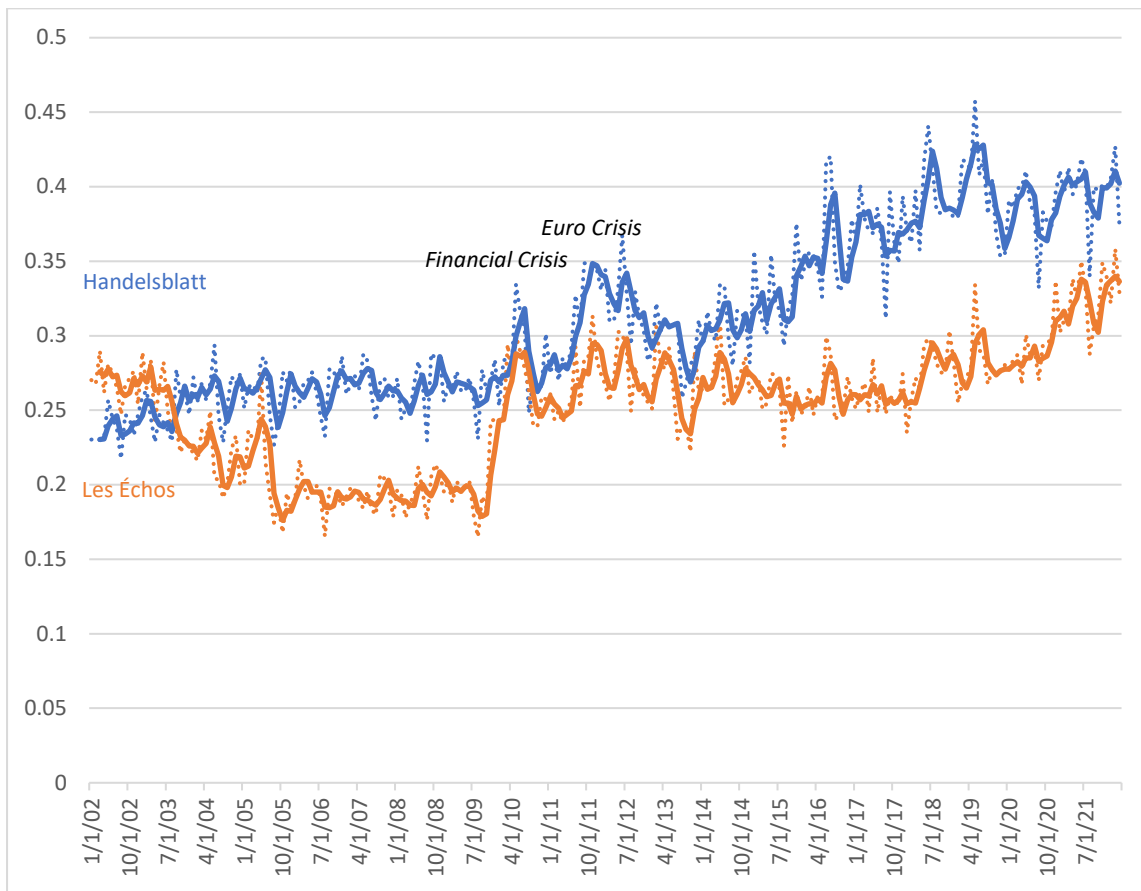
One of the most critical steps in our LDA analysis is the choice of an appropriate K-value, ie the number of topics we expect to find. To approach a reasonable topic count, we compute several prototype LDAs with different values for K based on our smaller sub corpus.

Concretely, we computed four LDA models per country with K=5, K=10, K=20 and K=40. All four authors labelled all topics independently, using the most characteristic words ('top words') and articles ('top texts') per topic, as well as the frequency distribution of each topic over time. A value of K=20 proved to be most appropriate with respect to our research interest. However, also a value of K=5 appeared to give interesting insights into our dataset. Therefore, we computed two final LDA analyses and choose K=5 and K=20 respectively as the model parameters and  $\alpha = \eta = 1/K$  as the Dirichlet parameter. The Gibbs sampler iterates 200 times over the data set in both models. The results presented in the next section are based solely on the K=20 models.

#### **4 Towards a common narrative? Results**

We start recounting the findings by harking back to the earlier study depicted in Figure 1. We ran a similar analysis with our corpora for *Handelsblatt* and *Les Echos*; due to limited data availability *Sole* is missing in this exercise. The results confirm the generalised increasing trend in news about EU affairs as a share of total news for both papers. The commonality of the pattern is especially evident around the peaks caused by the financial crisis in the late 2000s and the euro crisis in the first half of the 2010s (Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Europe corpora relative to entire coverage\***



Source: The authors. \*Shares of articles mentioning Europe, three-month moving average.

The consistency of our findings with previous research confirms that newspapers are talking more about European integration. This can provide a broader and quite rough answer to the fact that despite the absence of a truly European media landscape, issues related to the European Union have become more and more present in national debates.

However, whether the increased frequency in articles about the EU translates into a full-blown EPS is debatable. Previous research, specifically on media coverage of the euro-crisis (Müller *et al*, 2018b), showed that within common topics and frames there can be divergences in the narratives crafted at the national level, which can potentially contribute to the perception of dominance of certain actors or states.

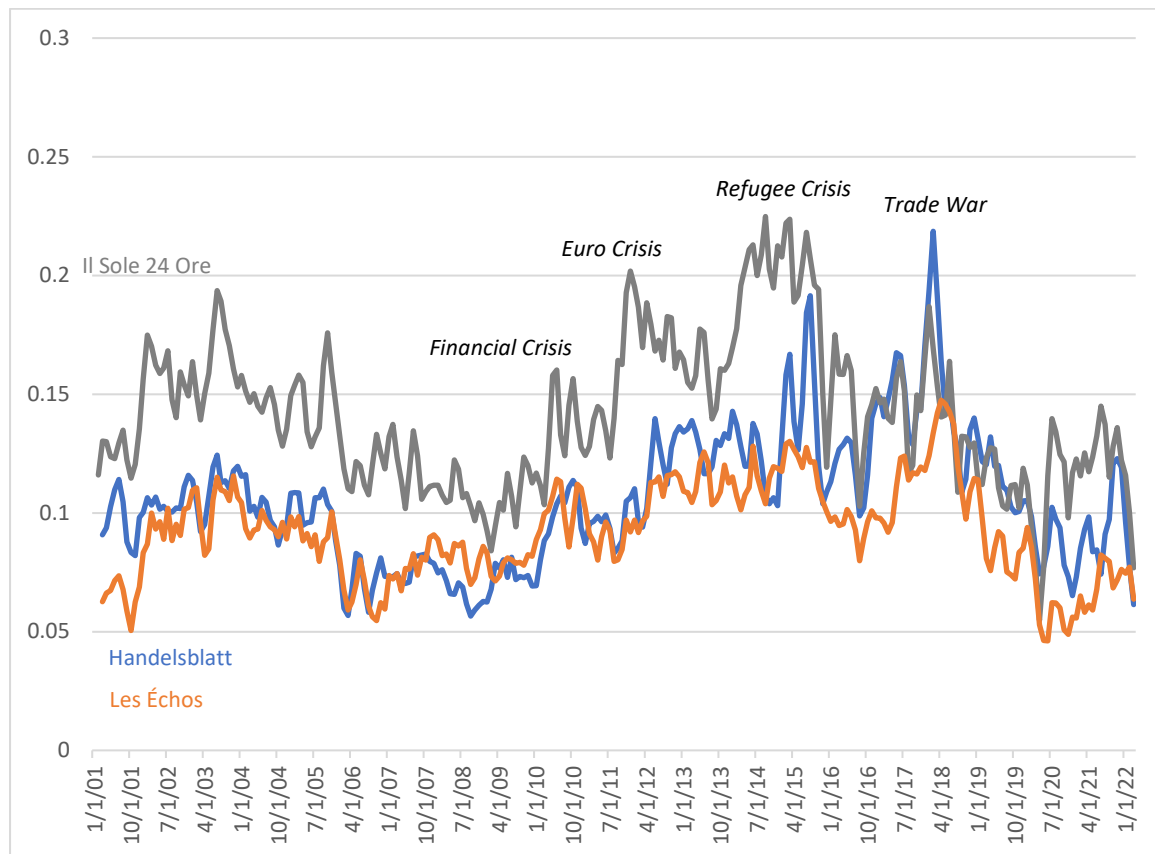
For this reason, our focus on reporting on European reforms can shed some light on our subsequent research questions.



#### 4.1 To what extent are reforms covered over time?

As described in section 3, we created a set of reform-specific corpora. In an additional step we applied a topic-modelling exercise to carve out the themes that European reforms are associated with. Figure 3 shows the overall frequency of the reform corpora and associated events.

**Figure 3: Reform-related corpora\* and selected events**



Source: The authors. \*Shares relative to European corpora, three-month moving averages.

The data underlines the familiar tendency of the media to focus on distinct events. When a crisis hits, coverage is intense, but it peters out soon afterwards, as the Issue Attention Cycle approach (Downs, 1972) would predict. The media stresses immediate challenges, and shifts its focus to the next big issue once the negative surprise of an event has subsided. The financial and euro crises, as well as the refugee crisis and the trade war in the 2010s, caused high-intensity debates about the consequences for the EU. But they subsided when the initial shock was digested, leaving little legacy in terms of on-going reform debates. What is more, neither the failed attempt to ratify a European Constitution in 2005, the Brexit referendum, nor the COVID-19 crisis triggered noticeable coverage of extra reform efforts.

However, the frequency curves shown in Figure 3 suggest some degree of *synchronisation* of the reform debates in the three countries. After all, the events highlighted show up in all the three papers, but synchronisation is more advanced between Italy and Germany, where major common peaks are associated with the refugee crisis in the 2010s and the trade war in particular, while *Les Échos* seems to follow a somewhat different pattern. The observed Italo-German parallelism need not mean the two countries share a common reform agenda; it may simply be a representation of the fact that the underlying shocks – unchecked mass immigration and new obstacles to merchandise goods – hit the two countries harder than they hit France.

#### **4.2 What are the patterns of reform coverage in the three newspapers?**

##### *European reforms in Les Échos*

For *Les Échos*, the topics related to European reforms encompass, broadly speaking, two types of issue. First, there are topics that contain news that is relevant to businesses and classic economic news reporting. Such topics include work, employment and retirement; the challenges of international competition; career changes and new appointments. Second, the topics more directly related to EU affairs and comparable to the other two newspapers we study, are: financial regulation (topic 3), EU reforms (topic 12), Greek debt crisis (topic 10) and national reforms (topic 16).

Among these topics, four elements stand out.

First, *national reforms* clearly played a dominant role until 2015. Reform of the French retirement system alone created all major peaks: 2003 (Fillon), 2008 (*régimes spéciaux*), 2010 (Woerth) and 2014 (Touraine). While the connection to the EU is limited in the discussion of the specifics of the pension reforms, several articles included in this topic explicitly relate to the EU ‘golden rule’ about budget deficits and respect for the Maastricht criteria. With the exception of the COVID-19 crisis and a marginal overtaking in 2019, the topic of national reform (16) was always at higher frequency than EU reform (12).

Second, the main topic focused on *EU reforms* (12) is related to news about the drafting and ratification of the European Constitution. In that period, the complexity of rules can be criticised (Nice); the implications of referendums were discussed (on euro membership, on enlargement and on the Constitution); the political setup of the treaty was debated (neoliberalism); and finally, Giscard’s role was underlined. The topic of EU reforms declined slowly after 2004-5 and the failure of the adoption of the European constitution, and oscillated more notably after 2016 (partly because of Brexit), after

Macron's election in 2017, dropping and rising again after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, reflecting debates about the role of the EU. In terms of policy areas, reform-related topics after 2004-05 included: further reform of the Treaties; the debate about European Central Bank policy (including the euro-area crisis); and the debate about the evolution of the legal framework for businesses and governments.

Third, the peak around the *Greek debt crisis* (10) in 2015 was sudden but remained at a lower level than the 2003 peak concerning the reform of the French pension system.

Fourth, the topic related to *financial regulation* (3) logically overtook that of EU reform with the Global Financial Crisis, and declined steadily from 2011, until 2014 when the trends crossed again with EU reform retaking the lead.

Reporting in *Les Échos* on EU reforms is therefore more reactive than pre-emptive in anticipation of coming crises; and is primarily framed through domestic lenses.

Only two topics out of the 20 identified view developments primarily through an EU-level lens, as opposed to domestic-level lenses: ECB policy (topic 1) and EU change (focusing on the European constitution, topic 12). Both can be attributed to the dimensions of *vertical EPS*.

Two topics related to EU reforms appear as standalone topics: Greece and Germany (topic 10), Italy, and Brexit (topic 11). These topics focus on specific countries, or bilateral relationships, and on their consequences for Europe as a whole. In that sense they can be interpreted as manifestations of *horizontal EPS*.

The place of *Europe in the world* appears explicitly through two topics only: one focusing very broadly on the international political situation (topic 5) and another on facing international competition (topic 19). In other words, the issue of so-called European sovereignty does not seem to be fully framed as an autonomous topic as reported in *Les Échos*.

#### *European reforms in Il Sole*

For *Il Sole*, the topics covered within the corpus of the articles linked to European reforms are, similarly to *Les Échos*, divided between those articles reporting business news, the broader coverage of political news and opinion articles.

Among the topics with larger shares we find: industrial policy (topic 1), labour markets, pensions and social issues (topic 3), tax reforms (topic 13) and justice reforms (topic 20). Concerning the topics which are also found in other newspapers, we find a more clear-cut focus on banking regulation (topic 19), debt crisis with a focus on Greece (topic 5) and national reforms (topic 16).

A big share (11.6% of the corpus) is linked to general articles about European politics (topic 18), EU governance reforms (topic 10), and national politics, which in the corpora refers to European politics in one way or another (topic 7).

Core topics of European politics and EU governance cover institutional events, from the European convention to the rejection of the constitution, to the enlargement in the early 2000s, to Brexit and most recently, NGEU and the future of Europe debates. This follows the general trend of an initial peak in the early 2000s with the debates on the European Convention, which from 2005 and the rejection of the constitution, decreased steadily with the global financial crisis. The euro crisis clearly brought up the topic again in the years of the debt crisis and the Monti government (2011-15), and peaked with the Greek referendum and the migration crisis of 2015. A similar peak is observed for the debt crisis/Greek crisis topic, for 2012 and 2015. After 2015 the frequency of articles decreased, with a smaller rebound after the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic during the discussions on the NGEU programme, but far from the levels observed in 2015.

National reforms are not very present in the corpora until the peaks of the measures taken between 2011 and 2013 to face the sovereign debt crisis. In Italy the reporting of national politics became intertwined with European politics when a spending review and structural reforms on pensions and other sectors were put in place by the Monti government.

Justice reforms (topic 20), or reforms linked to the legal system, make up a particularly important topic in Italy. Firstly because of the politicisation of the debates about the judicial systems since the 1990s, which through a series of corruption cases changed the political landscape. But also linked to Silvio Berlusconi's trials and so forth. Secondly, there was significant reporting on the compliance of the Italian legal system with European legislation, which is reported especially in the business sections.

The topic of financial and banking regulation follows a pattern very similar to the other newspapers, with a peak during the financial crisis and the euro crisis, and then a reduction.

An in-depth reading of the articles that speak directly about *EU-level reforms* in *Il Sole* shows that it is hard to generalise the approach of the newspaper towards the topic of reform, firstly because in the various historical periods, the mood towards the framing and the reporting has changed, and second, because the most interesting articles which would allow a framing of the debate beyond the simple reporting of the news, are usually opinion pieces which vary in tone according to who the guest authors are. This division of the corpus between article reporting news and articles reporting opinions is important to bear in mind.

First, when looking at the news reporting, we get a confirmation of the fact that EU-level reforms are brought up only while the discussion at the political level is happening. This was seen for instance in 2000 during the debate on the change in the Treaty to allow the enlargement in 2004, with the failure of the constitutional treaty, during the migration crisis, the call for the reform of the Dublin treaty while the emergency was being managed at humanitarian level. This confirms that the topic of EU reforms is not covered with the urgency it would deserve, meaning not covered at the times when a political debate is not influenced by a crisis or a sense of a tight deadline to be met.

The years between 2000 and 2004 are among the most dense in terms of news reporting about wider institutional reforms. It is not the case as this is a period with a Treaty Change in 2000 and the works of the European Convention that worked for the European Constitution proposal. However, another element to be considered is that at that time, Romano Prodi was president of the European Commission. Having an Italian at the helm of the institution triggered more detailed reporting of the Commission's workings in this period.

The financial crisis years were overall important for many discussions about the role of the EU and its future, but those are more extensively discussed in the opinion sections, where they link to the blame game (see Müller *et al*, 2018b) around the responsibilities for the crisis. The migration crisis in 2015-16 seems to have sparked more reporting with a link to EU reforms than the Brexit debate, which happened at the same time and continued to be present in the reporting section also in the subsequent years.

In 2020 and 2021, the discussions centre on the pandemic, the EU budget and the rule of law, but did not pick up on the wider need for Treaty reforms. The Conference on the Future of Europe is almost not present in the news section.

Last but not least, the debate on differentiated integration was very much present in the first part of the 2000s, but became less of a topic from the end of the decade.

The commentaries sections of the newspaper offer a more varied spectrum of analysis and this is not necessarily linked to the news cycle.

There are cyclical philosophical reflections about the role of Europe. Examples include the need to revitalise the project with a moral and an emotional appeal, the need to reflect on the populist stance versus the 'elites', the debate over the values that should underpin the European construction, the institutional conflicts between the European Parliament, Commission and Council as a sign of a deeper crisis, and a loss of the sense of direction of the European project.

Those are all themes that run through the decades, beyond the specific news reporting mentioned above. The overall tone of these critical reflections becomes more and more pessimistic as time passes, with alternating voices that flag that the 'ever closer Union' is not a necessary teleological goal which is achievable, and voices trying to rejuvenate the European debate and make it appealing again. It also shows the progressive fatigue in reporting and commenting on grand institutional or treaty reforms. The absence of the Conference for the Future of Europe is a case in point, if considered against the starting point of the reporting on the Treaty change in 2000 and the Constitution.

So, in a nutshell, *Il Sole* seems to reflect quite faithfully the state of the debate about the EU in Italy. Despite being a business-oriented newspaper, it captures the mood, at least in the framing of the commentaries, of different sectors of society.

#### *European Reforms in Handelsblatt*

Different to the French and the Italian LDA models, the German one from *Handelsblatt* reveals a strong focus on reforms at national level in response to developments in the EU and in the global economy.

Five of the topics deal specifically with *domestic economic policy reforms*, making up a combined share of almost a third of the analysis corpus. They all deal with the fundamental question of how Germany is coping in a highly competitive environment. This can be attributed to a strategy of *voluntary domestic differentiation*: striving to do things differently because outside pressures render the *status quo* unsustainable.

While Topic 10 ('German reflections'), containing intellectual deliberations about the German mindset, the country's place in Europe and in history, has no clear temporal focus and is relevant over the entire observation period, the other topics are significant only during limited periods.

In the early 2000s 'Reforming Germany' (Topic 7) is prominent. Its content deals with the dismal performance of the domestic economy, particularly the weakness of the industrial Mittelstand at the time. Similarly, Topic 5 ('Taxes and Transfers') reflects the intense debates about reforming the revenue system and the welfare state. Both topics faded from attention from the mid-2000s as the performance of the German economy improved.

Subsequently, Topic 12, labelled 'Innovation domestically', gained in prominence, dealing with how to raise productivity by improving research and development, education, science and technology. Its frequency curve followed a rising trend during the 2010s. The focus is clearly on the national level. Domestic performance is typically benchmarked against the best performers elsewhere in Europe and beyond. Towards the end of the observation period, a fifth topic of comparable reformist thrust is 'Green transition' (Topic 4), concerned with decarbonising Germany. Its frequency took off in the late 2010s, along with the Fridays for Future movement and rising concern about climate change in both politics and business.

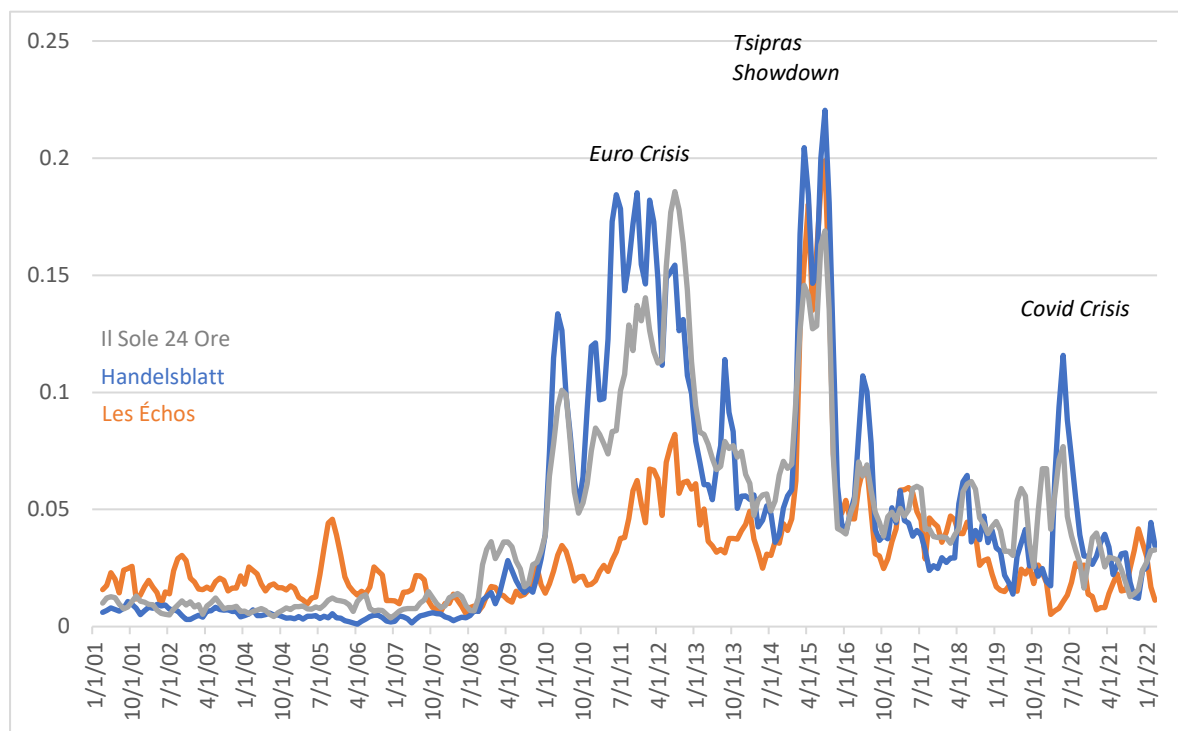
The *European dimension of reforms* is captured by a set of topics. They involve aspects that can be attributed to vertical and horizontal dimensions of an emerging EPS. A first set consists of 'horizontal European topics', covering political and economic developments in other member countries (Topic 13), which is a cluster of articles about a range of countries (Italy, Spain, France, Poland, etc). Another set is 'Reforming Greece' (Topic 6), which had a significant share during the country's sovereign debt crisis, dealing with the question of how to support and structurally reform Greece. Meanwhile, most European topics involve aspects of *vertical European Public Sphere*. Coverage focusing on EU institutions and policies clearly dominates in 'Competition Policy' (Topic 1), 'EU Foreign policy' (Topic 14), and 'Monetary Policy' (Topic 2), the latter offering a critical account of the ECB's expanding responsibilities and toolkit. 'Reforming Banking' (Topic 15) entails aspects of both the alleviation of problems in the national banking system, which was particularly acute in the early 2000s, and EU-driven proposals in response to the financial crisis. In turn, Topic 17, 'Reforming Europe', deals specifically with the fundamental reforms at EU level, such as the failed attempt to ratify the Constitution. The debates tend to be framed as controversies between France and Germany. We return to this issue – and its equivalents in the other two newspapers – in more detail in section 4.3.

### Some comparative reflections

We find broadly comparable reporting patterns in the three LDA models. Different national perspectives play a prominent role, while there is some degree of attention synchronisation with respect to developments of pan-European significance.

The most pronounced parallel movements can be observed in relation to the Greek debt crisis. Figure 4 shows the shares of the three corresponding topics over time. There are three distinct points of culmination: the climax of the euro-area debt crisis in 2011-12 (which was largely resolved after the ECB vowed to keep the euro area together “whatever it takes”), the stand-off between the leftist Greek government and its creditors in the first half of 2015, and the COVID-19 crisis that briefly sparked fears of a return of the country’s debt sustainability problems in 2020. Like in Figure 3, a considerable synchronism of the Italian and German coverage can be observed, while French reporting patterns are somewhat, but not completely, different.

**Figure 4: Covering the Greek debt crisis\* and related events**



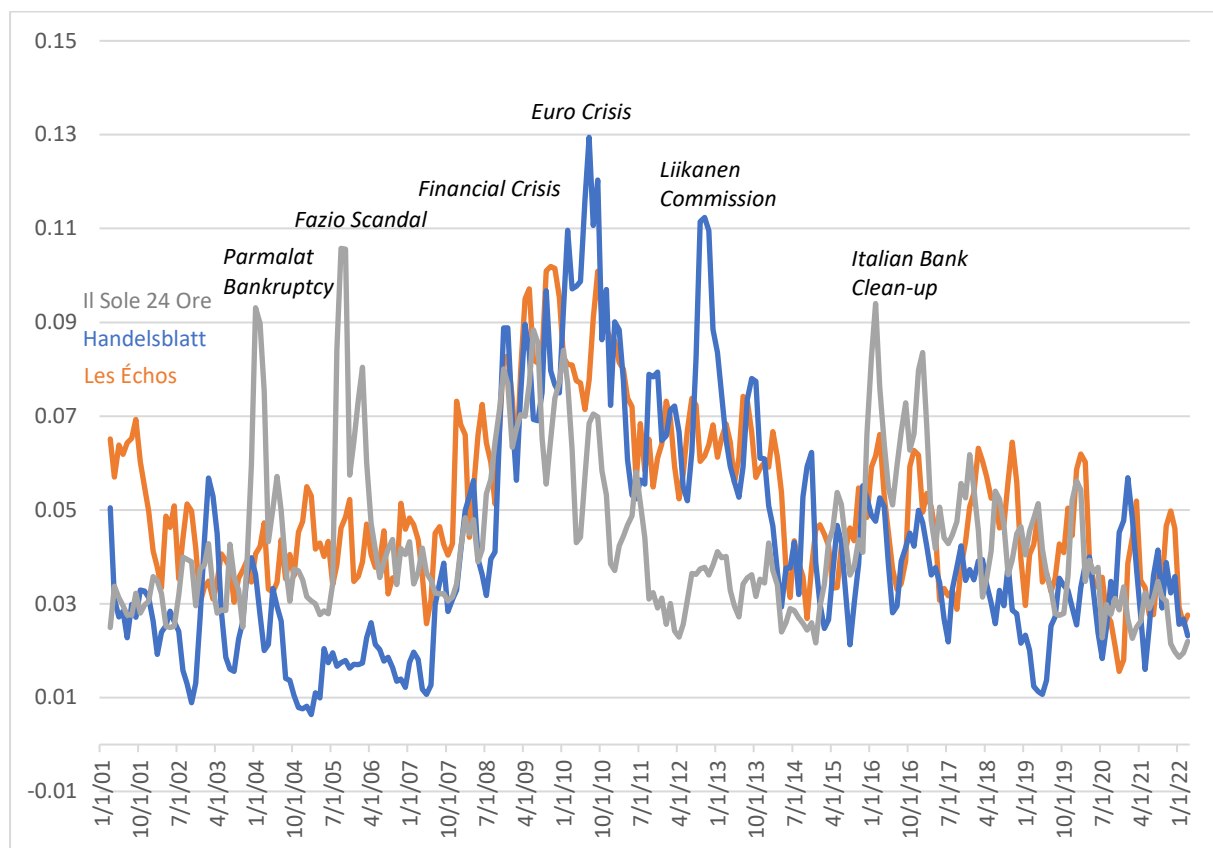
Source: The authors. \*Shares of topic relative to reform-related corpora, three-month moving average.

Another example is the three comparable topics concerning banking reforms (Figure 5). While there are idiosyncratic movements, common developments can be detected at times. The focal period of these topics is the financial crisis of 2008, which was triggered by an international chain-reaction of



banking stress, triggering debates about an overhaul of the entire financial system. At that time, all the three topics moved in sync. Before this watershed moment, national requirements differed, with Germany suffering a minor banking crisis in 2003. Italy, experienced a major accounting scandal at food conglomerate Parmalat in 2003-04, that led to the company's bankruptcy; in 2005 it was revealed that the governor of the Bank of Italy, Antonio Fazio, had intervened in a banking merger. Fazio had to step down and consequently, the governor's term was limited to six years.

**Figure 5: Covering banking reforms and related events\***



Source: The authors. \*Shares of topic relative to reform-related corpora, three-month moving average.

After the financial crisis retreats, the issue of banking sector reforms largely faded from public attention, with two exceptions: in Germany, the Liikanen group's recommendations<sup>4</sup> prompted *Handelsblatt* to report intensively in 2013 (but not the other two newspapers); in Italy, the clean-up of

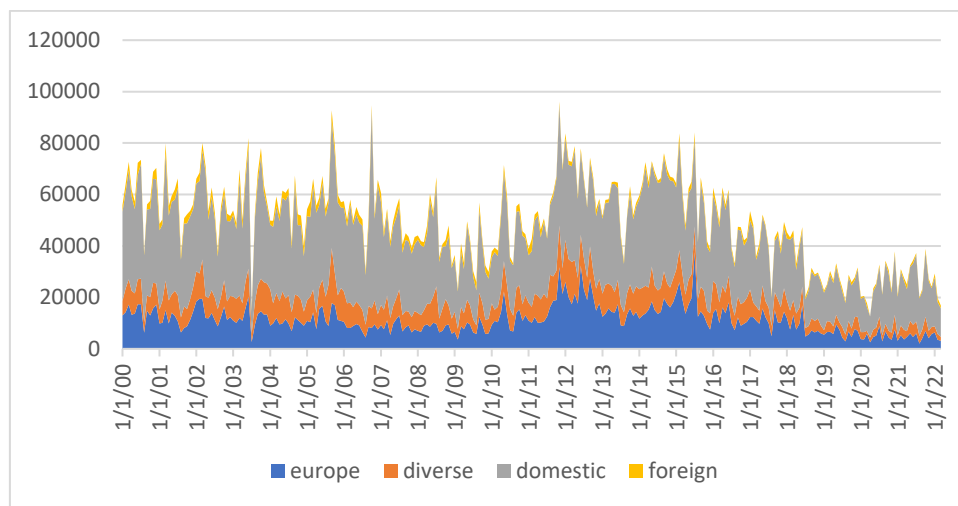
<sup>4</sup> The Liikanen Report or *Report of the European Commission's High-level Expert Group on Bank Structural Reform*, produced by the so-called Liikanen Group, is a set of recommendations published in October 2012 by a group of experts led by Erkki Liikanen, governor of the Bank of Finland and ECB council member.

the banking sector's bad debts in the mid-2010s, in line with new euro area-wide rules, generated considerable attention.

### 4.3 Is the coverage of reforms primarily directed at national or at European level?

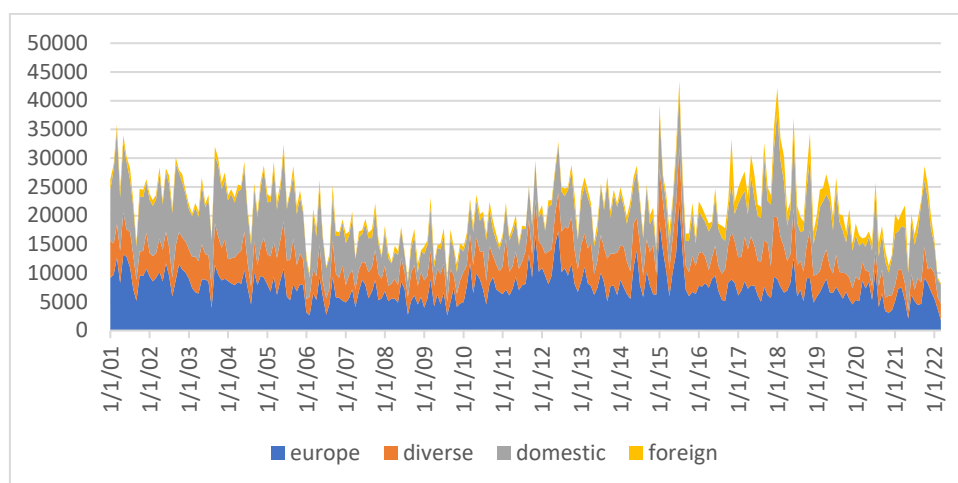
To identify the relative importance of reporting on reforms with respect to the domestic, European and international levels, we categorised the topics in terms of their thematic focus, and added a fourth category that cannot be clearly assigned ('diverse'). We counted the absolute number of articles over time in each of the three corpora. Figures 6a) – c) show the results.

**Figure 6a): Geographical focus in Il Sole\***



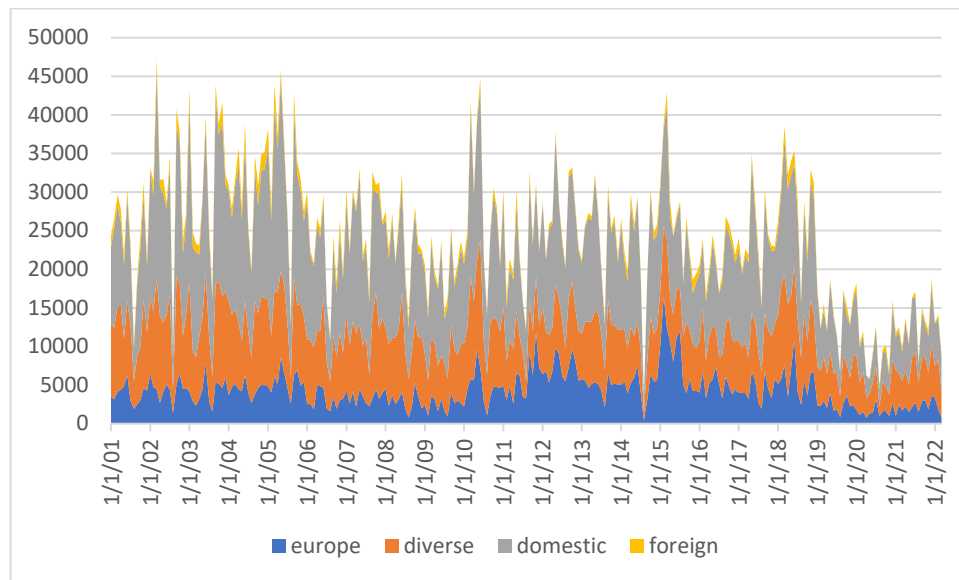
Source: The authors. \*Absolute number of articles in reform-related corpus.

**Figure 6b): Geographical focus in Handelsblatt\***



Source: The authors. \*Absolute number of articles in reform-related corpus.

**Figure 6c): Geographical focus in Les Échos\***



Source: The authors. \*Absolute number of articles in reform-related corpus.

Note that the figures are representations of the coverage of issues related both to the EU and to reforms in three leading business newspapers. So, where domestic clusters are most pronounced, the related articles deal predominantly with national political or economic matters that relate in some way to European issues. Hence, the grey plots in the figures indicate certain degrees of self-concentration of the respective public, or the individual newspaper. In turn, the need for European reforms, dealt with in articles associated with the blue plots, looms rather large in the 2010s, in the wake of the financial and the euro crises, but fades out of sight towards the end of the observation period.

However, there are significant differences between the three newspapers. The share of European news in *Handelsblatt* is greater than in *Les Échos* and *Il Sole*. Through the French and Italian newspapers' lens, coverage of European news remains primarily national.

In the case of *Les Échos*, topics 6 and 7 relate to French domestic politics, topic 8 to agricultural reforms through the specific French lens, topic 9 to career changes and appointments with a national perspective. Major economic reforms coming up in topics 13 (legal), 14 (business), 15 (energy), work and employment (18), international competition (19), are all primarily reported through their domestic impact rather than their European implications. However, at the most intense times of crisis between 2012 and 2018 (euro crisis and refugee crisis), the share of Europe-related news in the total increased markedly, even if it remained lower than domestic news (see Figure 6c).

Similarly, the overall pattern observed in *Il Sole* clearly leans towards a predominance of coverage of domestic over Europe aspects. First, the curve progression is stable throughout the 2000s until the first phase of the financial crisis hit, when the share of Europe-oriented articles declined even further. Throughout the 2010s, especially during the euro crisis, the number of articles linked to reforms in a European context was overall higher, and the number of Europe-oriented articles increased in absolute terms. From 2019 on, there was an overall decrease in the debate and an even lower ratio tilting towards national orientation, with the most pronounced drop in 2020 linked to the COVID-19 health crisis, which hit Italy particularly hard at the beginning of the pandemic. What we observed from a qualitative scanning of the articles over time was the prevalence, in national news, of references to European legislation in articles speaking about domestic business news, or industrial policy. Moreover, most of the Europe-related articles maintained a primarily national spin (consequences for Italian businesses, or for Italian politics, or for Italian citizens), and rarely compared the domestic situation with the experiences of other EU member states. However, this pattern can be attributed to the fact that EU-related legislation and reform debates become embedded in national discourse more and more, as the EU level is increasingly seen as another layer of governance to be considered in national news.

To be sure, while *Handelsblatt* deals more intensively with European issues than its European peers, and mostly from a vertical EPS angle – focusing on common institutions such as the European Commission or the ECB, as discussed in the preceding section – these findings say little about the framing. A qualitative analysis of the top articles reveals that the issues at stake tend to be presented with a distinctly German flavour. This is most notably the case with respect to ‘Monetary Policy’, on which the national preoccupation with inflation and central bank independence clearly shapes the coverage of ECB policies. The Greek debt crisis (‘Reforming Greece’) is another case in point, as the conflict between Athens and its creditors was partly portrayed as a showdown between two pairs of Greco-German adversaries: Yanis Varoufakis vs Wolfgang Schäuble (the finance ministers), Alexis Tsipras vs Angela Merkel (the heads of government).

#### **4.4 Are there shared narratives about EU-level reforms?**

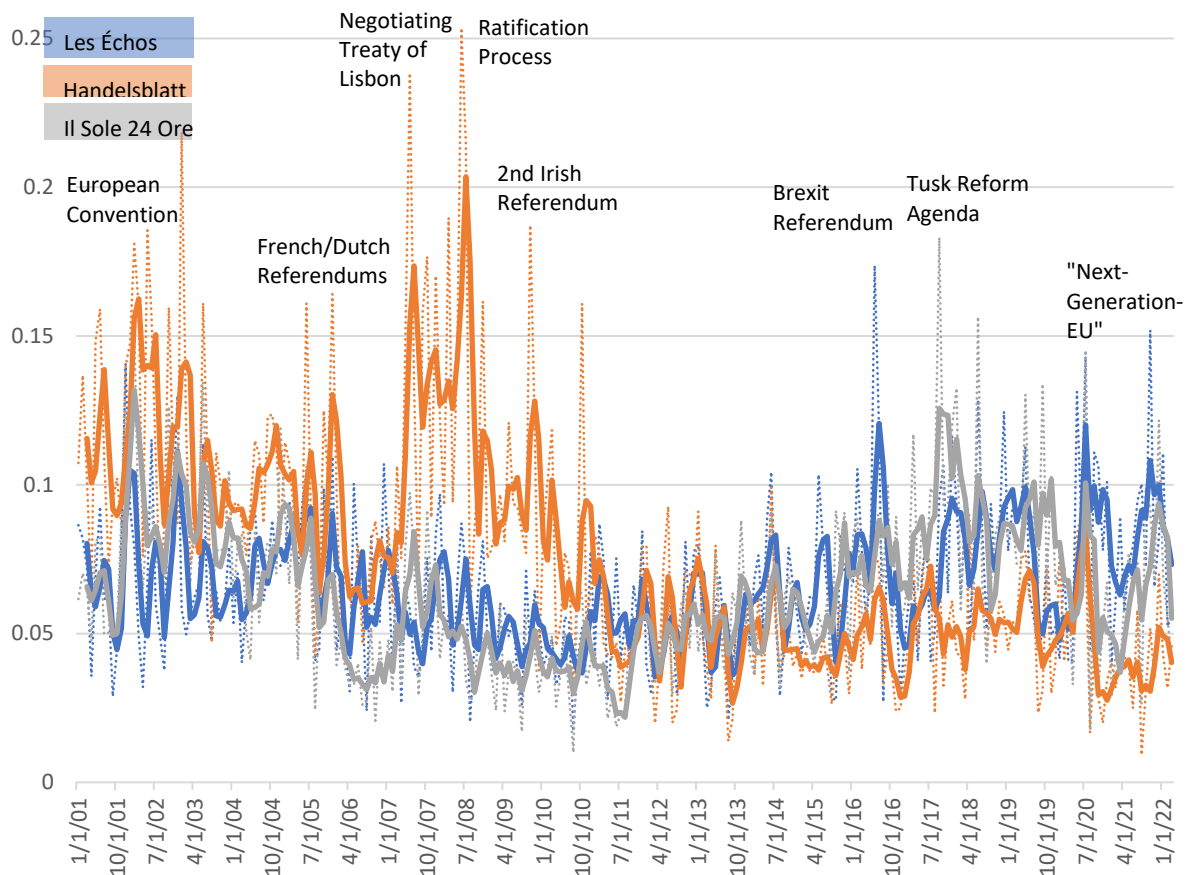
In pondering RQ3, we have looked at the coverage of European reform debates in their entirety, regardless of whether they are directed at the level of individual member states or at the EU. RQ4 specifically deals with the latter.

In each of the corpora, a topic can be identified that deals with EU-level reforms. Contrary to other topics, these three clusters of articles are not primarily concerned with specific policy areas such as competition or monetary policy, but more fundamentally with the entire set-up of the EU. Figure 7 provides an overview of the topics' importance over time. Clearly, the big debates about Europe took place in the early 2000s. It was a time when the European project was forcefully pushed forward: after monetary union had been achieved, Eastern enlargement was looming, and the EU needed to get ready for the accession of ten more member states. A Convention was set up to work on a European Constitution, with the media taking notice.

However, after the Constitution was rejected by referendums in France and the Netherlands in spring 2005, public attention declined rapidly. *Les Échos* and *Il Sole* all but stopped their reporting. *Handelsblatt*, in contrast, continued covering the negotiations that followed concerning the Treaty of Lisbon, which was supposed to salvage the Constitution's central provisions bent on preserving the EU's overall functionality in light of the enlargement of the 2000s. However, the interest was not solely driven by European motivations, but also by the difficulties of the Berlin government, which held the rotating EU Council presidency during a critical phase of the negotiations in the first half of 2007. When the Treaty was signed in December 2007, the ratification process started, culminating in a rejection in an Irish referendum. The troubles were only resolved when Ireland held a second referendum in autumn 2009 (causing a last peak in *Handelsblatt's* coverage), finally paving the way for the Treaty to come into effect in December that year. The drama was largely absent from *Il Sole* and *Les Échos*. After that, the debate about the future of Europe died down in all the three newspapers.

Only after the Brexit referendum in 2016, did *Les Échos* pick up on the issue, highlighting the need to reinvigorate the European project, given increased uncertainty. A year later, *Il Sole* highlighted a reform agenda put forward by Donald Tusk, the then President of the European Council. Both events caused a jump in the two papers' frequency curves. Towards the end of the observation period, the French and Italian publications reported on the issue of EU reforms with significantly greater relative intensity and constancy than their German peer. In particular, the adoption of the COVID-19 crisis relief fund (NextGenerationEU) in summer 2020, prompted considerable coverage.

**Figure 7: Topics capturing EU-level reforms\* and related events**



Source: The authors. \*Share relative to reform-related corpus; topics 12 (LM), 17 (HB), 10 (Sole); three-month moving averages, and monthly values (dotted lines).

While the trends in the frequency curves diverge somewhat, the curve progressions reveal a substantial degree of synchronisation, particularly after 2010 when the succession of peaks and troughs is largely congruent. Reporting is driven by the same events, although not with identical intensity. This pattern could be attributed to the concept of the *intersectional dimension of EPS*.

Turning to the concept of the *media narrative* sketched in section 2, we consult the lists of top words and top articles.

Table 9 contains the translated top 30 words, ie the most characteristic terms, of each of the three EU reform topics (Note that the cut-off point at rank 30 in the top word lists is somewhat arbitrary; for top 100 lists see the annex).

**Table 9: Top 30 words of EU reform topics (translated)**

Handelsblatt (Topic 17)	Il Sole (Topic 10)	Les Echos (Topic 12)
EU	commission	commission
Brussels	countries	The union
France	Brussels	European
Commission	EU	Brussels
EU-commission	France	States
European	Germany	Country
member states	European	Europe
Sarkozy	president	members
EU States	French	Treaty
Paris	of the union	Europeans
France	members	commissioner
Germany	Merkel	parliament
heads of government	Council	Summit
French	chancellor	Council
Union	Summit	ministers
Chirac	German	France
Juncker	Minister	presidency
Merkel	Paris	Germany
Berlin	Berlin	Rules
Great Britain	Europeans	Paris
Europe	Commissioner	European
Barroso	Community	community
Reform	Premier	Agreement
Schröder	National	Text
Common	Ministers	Read
EU summit	Treaty	Project
European parliament	German	Politics
Must	Britain	Budget
National	Said	Union
proposals	Sarkozy	constitution

The similarities are evident. *Protagonists* include European and national institutions – the Council, the Parliament, national governments (often referred to by country name or capital city – (France, Germany, Britain, Paris, Berlin...)) – and individual politicians who played prominent roles at various times (Barroso, Sarkozy, Juncker, Merkel, Schröder...). The outsized importance of the tense Franco-German partnership to move integration forward is also prevalent in Italian newspaper *Il Sole*. As far as

events are concerned, summits, taking place in Brussels most of the time, are key moments in the EU reform theatre.

In terms of *framing*, there are several terms suggesting the struggle, but also the will, to find common ground, characterised by words like 'common', 'treaty', 'project', or 'proposal'. Further insights are derived from an up-close reading the most characteristic articles ('top texts'). These texts usually focus on disagreements, conflicts, and set-backs.

Typical headlines of the topics' characteristic articles read:

### ***Il Sole***

20.05.2000 *In search of the lost axis - A Rambouillet summit between the leaders of France and Germany to relaunch the "motor" of Europe*

16.01.2003 *Controversy over the Paris and Berlin plan - EU reforms - the project of a double European presidency, launched by Chirac and Schröder, meets with consensus but also perplexity*

22.07.2008 *"The EU respects the result of the Irish referendum"*

06.06.2018 *Migrants, EU split over the new Dublin*

12.03.2019 *Brussels worries a Germany too lukewarm about reforms - After the article by the CDU leader*

### ***Les Echos***

17.12.2001 *Giscard d'Estaing will lead the reform of Europe*

30.05.2003 *European Convention: criticisms multiply against Giscard's project*

21.09.2006 *The Barroso Commission lacks inspiration*

13.05.2011 *MEPs opposed to the revision of the agreements*

18.02.2016 *Should the treaties be reviewed?*

### ***Handelsblatt***

30.11.2001 *Controversy about new EU convention sharpens*



23.19.2002 *Giscard runs into massive opposition*

26.3. 2007 *Merkel drives EU forward*

11.02.2010 *Heads of governments grab for power in Europe*

12.9. 2017 *Eurozone slows down reform efforts*

Note that the general thread of the articles clustered in the EU-reform topics is somewhat similar. While at times different aspects are stressed, eg Italy's strong interest in the reformulation of immigration policies, all three newspapers stress the need for Europe to move towards closer integration in general and highlight the obstacles in the way.

With appropriate caution, we draw out a common EU-reform narrative along the lines cited in section 2, that reads as follows:

- Europe is confronted by a changing geopolitical landscape and instability from within, epitomised by the refugee crisis, the euro crisis and Donald Trump's trade war (*problem definition*). Alas, the EU is prone to internal quarrels hindering progress (*problem diagnosis*). The resulting uncertainty is bad for business, the economy and for the wellbeing of its citizens in general, with special responsibility falling on the (sputtering) two-cylinder motor of integration, France and Germany (*moral judgement*). Major *protagonists* of this story are the heads of government (and state) of Germany and France, and the presidents of the Commission. The story unfolds in a series of (failed) attempts to move forward (*events*). (*Possible remedies* are largely missing.)

As social narratives about continuing developments go, there is no ending, and at each point in time it is unclear how the current situation will play out eventually. Contrary to narratives about historic developments, in which causes and effects may be claimed to be clear with the benefit of hindsight, the present and the future are surrounded by profound uncertainty. To overcome this uncertainty, resorting to collective stories that create an imagined community is a time-tested strategy. Like in the old football hymn, "Walk on, walk on/With hope in your heart/And you'll never walk alone", striding on together and hoping it'll all work out all right, even though the final destination is unknown, may be the best option. After all, what we find in the media we analysed is an ongoing conversation about the future of the European project, with plenty of communicative spillovers between member countries.

Whether these narratives are sufficient to solve the problems is a different matter. But at least the EPS seems to be integrated to an extent, given that in Europe *you'll never talk alone*.

Nevertheless, the effects of the existence of related narratives for the EPS should not be overestimated. The corresponding topics make up only a tiny fraction of the entire news coverage towards the end of the observation period: Figure 7 shows the topics' shares relative to the reforms-related sub-corpus, which has declined considerably since 2018 (Figure 3).

## **5 Let's try more contestation – Conclusions**

In this paper, we have analysed the coverage of reforms in a European context in the leading business newspapers in the three biggest EU member states: *Handelsblatt* (Germany), *Les Échos* (France) and *Il Sole 24 Ore* (Italy). Applying a mixed-method approach, that combines quantitative with qualitative steps, allows exploration of the publication history from 2001 to February 2022. The observation period encompasses some momentous developments, notably the financial and the euro crises, the refugee crisis of 2015-16, Brexit, the COVID-19 pandemic and intra-EU events including the Eastern enlargement of the bloc, the final stage of the adoption of the euro, and the failed attempt to introduce a European Constitution in the first half of the 2000s. Undeniably, both the environment in which the EU operates and the setup of the EU itself have been subject to profound changes during our observation period. Coping with substantial transformations requires adaptation. It comes as little surprise, then, that calls for 'reforms' are part of the background noise in public discourses. To be sure, 'reform' is a catch-all term, that largely leaves open the question of who should change what, induced by whom, to achieve which objective. For the EU to evolve, answers to this question are of utmost importance. Hence, the focus of this paper.

Our findings can be summarised as follows:

- Europe plays a more and more important role in the content of national newspapers. The financial crisis and the euro crisis led to a lasting upward shift in the Europeanisation of (business) news.
- The need for reform in general is a central theme during times of crisis, but peters out quickly afterwards. In recent years, media focus on reforms has declined steadily. Somewhat surprisingly, the COVID-19 crisis has not sparked much of a debate.
- Reform debates are focused at the national level. European issues were more prominent during the 2010s, but had largely faded from media coverage by the end of the observation period.

- Some events of common interest trigger synchronised media attention cycles, resulting in a temporarily shared focus in the media considered. This was particularly the case during the Greek debt crisis and, albeit to a lesser extent, with respect to banking reforms in the wake of the financial crisis.
- The issue of reforming the EU setup in general has all but faded from media awareness. Since the failed attempt to establish a European Constitution and the implementation of the Treaty of Lisbon in the 2000s, the issue has played only a minuscule role in overall reporting. However, from time to time some event may give the issue a little boost. It can be argued, though, that the three newspapers we have analysed share a common narrative with regard to EU-level reforms, deeming them necessary, but unattainable.

Our analysis is based on content from business news media. These newspapers are leading publications with a strong influence on other ‘follower’ media. They cater to an internationally-minded audience and cultivate a sober, matter-of-fact reporting style. Therefore, they can hardly be seen as representative of the overall media landscapes of their respective home countries. Still, the fact that even the arguably most Europeanised media brands put little emphasis on reforms in a European context suggests that the issues at stake play an even lesser role in other media.

With respect to the business newspapers we compared, we conclude that the reporting patterns constitute aspects of an incomplete European public sphere, which works best at times of crisis, when attention cycles tend to be largely synchronised. It would be very interesting to include the Ukraine war, the ensuing energy crisis and the subsequent bout of inflation in the analysis, all of which are major pan-European events but were outside our observation period. Maybe at time of writing there is a revival of reform efforts that will show up in future research.

Looking at the results through the lens of the EU3D formula, national differences in reporting can be interpreted as aspects of *differentiation* in a setting of interconnected national public spheres. Where there’s common ground and synchronisation of coverage, we see aspects of *democracy* at work at the European level, as a common public sphere – or the convergence of national ones – is a key precondition for democracy to work at the EU level. *Dominance*, in turn, refers to arbitrary and unjustified forms of rule. It could be attributed to the way the Franco-German pairing is seen as holding the key to progress on EU-level reform, each commanding a group of other countries that need to either fall into line or hold up the entire project. Note however that such an observation only pertains to instances where they depart from or shirk away from established rules and procedures, not when they reinforce the framework of collaboration and reinforce supranational democracy. For big states,

binding collaboration is a form of self-discipline that reduces the scope for power politics. But, as we have seen in recent years, this Franco-German collaboration no longer yields ground-breaking results, as the EU has become larger and more diverse.

This leaves us with two difficult questions: Are the reporting patterns we find *adequate*? And, can we do something about it?

Our measured answer to the highly normative question 1 would be: hardly. While major events are indeed covered and put into the context of European reforms, media awareness tends to subside quickly. But reform processes, particularly at the EU level, are complex and time-consuming endeavours, that afford considerable attention over longer timespans and require politicians to commit themselves to grinding work over the long haul. Therefore, for reforms to be followed through, ongoing public attention – and pressure – is essential, as it serves as an incentive for politicians to devote time and energy to much-resisted causes. This is true for reforms at the national level, but even more so at EU level. Our results suggest that the public is mostly inattentive to long-term EU challenges, and that the need for European reforms is not covered with necessary consistency.

In 1976, Jean Monnet, one of the architects of European integration, expressed his conviction that *“Europe will be forged in crises and will be the sum of the solutions adopted for those crises”*. His optimism may have been well-founded in the circumstances of a small, homogenous Western European Community, where reforms were negotiated among governments behind closed doors. Since then, however, the setting has changed radically. Democratic politics has become more and more ‘mediated’, that is, influenced by publicised debates and public opinion, while the number of member countries has grown threefold since Monnet’s time. Arguably, it’s become a lot harder to actually accomplish reforms. What’s more, to get citizens involved and to do justice to the principle of democracy, vivid ongoing media coverage is indispensable. Four and a half decades after Monnet there is still plenty of room for improvement. What’s needed are partly synchronised agenda-setting patterns in individual EU countries. European reforms need to become a common top priority among member states.

This leads us to question 2: to broaden the frame of reference in reporting in order to reach a more Europeanised perspective, training of journalists or furthering pan-EU media (or transborder co-operations of national media) can be part of the answer. If the national focus of media is primarily the result of editorial routines or a lack of knowledge and transnational experience, these are obstacles that could be tackled. These measures may also improve the media’s ability to influence the policy

agenda and to nudge reluctant politicians into the direction of deepened integration. However, media economic restrictions are harder to overcome. In highly competitive news markets, the audience's attention is a scarce resource. European issues – complex, abstract and rather detached from everyday experience, as they are often presented – are a particularly hard sell.

Is it possible to make 'Europe' a more interesting read? Common narratives about Europe's destiny are fine, but they can also sound boring to the average citizen. *Conflict* and contestation meanwhile are central elements in narrative building as in storytelling in general. Our analysis of media narratives confirms that stories portrayed by the newspapers are often driven by conflict. Conflict indicates uncertainty and danger, which, according to Conviction Narrative Theory (Tuckett and Nikolic, 2017), activates the human cognitive system and prompts attention. Thus, it's for good reasons that journalistic routines imply that a good story needs a good conflict, as it is a natural element of any narrative.

Additionally, there is a link between democracy, conflict and dominance. Conflict is inherent in the democratic dialectic. It is linked to the very idea of a plurality of voices in the democratic arena and subsequent compromise as a tool to find an acceptable solution. It is also linked to democracy as a process, in which conflict can be seen as a positive and transformative methodology. But conflict can also be a pattern of dominance. Especially when it is framed in a highly polarised political spectrum, and in the context of a political contest in which the end game can only be the victory of one side over the other.

Merging the first reflection and the second, we can observe in our analysis how journalism, especially recently, has been rather prone to a version of conflict as a zero-sum game, where simplification through extremisation portray the political battles as zero-sum games. Conversely, when conflict is avoided, an over-emphasis on avoiding any kind of conflict (safe spaces, political correctness etc) can be an equally dangerous pattern that leads to isolated filter bubbles rather than democratic pluralism. We can also say that when conflict is avoided by reducing reporting to technicalities, it portrays the policy arena as distant from citizens' debates, restricted to bureaucratic circles or to elites, and boring to report, as our findings suggest.

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## ANNEX 1

### Topic descriptions of the Handelsblatt LDA model

No	Label	thematic Focus	Share	Content	Protagonists
1	Competition policy	Europe (vertical)	5.5%	Competition policy, merger regulation, EU reforms and domestic effects (reforms) of EU actions	EU commission, EU and national courts, competition authorities, companies
2	Monetary Policy	Europe (vertical)	7.8%	ECB (+Fed, other CBs), expansion of tools, changing strategy, limits and side effects, over-extended mandate?, fiscal dominance?	ECB, Draghi, economists
3	Corporate Restructuring	domestic	4.6%	corp. remodeling due to market and regulatory pressures; shrinking balance sheets, changing business models, M&A, financial sector but also large industrials	Big Banks (Deutsche, HSBC, Commerzbank...), also industrials (Siemens, Telekom, Daimler...)
4	Green Transition	domestic	3%	saving greenhouse gases, emission rights trading, renewables, energy and transport markets, hydrogene tech	Deutsche Bahn, RWE, Eon, federal government,
5	Taxes and Transfers	domestic	4.9%	reforming the German tax code, social transfers	Fed. and State governments, labour unions, employers associations
6	Reforming Greece	Europe (horizontal)	4.7%	The greek sov. Debt crisis, how to support and structurally reform Greece	Greek and German ministers, ESM, ECB, IMF
7	Reforming Germany	domestic	5.6%	What to do about sluggish domestic growth? 2000s theme, mittelstand bankruptcies	Germany, companies, business cycle, research institutes
8	Reforming Emerging Markets	foreign	3.3%	performance-enhancing reforms in China, Mexico, Indonesia etc.	China, Xi, IMF, G20, World Bank, WTO,
9	Reforming America	foreign	2.9%	Challenges to various US administrations, domestic reforms	Trump, Obama, G.W.Bush, Merkel
10	German reflections	diverse	11.4%	Intellectual debates about the German mindset, Europe, history, capitalism, the pope, Merkel, justice	
11	EU Enlargement	Europe (horizontal)	2.1%	EU enlargement, accession countries, controversial issues, Kosovo, migration policy ...	
12	Innovation domestically	domestic	9.9%	Improving German productivity, R&D, Education, Science % Technology, domestic focus, comparisons with foreign/European best performers	Universities, Start-ups, corporations, governments

13	Europe horizontal	Europe (horizontal)	4%	Horizontal EPS view on developments in other EU countries at national level	Italy, Spain, France, Poland, prime ministers, presidents...
14	EU foreign policy	diverse	3.6%	EU (and national) policy vis-à-vis third countries	Russia, Israel, Palestine, Kosovo, Ukraine, USA, Afghanistan
15	Reforming Banking	diverse	4.1%	Strengthening regulation and governance after the financial crisis, scope: national, european, international	ECB, Savings banks, Bafin, Weber, Weidmann, Basle
16	miscellaneous	domestic	1.8%	(Calendar of events entries)	
17	Reforming Europe	Europe	7.5%	Vertical EPS view: sometimes framed as a controversy between France and Germany, failing constitution, Lisbon treaty etc.	Commission, French Presidents, Merkel,
18	Domestic Politics	domestic	5%	Wrangling within and between parties and persons about various issues	SPD, Merkel, CDU, Coalition, Schröder, FDP, Green Party...
19	Arts and Entertainment	Europe	3.9%	Market for fine arts, sports etc., focus on UK and Germany	Blair, Brown, Cameron...
20	Financial Market News	diverse	4.3%	Up and down at bourses in Germany, Europe and international, Stocks, Bonds, Currencies	fund managers, analysts, investors, ECB

### Topic Descriptions of the II Sole LDA Model

Industry	domestic	6.1	Industrial policy and economic development, reforms
Infrastructures	domestic	3.2	News related to logistics, digital and physical infrastructures
Welfare	domestic	4.98	Labour markets, pensions, and social issues
Agriculture	domestic	1.7	Miscellaneous
Debt crisis	europe	4.5	Debt crisis with a specific focus on Greece
Economy		6.5	Evolution of economy
National Politics	domestic	5.3	National politics news but also linked to Europe
Stability Pact	domestic	5.9	News about national reforms or national measures but linked to respect EU parameters
Financial markets	diverse	3.5	News about stock exchange and markets
EU governance	europe	6.8	EU Governance reforms
Culture	domestic	4.0	Cultural pages of the newspaper, focus on history and philosophy
Trade	diverse	4.2	Business news with trade focus
Legislation	domestic	4.9	Taxes reforms
National governance	domestic	6.95	Public administration reforms

Social partners	diverse	3.8	Labour markets, pensions, and social issues
Geopolitics	foreign	3.9	Foreign policy news with specific focus on security
Education	domestic	2.7	News about the school and university system
European politics	europe	11.6	General articles about European politics with a broader angle
Banking	diverse	4.6	News about banking regulation
Legal system	domestic	4.9	Justice reforms

## Topic Descriptions of the Les Echos LDA model

No.	Label	Thematic Focus	Share	Content	Protagonists	Key events and analysis
1	ECB policy	europe	4.69	Discussion, debate, commentary, description of ECB decisions and policy	ECB, eurozone member states, ECB president	Very clear peak in 2012: rise from 2008, peak reached in 2012, then decline until 2017 when return to pre-2008 level. Obvious association to eurozone crisis
2	Economic indicators	diverse	5.76	Commentary on economic indicators: growth, stock exchange, exchange rates	All relevant financial actors: stock exchanges, financial sector	Relatively stable until drop from 2018 until 2021. Not clear why
3	Financial sector	diverse	5.21	Issues related to the financial sector: new regulations, financial innovations	All relevant actors from the financial sector: international regulators/supervisors, banks, insurance companies	Rise from 2008 until peak reached in 2009-2011, then decline until return in 2014 to pre-2008 levels. Nicely mirroring the global financial crisis; but not really the eurozone crisis
4	Legal framework	domestic	3.14	Issues related to legal framework of economic activity, with a predominance of taxation issues	Audiovisual/cultural actors; companies; government	Modest peak in 2011, and rise from 2016 until 2018, then new decline. Difficult to understand these fluctuations
5	International political situation	foreign	3.74	Anything related to the international political situation and crises: Asia, Africa, Middle East ...	All relevant international political actors: governments, international institutions	Overall level remains stable but many occasional fluctuations
6	French domestic situation	Domestic	6.38	Issues related to French domestic situation and politics: social conflicts, economic reforms, political life	French government, trade unions, business organisations, political parties and their leaders	Sudden rise 2002-2003 (consequence of Chirac's reelection?), then decline until new sudden rise in 2007 (Sarkozy's election?), then steady decline until stabilisation at a lower level than in

						2000 around 2017 (associated with new rise: Macron&apos;s election?)
7	French domestic politics	domestic	5.89	Issues related to French domestic political situation: political alliances, political projections, party-politics	French political parties and their leaders	Stable over time, but occasional peaks related to presidential elections most obviously (2002, 2007, 2012, 2017, 2022)
8	Agricultural and food sector	diverse	2.20	Issues related to food and the agricultural sector: evolution of production, impact of international/EU regulations	Agricultural sector, international and EU institutions	Stable overall, except a noticeable drop at the very beginning (unclear why) and occasional oscillations that are difficult to interpret
9	Career changes and nominations	domestic	3.84	Mention and discussion of new appointments and career changes, whether in government or in the private sector	French national and local government, private companies	Stable over time, except a clear peak in mid-2011 and mid-2019 (unclear why)
10	Greece and Germany in Eurozone	europa	3.32	All issues related to Greek and German policies related to the Eurozone: debt rescheduling, bailouts, reparations, political conflict...	Political actors in Greece, Germany, and the EU	Stable over time, except a modest peak in 2012-13, and a major one (approx 6 times increase) in 2015-16 (eurozone crisis)
11	European issues with focus on Italy and Brexit	europa	3.29	Issues related to many different EU countries, but with clear predominance of Italian problems and Brexit	EU national governments and politicians	Peak around 2006-7 and then again 2015-16 (Brexit)
12	EU change	europa	6.65	Topics related to reform of the EU (constitution) and EU enlargement	EU national governments and politicians, EU institutions	Surprisingly stable over time, except a modest rise around 2005 (constitution) and a drop around late 2019 (difficult to interpret)
13	Legal framework bis	diverse	5.78	Issues related to evolution of legal framework : digital regulation, competition policy	National and EU legal actors, governments	Occasional oscillations but two clear periods: 2000s and then drop to lower level for 2010s. Not clear why
14	Business life	diverse	4.13	Topics related to changes in business life: mergers, acquisitions, new strategies	All businesses and new companies	Stable on average over time, with occasional oscillations
15	Energy sector	diverse	2.86	All issues related to the energy sectors	Energy companies	Stable over time until spectacular rise from 2019 (multiplied by approx 10

						compared to 2018 level) reflecting the energy crisis
16	Debt and deficit	domestic	5.56	Discussion of debt and deficit levels in France, associated with perceived relevant reforms (retirement, taxation)	French government; occasional other EU member states	Rise over the 2010-2015 period, associated to the global financial crisis and eurozone crisis
17	Research and local actors	domestic	3.76	Issues related to academic research and school teaching	French government	2010s at a lower average level than the 2000s; occasional oscillations throughout that are difficult to interpret
18	Work, employment, retirement	diverse	4.83	Issues related to labour market reforms and pensions reforms	Government and social actors, predominantly French but also other European countries (especially Spain)	Peak in 2007 (Sarkozy election?) then occasional oscillation but remaining broadly on same level over time
19	Facing international competition	domestic	6.83	Issues related to international competition; research, innovation, exports	Business actors and government	Stable on average over time, modest increase from 2017 (Macron's narrative about the start-up nation?)
20	Miscellaneous comments on change, reform, crises	domestic	12.15	Topics related to crises and renewal, economic and social change in France, radical change from past traditions	Government, intellectuals, businesses	Modest rise 2005-2007 (run-up to Sarkozy's election which placed 'la rupture' at the heart of his campaign?), then decline, modest increase of trend 2010-15 and sharp decline 2015-22. The 2010-22 evolution is hard to explain.

### Top 100 words of EU-reform topics

Handelsblatt	Les Echos	Il Sole
"Topic 17"	Topic 12	"Topic 10"
"eu"	"commission"	"commissione"
"bruessel"	"lunion"	"paesi"
"frankreich"	"européenne"	"bruxelles"
"kommission"	"européen"	"ue"
"eukommission"	"bruxelles"	"francia"
"europaeischen"	"etats"	"germania"
"mitgliedstaaten"	"pays"	"europa"
"sarkozy"	"leurope"	"europeo"
"eustaaten"	"membres"	"presidente"
"paris"	"traité"	"francese"

"frankreichs"	"européens"	"dellunione"
"deutschland"	"commissaire"	"membri"
"europaeische"	"parlement"	"merkel"
"regierungschefs"	"somet"	"consiglio"
"franzoesischen"	"conseil"	"cancelliere"
"union"	"ministres"	"vertice"
"bruesseler"	"france"	"tedesco"
"chirac"	"présidence"	"ministro"
"franzoesische"	"lAllemagne"	"parigi"
"juncker"	"règles"	"berlino"
"merkel"	"paris"	"europei"
"berlin"	"européennes"	"commissario"
"grossbritannien"	"commune"	"comunitario"
"europa"	"accord"	"premier"
"barroso"	"texte"	"nazionali"
"reform"	"lue"	"ministri"
"schroeder"	"projet"	"trattato"
"gemeinsame"	"politique"	"tedesca"
"eugipfel"	"budget"	"bretagna"
"europaparlament"	"union"	"detto"
"muesse"	"constitution"	"sarkozy"
"nationalen"	"europe"	"governo"
"vorschlaege"	"nationaux"	"politica"
"franzosen"	"ministre"	"leuropa"
"regierungen"	"affaires"	"governi"
"gemeinsamen"	"compromis"	"presidenza"
"gestern"	"juncker"	"macron"
"staaten"	"négociations"	"lunione"
"bundesregierung"	"pologne"	"blair"
"vorschlag"	"président"	"angela"
"staats"	"berlin"	"juncker"
"hiess"	"lélargissement"	"europee"
"blair"	"hier"	"polonia"
"gipfel"	"royaumeuni"	"patto"
"macron"	"zone"	"riforme"
"vertrag"	"barroso"	"francesi"

"finanzminister"	"pacte"	"chirac"
"nicolas"	"propositions"	"spagna"
"jacques"	"français"	"londra"
"europas"	"communautaire"	"parlamento"
"treffen"	"proposition"	"proposta"
"angela"	"vingtsept"	"finanze"
"hollande"	"débat"	"schroder"
"parlament"	"lisbonne"	"prodi"
"rat"	"institutions"	"partner"
"debatte"	"convention"	"euro"
"verhandlungen"	"bureau"	"paese"
"laender"	"jeanclaude"	"gran"
"praesident"	"unique"	"delleuropa"
"jeanclaude"	"stabilité"	"bilancio"
"britten"	"paysbas"	"europa"
"prodi"	"luxembourg"	"lisbona"
"waehrungsunion"	"chefs"	"accordo"
"bundeskanzlerin"	"réunion"	"voto"
"handelsblatt"	"politiques"	"trattati"
"erweiterung"	"euro"	"convenzione"
"verfassung"	"gouvernements"	"leader"
"bundeskanzler"	"nationales"	"negoziato"
"kommissar"	"josé"	"negoziati"
"polen"	"dun"	"regole"
"eurozone"	"manuel"	"comune"
"lissabon"	"britannique"	"litalia"
"britische"	"citoyens"	"lussemburgo"
"euverfassung"	"réformes"	"barroso"
"einigung"	"voir"	"posizione"
"ausenminister"	"directive"	"tedeschi"
"streit"	"traités"	"gerhard"
"nationale"	"vingtcinq"	"hollande"
"eurogruppe"	"partenaires"	"zona"
"gemeinschaft"	"litalie"	"conferenza"
"irland"	"majorité"	"riunione"
"deutschfranzoesischen"	"detat"	"vuole"

"ruth"	"lespaigne"	"capi"
"premier"	"nice"	"esteri"
"britischen"	"etat"	"decisione"
"berschens"	"ue"	"economica"
"referendum"	"référendum"	"compromesso"
"kuenftig"	"grandebretagne"	"progetto"
"stabilitaetspakt"	"principe"	"jacques"
"josé"	"position"	"nellunione"
"nizza"	"question"	"difesa"
"euvertrag"	"eurodéputés"	"uneuropa"
"praesidenten"	"dirigeants"	"nizza"
"deutschfranzoesische"	"processus"	"turno"
"vorlegen"	"droit"	"però"
"manuel"	"expliqué"	"affari"
"behoerde"	"vote"	"maggioranza"
"eukommissionspraesident"	"dossier"	"proposte"
"koenne"	"membre"	"regno"
"almunia"	"lunanimité"	"prossimo"
"ministerrat"	"discussions"	"dellest"
"integration"	"idée"	"belgio"
"eufinanzminister"	"sanctions"	"inglese"
"staatspraesident"	"juin"	"elezioni"
"kommissionspraesident"	"brexit"	"futuro"
"forderung"	"hongrie"	"jeanclaude"
"fischer"	"barnier"	"britannico"
"premierminister"	"frontières"	"spiegato"
"verheugen"	"coopération"	"spd"
"zusammenarbeit"	"décision"	"cdu"
"mehrheit"	"londres"	"unito"
"mitglieder"	"réforme"	"entro"
"widerstand"	"étrangères"	"nicolas"
"betonte"	"défense"	"cancelliera"
"solbes"	"chargé"	"referendum"
"agrarpolitik"	"document"	"brexit"
"luxemburg"	"lors"	"dibattito"
"juni"	"lavenir"	"stampa"



"jospin"	"sein"	"olanda"
"italien"	"tchèque"	"decisioni"
"gerhard"	"intérieur"	"portavoce"
"konvent"	"belgique"	"stabilità"
"ratifizierung"	"lest"	"migranti"
"kompetenzen"	"jacques"	"intergovernativa"
"muessten"	"économiques"	"costituzione"
"solle"	"cadre"	"strasburgo"
"interessen"	"contributor"	"prevede"
"niederlande"	"procédure"	"giugno"
"françois"	"néerlandais"	"dopo"
"fischler"	"vendredi"	"dovrà"
"wirtschafts"	"mécanisme"	"deciso"
"deutsche"	"polonais"	"portogallo"
"sprecher"	"proposé"	"summit"
"europaeer"	"souhaite"	"aiuti"
"deutschen"	"questions"	"austria"
"london"	"coordination"	"aggiunto"
"kompromiss"	"commun"	"grezia"
"wolle"	"lirlande"	"jospin"
"europapolitik"	"mardi"	"signora"
"entwurf"	"sujets"	"francotedesco"
"iren"	"propose"	"danimarca"
"minister"	"giscard"	"politico"
"michel"	"solidarité"	"cameron"
"euparlament"	"commissaires"	"françois"
"eupraesidentschaft"	"travail"	"economiche"
"eukommissar"	"danemark"	"settimana"
"regeln"	"suède"	"federale"
"frage"	"prodi"	"candidati"
"tony"	"déclaration"	"dicembre"
"dezember"	"finances"	"ceca"
"van"	"fonctionnement"	"dellue"
"binnenmarkt"	"britanniques"	"laccordo"
"zustimmung"	"négociation"	"lidea"
"le"	"rôle"	"romano"

"pakt"	"ladhésion"	"comunitarie"
"europaeischer"	"atil"	"discussione"
"euhaushalt"	"devraient"	"sera"
"spanien"	"destaing"	"schroeder"
"warnte"	"mars"	"emmanuel"
"schweden"	"soir"	"rifugiati"
"mitgliedslaender"	"renforcer"	"ribadito"
"parlaments"	"qualifié"	"alcuni"
"gemeinsam"	"communes"	"unione"
"pariser"	"mercredi"	"svezia"
"grossbritanniens"	"renforcement"	"van"
"woche"	"décembre"	"unico"
"kanzlerin"	"priorités"	"estera"
"initiative"	"moscovici"	"lesecutivo"
"forderte"	"déclaré"	"semestre"
"regierungskreisen"	"daccord"	"politiche"
"euregierungen"	"jeudi"	"josé"
"euratspraesidentschaft"	"adopté"	"tony"
"bonse"	"ratification"	"gruppo"
"leyen"	"communautaires"	"coalizione"
"vorgeschlagen"	"recommandations"	"riforma"
"sanktionen"	"chirac"	"bozza"
"aussen"	"mai"	"lallargamento"
"euratspraesident"	"convergence"	"istituzioni"
"scheerer"	"belge"	"trattative"
"stabilitaetspaktes"	"van"	"dichiarazione"
"kommissare"	"francoallemand"	"fronte"
"sarkozys"	"michel"	"cooperazione"
"eric"	"dossiers"	"dovrebbe"
"duerfe"	"portugal"	"necessità"
"belgien"	"candidats"	"istituzionali"
"kritik"	"élargissement"	"polacco"
"entscheidungen"	"irlandais"	"varsavia"
"giscard"	"quils"	"ventotto"
"emmanuel"	"consensus"	"est"
"eulaender"	"romano"	"veto"

"reformvertrag"	"volonté"	"integrazione"
"erklaerung"	"valéry"	"diritto"
"regierungschef"	"souveraineté"	"chiesto"
"position"	"leurogroupe"	"mesi"
"euregierungschefs"	"parlements"	"olandese"
"wirtschaftsregierung"	"ppe"	"spagnolo"
"beschliessen"	"continent"	"questione"
"eudiplomaten"	"schengen"	"interno"
"lehnt"	"lettre"	"temi"
"barnier"	"dune"	"rompuy"

## Headlines of top 100 articles on EU reform topics

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08/30/02 Chirac rejects EU agricultural reform before 2006

09/24/08 France increases pressure on Ireland because of the EU treaty

May 14, 2007: Merkel dampens expectations of German EU presidency

07/23/04 Barroso elected head of the EU Commission

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12/06/01 Prodi pushes for ambitious EU reform

01/30/02 Growing criticism of the preparatory work of the convention

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05.07.01 Great Britain contradicts Prodi's push for EU enlargement

05/23/02 Prodi aims for ambitious EU reform

02/26/02 Schröder and Blair take the initiative

10/10/01 Great Britain gives up resistance - accession candidates are included Governments commission a convention with the elaboration of a new EU treaty

11/22/05 EU ministers warn Great Britain against failure in the budget dispute

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05/17/02 Prodi wants to lead the Eurozone politically

12/13/07 Merkel wants to ratify the EU treaty quickly

February 5, 2001 Paris is ready for a common foreign policy with Berlin

07/17/08 Sarkozy lures Irish with concessions

10/26/01 Reforms of the Council of Ministers called for

06/21/07 "Either 25 have to give way - or two"

April 23, 2003 Giscard supports the position of the major EU states

09/18/08 Juncker: EU reform treaty will not come into force before 2010

01/12/01 EPP for improvement of the Nice Treaty

07/03/01 Prodi sees a growing desire for political reforms in the EU

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April 3, 2003 Small EU states reject demand for a strong EU president

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23.11.2000 Germany: we are not giving up the veto on immigration for now  
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22.03.2017 On April 29, the Brexit dossier to the EU

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24.02.2018 EU resources, 15 countries ready to give more

26.11.2000 The shadow of the weak euro over Nice - The Franco-German cooling raises questions about the outcome of the union summit

20.05.2000 In search of the lost axis - A Rambouillet summit between the leaders of France and Germany to relaunch the <motor> of Europe

05.05.2016 Brussels: fines for those who refuse migrants

27.06.2000 Tepid Chirac on federalism sees a Europe of states - EU - the French president relaunches the idea of a European constitution in Berlin

14.12.2003 Europe split, the Charter moves away - Brussels summit - EU council failed, the idea of a <two speed> integration returns

31.05.2002 Foreign policy, confrontation in Brussels - External relations commissioner Patten challenges the proposal of a <single voice> in a letter

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06.12.2006 Finland has ratified the European Constitution  
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12.12.2003 Brussels Summit: the fate of the Constitution in the hands of Spaniards and Poles

05.26.2003 Convention: Giscard wants to strengthen the management bodies

qualitative analyses provides information on the framing and the specific angles of the related articles.



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Bruegel, Rue de la Charité 33, B-1210 Brussels  
(+32) 2 227 4210  
info@bruegel.org  
www.bruegel.org