

**Between Europeanization and De-Europeanization. A Comparative Content Analysis of
the EU Agenda in the Pre-election Czech Quality Press**

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Abstract:

The article aims to explore the media coverage of the EU agenda in the hot phase of the Czech national parliament election campaigns in 2002, 2006, and 2010. Although the majority of studies dealing with media representation of the EU agenda concentrate on the European Parliament election campaigns, we focused on the NP election campaigns which are not only more intensively covered by the media, but which simultaneously generate more influential political representation defining national politics towards the EU. The articles referring to the EU agenda published in the Czech quality press were content analysed, and the results suggest that their performance is ambivalent: media attention towards the EU is fading, but when the EU agenda does find its way into the newspapers, it is treated in a more analytical and reflexive way.

KEY WORDS: (de-)Europeanization, euro-optimism, euro-scepticism, media coverage, content analysis

Public support for membership in the EU is declining among all the EU member states. But in case of the Czech Republic we see the most sceptical attitudes towards the EU, even more sceptical than in economically disorganized Greece. For instance, the Pew research (2012) indicator 'the EU favourable rating' showed that support for the EU in the Czech Republic was at the lowest level since its entry to the EU in 2004. Besides the role of the economic crisis as one of the important variables which emphasize the negative attitudes towards the EU, there are some other deeper reasons which determine the fact that only one third of Czech citizens is satisfied with membership in the EU. In our opinion, there have been two important variables which have determined the weak identification of Czech citizens with the EU in the long term. Firstly, there has been a general lack of concern by Czech political parties in the EU agenda. Secondly, and as a consequence of the above, the mainstream media have accepted the disinterest of the main political parties. Generally speaking, these two variables have determined declining popularity of the EU among many member states. In other words, our national research can indicate some basic trends common also for other Euro-sceptic countries.

Our research ties up to a broad research field of media representation of the EU agenda. Unlike previous studies, which concentrated either on a key-events period (e.g. the European Parliament elections, summits etc.) or routine periods, this study is focused on the period which is from the EU perspective neither strictly key-event nor routine, and which is at the same time a period of intensified electorate/audience attention – the hot phase of the national parliament election campaigns. To put it simply, the EU and its institutions play an increasingly important role in the political governance of the member states, and thus also in the everyday life of its citizens. At the time of the NP election campaigns, the EU agenda in general, and the attitude of the national political parties towards the EU in particular, should have been an important part of the media coverage of the campaigns. We were therefore

interested in answering the question of to which extent the EU agenda was present in the media coverage of the Czech NP election campaigns. In other words, we tried to analyze how the media coverage of the EU and its member states has been transformed to see more clearly the change in the framing of the EU agenda. And last but not least, we tried to analyze what role Czech press has played in the well-discussed process of Europeanization.

1 Theoretical background: the European public sphere, the process of Europeanization, and media representation of the EU

The mass media are considered to be the most important link between politics and citizens, especially in the case of the rather remote and abstract EU politics (e.g. Machill et al., 2006). More specifically, the mass media can fasten and deepen the European integration process by diffusing various ideas about appropriate forms of political governance, by portraying the EU as an important and relevant entity influencing our everyday life, and by stressing the need for active engagement and participation by citizens. Moreover, almost two thirds of EU citizens identify the media as their main source of political information about the EU (Eurobarometer, 2011).

Despite the crucial importance of the mass media in the process of political governance at the EU level, the communication research unequivocally show that the EU agenda plays only a marginal role in media reporting (e.g. Machill et al., 2006; Peter et al., 2003; Leroy and Siune 1994). According to previous research, EU issues are considered to be too complex and uninteresting for the media (De Vreese 2003). D'Haenens (2005) also notes that in today's profit-oriented and downsized newsrooms, it is often difficult for journalists to take the time to gather information on rather complex EU issues. Moreover, increased competition has led to a tendency towards sensationalism and trivialization, which had further decreased the interest of the media in EU matters.

It comes therefore as no surprise that two thirds of EU citizens claim that they are poorly informed on EU matters; in the case of the Czech Republic it is even 70% (Eurobarometer, 2011).

Although the general conclusion of these studies is that the media coverage of the EU agenda is rather poor, when looking closer at the coverage in specific time periods, we came to a more differentiated picture. The analyses dealing with the media representation of the EU in the national media can be divided into three main groups: (1) an analysis of media coverage of the European Parliament elections (e.g. Strömbäck et al., 2011; Peter et al., 2004; Kevin, 2003; Leroy and Siune, 1994; Blumler, 1983; Siune, 1983), (2) an analysis of media coverage confined to EU key events such as the 1999 introduction of the euro (de Vreese et al., 2001), or crucial summits of heads of government (Peter and de Vreese, 2004; Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000), and (3) an analysis of media coverage in non-key-event periods (Peter and de Vreese, 2004; Norris, 2000). In general, the coverage of EU issues ‘tends to be cyclical in nature, with coverage of the EU virtually absent from the news agenda and then peaking around important EU events, to vanish off the agenda again’ (De Vreese et al., 2006: 481).

It is often argued that the EU is inaccessible to ordinary citizens, it lacks popular support, and its legitimacy is therefore at stake. This democratic deficit can be perceived not only as a result of the EU institutional design and its complex method of operating (Coultrap, 1999; Kuper, 1998), but also as a result of a failure of communication between EU institutions and citizens, known as the communication deficit (Meyer, 1999).

More specifically, it is often argued that the EU is not sufficiently successful in reaching its citizens and discussing political decisions because of the lack of the European public sphere (e.g. De Vreese et al., 2006), or, in other words, because of the public communication deficit (Schlesinger, 1999). Ideally, political decisions should be discussed within the public spheres, where ‘the public discussions about the exercise of political power are both critical in

intent and institutionally guaranteed' (Habermas, 1974: 50). However, it seems that the European public sphere, conceived as a vision of an open forum of exchange among citizens and political elites on matters of common interest that transcend the borders of the member states, is only at the beginning of its development (e.g. Machill et al., 2006; Trenz, 2004), or, according to some authors (Peter and De Vreese 2004; Peter et al., 2003), does not exist at all.

In the literature, the European public sphere is conceptualized in two different ways: it is perceived as a pan-European public sphere independent of national states or as a sphere that emerges as a result of the Europeanization of the national public spheres (Machill et al., 2006). The arguments against the first view are clear: several crucial preconditions of the pan-European public sphere are absent, especially a common language, and the existence of mass media with an EU-wide reach (Machill et al., 2006). The transnational media are rather rare and do not reach broad audiences the way national media do (Brüggemann and Schulz-Forberg, 2009).

Therefore, the attention of the researchers is mostly focused on the second view, conceiving the European public sphere as the result of a Europeanization of national public spheres, most importantly the national media. The core idea builds on Deutsch's (1953) concept of transnationalization, referring to a process of intensified interactions across borders as opposed to interaction within national borders. Europeanization can be perceived as a form of transnationalization limited to the member states of the European Union (Brüggemann and Kleinen-von Königslöw, 2009); considering the mass media, it can be perceived as a form of transnationalization of the reporting in the national media.

Europeanization is not a homogenous process; in this sense, two basic forms are distinguished: vertical Europeanization, which means paying closer attention to the EU as a whole and its institutions and politicians, and horizontal Europeanization, which means increasingly taking account of what happens in the other member states of the EU. The

interplay of the two ways of Europeanization forms four different patterns of Europeanization (Brüggemann and Kleinen-von Königslöw, 2009): (1) comprehensive Europeanization, combining high levels of both vertical and horizontal Europeanization; (2) segmented Europeanization, characterized by the presence of vertical and the absence of horizontal Europeanization; (3) Europeanization aloof from the EU, which means horizontal without vertical Europeanization; and (4) a parochial public sphere with neither vertical nor horizontal Europeanization.

2 Methodology

As mentioned above, unlike the previous studies which concentrated mostly on the European Parliament election campaigns, we analyzed the hot phase of the NP election campaigns. We had two important reasons. Firstly, the media attention towards the NP elections is substantively higher than the attention dedicated to the 'second order' European Parliament elections (Reif and Schmitt, 1980). For these reasons, the NP election campaigns reflect the attitudes of the national media (as well as political parties) towards the EU than the EP election campaigns much more realistically. Secondly, political representation generated by the NP elections is generally more important for shaping national politics towards the EU. Czech media and political practice is no exception, and twenty two Czech representatives in the EP do not play important role in the process of setting up of national agenda towards EU.

The main research question was as follows: How has the media coverage of the EU agenda (i.e. the agenda of the EU and its member states) changed in the time of last three Czech NP election campaigns? In particular, we focused on four specific sub-issues, which led us to the following four subsidiary questions.

Firstly, we were interested in the visibility of the EU agenda. Therefore, the first subsidiary research question (RQ1) was as follows: What are the trends of the EU agenda coverage in the last three Czech NP election campaigns with regard to the visibility of the EU

issues? The question was motivated by the assumption that the visibility of the EU in the media was a precondition of public concern and participation in EU matters. Moreover, the greater visibility of EU matters is related to knowledge gains about the EU (De Vreese and Boomgaarden, 2006). We assumed the Czech quality press to accept the growing disinterest of the main political parties in the EU agenda. Our first hypothesis (H1) therefore was that the visibility of the EU agenda would follow a declining trend.

Given the overall importance of the EU in both Czech and foreign politics, one could expect that in the media coverage of the NP election campaigns, the leaders of political parties would comment on the EU agenda, and present their stance towards EU matters to the potential electorate. Moreover, the position of the political parties towards the EU can potentially serve as an argument in the election battle, and a means of their differentiation from each other. The second subsidiary research question (RQ2) therefore was: To what extent does the EU agenda serve as a direct election campaigns agent? We assumed (H2) that due to the general lack of interest of the Czech political parties in the EU issues, the EU agenda would be less and less used as a tool of political communication in the NP election campaigns.

Besides visibility of the EU agenda and its significance in the NP election campaigns, it is also necessary to explore the thematic agenda of the articles referring to EU issues, and its framing. The third subsidiary research question (RQ3) was therefore stated as: What are the thematic transformations of the EU agenda? In this respect, we focused on the referred policy fields of the EU agenda, and news frames (central organizing ideas) used by journalists in articles dealing with EU issues. Habermas (2012) repeatedly calls attention to the myth that questions concerning the European integration can be answered in purely economic terms. In fact he warns against the unanticipated consequences of instrumentalization the EU integration. We assumed that this instrumentalization would be (also due to the recent

economic crisis) more and more reflected in the EU coverage during the NP election campaigns. We therefore formulated the hypothesis (H3) that the prevalence of economic agenda would grow throughout the periods under scrutiny.

More generally, we examined the coverage of EU issues in terms of the Europeanization of the Czech press media, more concretely from the viewpoint of four different patterns of Europeanization (Brüggemann and Kleinen-von Königslöw, 2009). The fourth subsidiary research question (RQ4) was: to what extent does the analyzed quality press facilitate horizontal and vertical Europeanization? On the ground of growingly sceptical attitudes towards the EU we expected (H4) that in the time of NP election campaigns, the Czech quality press would increasingly tend towards Europeanization aloof from the EU, characterized by the presence of horizontal and the absence of vertical Europeanization.

In order to explore the coverage of EU issues, the relevant articles were content analyzed. We focused on the performance of the quality press, specifically the nationwide dailies MF Dnes¹, Lidove noviny², Hospodarske noviny³, and Pravo⁴ in the hot phase (the last three weeks before election day) of the last three Czech NP election campaigns (in 2002, 2006, and 2010).

The articles used in the content analysis were selected on the following basis: by an article referring to the EU agenda, we meant an article discussing the topic(s) related to the EU as a whole, and/or to the member states. In the next step, since we were interested in the EU agenda in the specific context of the Czech NP election campaigns, only the articles with an explicit reference to the Czech domestic agenda were selected. According to this multi-criteria selection we eventually analyzed 2668 articles.

3 Results and findings

3.1 The key trends in EU representation: declining visibility, increasing reflection

We first investigated the main trends of the EU coverage - the visibility of the EU agenda, the journalistic genre used by media, and the national or institutional identity of quoted actors. Visibility is generally considered to be an essential basis for a sufficient knowledge of EU issues and a precondition of public concern and participation in EU matters. However, in the case of the media coverage of the Czech NP election campaigns, this precondition was not fulfilled. As can be seen in Table 1, the visibility of the EU agenda in the hot phase of the NP election campaigns is rather low and has a clearly declining trend. Compared to 2002, the number of articles dealing with the EU agenda decreased by almost one third in 2010.

This would suggest that the EU agenda, in spite of the growing importance of the EU to national politics and the life of citizens, plays a marginal and weakening role in the media agenda before the NP elections. Paraphrasing the description of the EP elections as the second-order elections, we can say that the EU agenda is the Nth - order NP campaign agenda, being more and more neglected over time.

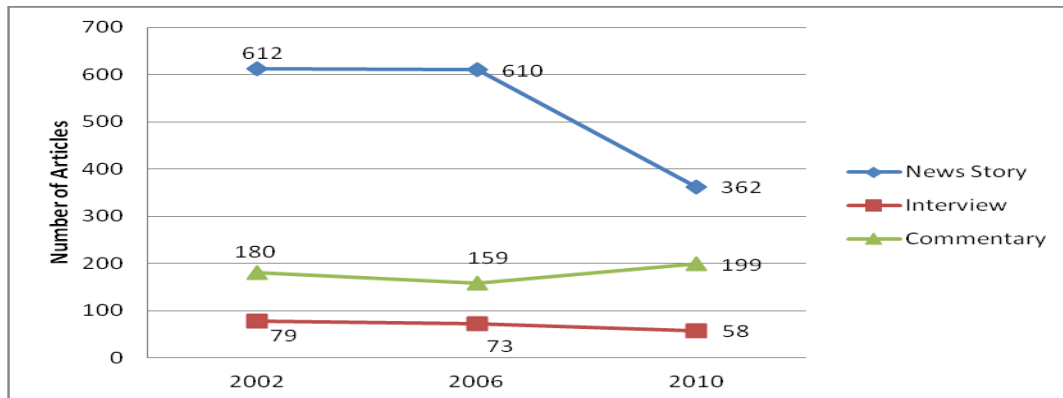
Table 1 The frequency of articles in the Czech left-wing and right-wing dailies

Dailies	2002	2006	2010	Total
Left-wing (Právo)	255 (25%)	240 (25%)	147 (21%)	642 (24%)
Right-wing (MF Dnes, Lidové noviny, Hospodařské noviny)	748 (75%)	730 (75%)	548 (79%)	2026 (76%)
Total	1003 (100%)	970 (100%)	695 (100%)	2668 (100%)

Looking at Graph 1, we can note the change in genre structure, more specifically a decrease in the number of news stories and an increase in the number of commentaries. This could mean a more reflexive approach to EU issues. At a time of an overall decrease in the

number of articles dealing with the EU agenda, the number of commentaries increased by more than 10 %. On the other hand, the number of news stories decreased by 40%.

Graph 1 Genre structure



From the viewpoint of the overall valence of the commentaries towards the EU, we can note in Table 2 that the ratio of the commentaries presenting negative stances is growing: it increased from 4 % in 2002 to 12 % in 2010, while the ratio of commentaries with positive valence towards the EU remained constant (14 % in total). Thus, the increased reflexivity of the Czech quality press is accompanied by rising negativity towards the EU.

Table 2 Overall valence of the commentaries towards the EU (N=538)

	2002	2006	2010	TOTAL
Neutral	146 (81 %)	116 (73 %)	147 (74 %)	409 (76 %)
Positive	26 (14 %)	25 (16 %)	27 (14 %)	78 (14 %)
Negative	8 (4 %)	18 (11 %)	25 (12 %)	51 (10 %)
Total	180 (100%)	159 (100%)	199 (100%)	538

The EU agenda can be mediated to the readers either in the form of news about the EU as a whole, in the form of news about the EU member states or a combination of both. Most of the articles on the EU issues come to Czech readers in the form of news on the member states, what suggests that the EU agenda enters the Czech media somehow indirectly, through the backdoor. Although in 2002 the analyzed dailies paid as much attention to the EU as a whole as to the member states, in 2006 and in 2010 there were considerably more articles

referring to the member states rather than the EU as a whole. The absolute number of articles dealing with the EU as a whole decreased by 40 % between the years 2002 and 2010.

Another aspect of the EU visibility is connected with the representation of its member states. The results, reported in Table 3, are consistent with the concept of news values as defined by Galtung and Ruge (1965). Attention is motivated by the value of conflict (reporting on the German-Czech dispute concerning the Benes Decrees⁵ – 34 % of all of the references in 2002), negativity (reporting on a country in crisis, Greece⁶ – 15 % of all of the references in 2010), proximity (from all the member states, one fifth of the references point to the four Visegrad countries), and reference to elite nations (in the case of France it is 8 %, in the case of the UK it is 6 %). Moreover, we can see with the example of Greece in 2010 that the news value of negativity overrides the news values of proximity and affiliation to elite nations.

Table 3 Reporting on the EU member states: frequency and proportion

	2002	2006	2010	TOTAL
Germany	227 (34%)	195 (21%)	178 (20%)	600
Greece	16 (2%)	15 (1%)	129 (15%)	160
France	58 (9%)	73 (8%)	65 (7%)	196
Great Britain	43 (6%)	69 (7%)	47 (5%)	159
V4 (Slovakia, Hungary, Poland)	36 (5%)	238 (25%)	200 (22%)	554
Austria	90 (13%)	77 (8%)	45 (5%)	212
Others	199 (30%)	272 (29%)	226 (25%)	697
Total	669 (100%)	939 100%)	890 100%)	2498

After an initial mapping of the terrain, we looked more closely at the national and institutional identity of quoted actors who spoke in the name of the EU. As summarized in Table 4, the actors representing the EU institutions constitute only a marginal fraction of all the actors (8 %); the articles are clearly dominated by actors representing the Czech Republic. It seems that even after six years of EU membership, the Czech quality press journalists had not got used to addressing and quoting EU actors, and therefore EU politics appears faceless

in the media. This poses a risk of turning the media picture of the EU into a representative democracy with invisible representatives.

Table 4 The national and institutional identity of the actors

	Year			Total
	2002	2006	2010	
Actors representing Czech subjects	439 (70%)	562 (75%)	345 (69%)	1346 (72%)
Actors representing EU institutions	53 (8%)	57 (8%)	37 (7%)	147 (8%)
Actors representing member states	117 (19%)	98 (13%)	97 (20%)	312 (17%)
Actors representing other subjects	20 (3%)	29 (4%)	18 (4%)	67 (3%)
Total	629 (100%)	746 (100%)	497(100%)	1872(100%)

3.2 The EU agenda in the battle for votes

Given the overall importance of the EU in both Czech national and foreign politics, one could expect that in the media coverage of the NP election campaigns, the leaders of political parties would comment on the EU agenda, and present their stance towards EU matters to the potential electorate. The position of the political parties towards the EU can potentially serve as an argument in the election battle and a means of their differentiation towards each other.

In this respect, it seems that the EU agenda plays only a very limited role in the media coverage of the NP election campaigns, which is, moreover, further decreasing. The number of articles which reflect the position of the political parties towards the EU decreased by 50 % from 2002 to 2010). This applies to both the left-wing daily and the right-wing dailies. These results lead to the conclusion that the EU agenda plays second-rate role in the media coverage of the NP election campaigns.

Political parties generally use the EU agenda in the election campaigns in two different ways: in an anti-EU (Euro-sceptic) way or in a pro-EU (Euro-optimistic) way. In spite of the Euro-sceptic image of the Czech Republic, in the media coverage of all the three NP election

campaigns, the frequency of the pro-EU arguments overrides the frequency of the anti-EU arguments. As summarized in Table 5, this applies both to the left-wing and right-wing parties (with the only exception of the campaign in 2002 when the right-wing parties mostly used anti-EU arguments). It is also obvious that the ratio of pro-EU arguments is much higher in case of left-wing parties than in case of right-wing parties, what could indicate that the Czech left is considerably more Euro-optimistic than the Czech right. Generally, we can note the overall dominance of the pro-EU arguments: compared to the anti-EU arguments, their frequency is twofold in 2002 and 2010, and even threefold in 2006. On the other hand, the use of the arguments, both pro-EU and anti-EU, has a decreasing tendency.

Table 5 The use of pro/anti-EU arguments by the Czech left/right wing political parties

		Year			Total
		2002	2006	2010	
Left-Wing Parties	Pro-EU arguments	52 (80%)	54 (84%)	20 (80%)	125 (82%)
	Anti-EU arguments	13 (20%)	10 (16%)	5 (20%)	28 (18%)
Right-Wing Parties	Pro-EU arguments	36 (47%)	37 (61%)	29 (56%)	103 (54%)
	Anti-EU arguments	41 (53%)	24 (39%)	23 (44%)	88 (46%)

As depicted in Table 6, in the media coverage of the election campaigns, the differences between the parties which are considered Euro-optimistic and Euro-sceptic are diminishing. Unsurprisingly, the Euro-optimistic parties predominantly use pro-EU arguments, while the Euro-sceptic parties mostly use anti-EU arguments, but the ratios are gradually evening out. From 2002 to 2010, the ratio of anti-EU arguments used by the Euro-optimist parties doubled, and so did the ratio of pro-EU arguments used by the Euro-sceptic parties. The blurring of these differences indicates the continuing process of homogenization of political attitudes towards the EU. In general, the homogenization of the arguments could suggest to the readers that the EU agenda is not worthy of attention and contestation.

Table 6 The use of pro/anti-EU arguments by the Czech Euro-optimistic/sceptic political parties

		Year			Total
		2002	2006	2010	
Euro-optimistic Parties	Pro-EU arguments	73 (89%)	75 (89%)	33 (75%)	181 (86%)
	Anti-EU arguments	9 (11%)	9 (11%)	11 (25%)	29 (14%)
Euro-sceptic Parties	Pro-EU arguments	15 (25%)	16 (39%)	16 (48%)	47 (35%)
	Anti-EU arguments	45 (75%)	25 (61%)	17 (52%)	87 (65%)

3.3 Framing the EU agenda: conspicuous criticism, inconspicuous acceptance

Next, we investigated the reported policy fields of the EU agenda and the framing of the articles. In other words, we dealt with the two key questions: 'What are the topics through which the EU agenda is represented?' and "How Czech dailies frame the EU agenda?"

Firstly, Table 7 clearly indicates that the EU is increasingly reduced to the economic agenda. Out of all the policy fields mentioned in the articles in 2002, 32 % were economic issues, and their proportion rose to 51 % in 2010. This means that every second mentioned policy field is economics, with a significant lead over all the other policy fields. The opposite trend is visible in the issues of foreign/security policy; the proportion of this policy field declined by two thirds from 2002 to 2010. This drop could be explained by the high importance of the issue of the Benes Decrees in the campaign of 2002.

We can understand these results as one of the indicators of the economization of the EU agenda in media coverage, i.e. the reduction of the idea of a common European Union as a community of values to a mere exchange of goods and services. It is a *de facto* approval of the Euro-sceptic argument that the EU makes sense only as a mutually profitable economic area so long as it does not infringe national economic legislation.

Table 7 Issues of the EU agenda: policy fields

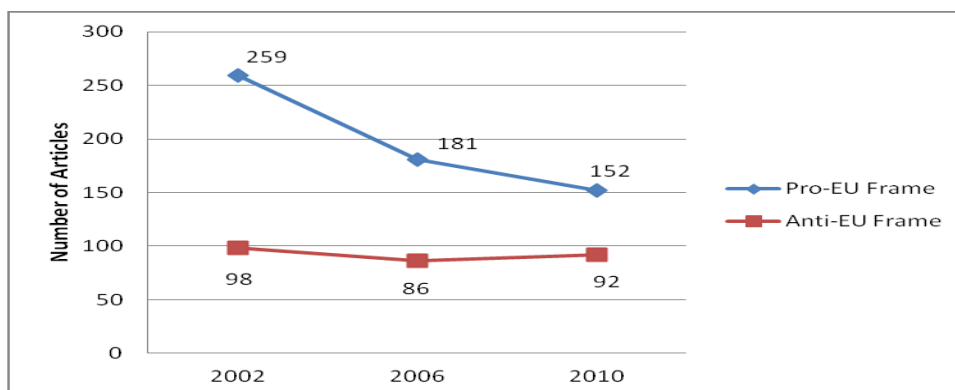
AGENDA	2002	2006	2010	total
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Economics, monetary policy, euro, market/competition, the EU funds	32%	42%	51%	41%
National politics	17%	15%	12%	15%
Constitutional and institutional affairs	2%	6%	4%	4%
Employment/social policy, health and consumers	7%	10%	6%	8%
Education/culture/sport, science and technology	10%	10%	8%	9%
Agrarian policy	3%	1%	1%	2%
Environment	1%	4%	4%	3%
Regional policy	2%	1%	2%	1%
Foreign/security policy	20%	6%	6%	12%
Other	5%	5%	6%	5%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Besides the manifest content of the articles dealing with the EU issues, we also focused on their less apparent aspect, specifically the frames. We understood frames as the central organizing ideas of the articles and as tools which suggested how the issues (in our case, EU issues) should be conceptualized.

In general, the overall tone of the articles is still rather favourable towards the EU, although the pro-EU voice is rapidly weakening, as can be seen in Graph 2. The number of articles with an anti-EU frame decreased by more than 40 % from 2002 to 2010; the number of articles with an anti-EU frame remained more or less the same in spite of a general decrease in the number of articles dealing with EU issues. The proportion of articles containing an anti-EU frame rose from 10 % to 13 % from 2002 to 2010. This indicates the strengthening trend of criticism towards the EU.

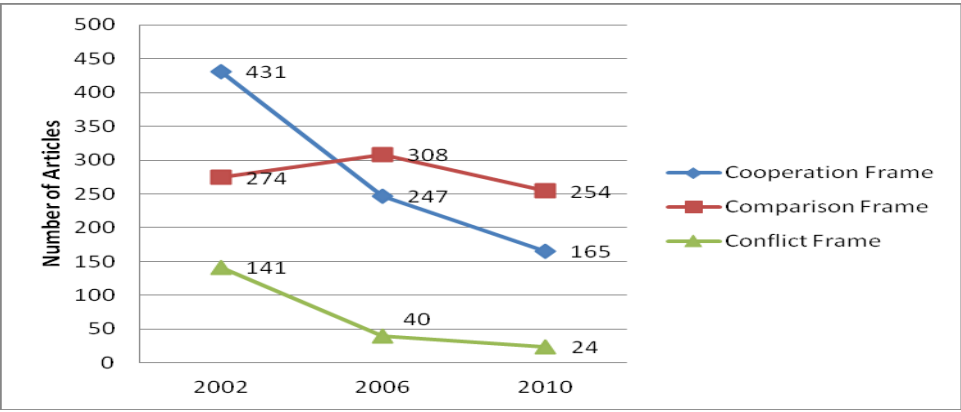
Graph 2 The number of articles with pro-EU and anti-EU frames



Further inspecting the use of the pro-EU and the anti-EU frames, what specific benefits or weak points of the EU were accentuated in media coverage? The results indicate, in accordance with our previous findings, the economization of the EU agenda: the EU is mostly portrayed as an entity whose greatest asset is a pay-off, either economic (11 % of all the articles in 2010) or something other than strictly economic (12 % in 2010) to the members. On the other hand, in its media coverage, the EU is depicted as an organization which threatens national sovereignty (9 % of all the articles in 2010), and moreover, fails at solving problems (5 % in 2010).

Furthermore, we focused on the frames conceptualizing the relations of the Czech Republic with the EU as a whole and with the member states: the frames of comparison, cooperation, and conflict. The use of these frames could suggest how and in what sense the EU agenda was used in the NP election campaign. As can be seen in Graph 3, the use of all these frames has a decreasing tendency, which suggests that from the viewpoint of the Czech dailies, the EU and its member states are still less and less worthy of being taken into account. By 2010, the use of the comparison frame took over the use of the cooperation frame, which was the dominant frame in 2002. This could mean that according to the media, after the goal of entering the EU had been accomplished, the Czech-EU relationship cooled, with the EU and the member states serving mostly as a benchmark but not as partners.

Graph 3 The number of articles with the cooperation frame, comparison frame or conflict frame



More specifically, the number of articles using the frame of cooperation of the Czech Republic and the EU/member states decreased by almost 40 % from 2002 to 2010. On the other hand, in the time of the overall decrease in the number of articles dealing with EU issues, the use of the comparison frame decreased only slightly, making it the most frequently used frame in 2010. This indicates the high importance of the EU as an economic, political, and cultural point of reference.

Taking a closer look on the agendas of comparison, we can again note the importance of the economy: the proportion of this agenda, out of all the agendas in which the Czech Republic was compared to the EU/member state(s), rose from 25 % in 2002 to 33 % in 2010. The political agenda remained stable with a constant proportion of 23 %. This could be understood as another indicator of the economization of the EU agenda in its media coverage.

The use of the conflict frame decreased rapidly by more than 80 % from 2002 to 2010; supposedly, this was caused by the fact that in 2002 an important sub-agenda of the 2002 NP election campaigns was the conflicting issue of the Czech-German relationship, more specifically the issue of the Benes Decrees.

4 Conclusion

Initially we posed the question: How has the media coverage of the EU agenda (i.e. the agenda of the EU and its member states) changed in the last three Czech national parliament election campaigns? The answer can be summarized in four points.

Firstly, it seems that after the goal of entering the EU had been accomplished, media attention towards the EU fell away and the visibility of the articles on the EU agenda clearly decreased. We can therefore hold our first hypothesis claiming that the visibility of the EU agenda would follow a declining trend. On the other hand, when the EU agenda does find its way to the newspapers, it is treated in a qualitatively and structurally different way. The frequency of commentaries rose in spite of the general decrease in the number of articles dealing with the EU agenda.

Secondly, we can conclude in accordance with our second hypothesis, that the EU agenda was less and less used by the political parties as a tool of political communication in the NP election campaigns. Moreover, it seems that the coverage of the EU agenda served predominantly to the interests of the local politicians, and their national state perspective. The use of conflict frame indicated importance of national interest framing which was manifested in the specific sub-agendas pursued in particular election campaigns (e.g. the issue of the Czech-German relationship, more specifically the issue of the Benes Decrees in 2002, the issue of Austrian animosity towards the Czech nuclear power station at Temelin in 2002 or the issue of the Greek economic crisis which was abused by the right-wing parties to manipulate voters in 2010).

Thirdly, we can conclude that the above mentioned increased reflexivity of the Czech quality press was accompanied by rising negativity towards the EU, although the overall valence of the articles is still rather favourable towards the EU. In our third hypothesis, we expected the prevalence of economic agenda would be growing throughout the periods under

scrutiny. The results suggest that we can hold the hypothesis, because the EU is increasingly reduced to the economic agenda. In the campaign of 2010, more than one half of the articles on the EU agenda referred to the field of economics, although the ratio was less than one third in the campaign of 2002. In case the EU was depicted within a pro-EU frame, it was mostly portrayed as an entity whose greatest asset is a pay-off (either economic or something other than strictly economic) to the members.

Fourthly, considering the frames of criticism of the EU as stated by Habermas (2012), it seems that three weeks before the Election Day to the NP, the Czech quality press suggested to its readers that the main problem of the EU was in its proper functioning, resulting in a threat to Czech national sovereignty and an incapability to address important issues. Based on the indicated overall economization of the EU agenda, it could be assumed that the preferred solution would be the economic analysis of the (in)profitability of the integration process. However, since membership in the EU was still presented as rather enjoyable, mostly due to its economic convenience, neither the problems of the EU nor their solutions were discussed in greater depth.

Let us now evaluate the results from the viewpoint of two different forms of Europeanization, and examine to what extent we can speak of the horizontal or vertical Europeanization of the Czech quality press during the NP election campaigns. Our results suggest, in line with the fourth hypothesis, that the Czech quality press tends towards Europeanization aloof from the EU, characterized by the presence of horizontal and the absence of vertical Europeanization (Brüggemann and Kleinen-von Königslöw, 2009). It seems that the media attention paid to the member states dominates over the attention paid to the EU as a whole. The EU agenda comes to Czech readers through the backdoor, mainly in the form of references to the member states, not to the EU as a whole, and it is communicated by the actors representing the member states rather than by the actors representing the EU.

5 Discussion

The process of Europeanization of the mass media can be characterized as a process of increasingly taking into account of what happens in the EU and its member states (Brüggemann and Kleinen-von Königslöw, 2009). However, our results indicate that the Czech quality press followed in its coverage of the EU agenda in the time of the NP election campaigns exactly the opposite pattern: the visibility of the articles is decreasing, and they are shifted to the back (less prominent) pages. Moreover, the EU agenda is less and less used by the political parties as a tool of political communication in the media coverage of the NP election campaigns.

This trend leads us to the question: is it still justified to speak of deepening Europeanization in the Czech media, or is it necessary to speak about new reverse trend of de-Europeanization in the media? We understand de-Europeanization of the reporting in the national mass media as a process of radically increasing disinterest in the EU matters, simultaneously accompanied by increasing occurrence of articles expressing negative/averse attitude towards the EU. In this respect, our research shows that the ratio of articles with negative valence towards the EU as well as the ratio of articles using an anti-EU framing is rising. And last but not least, we identified the process of simplification of the EU agenda to the economic agenda in the media. We can see the trend of displacing the idea of a common European Union as a community of values by the focus on the mere exchange of goods and services.

In spite of these trend indicators, positive valence, and the use of pro-EU framing are still clearly dominant. Our data therefore describe only deceleration of the Europeanization process in the Czech quality press during the NP election campaigns. In our opinion, further research will be needed to explore the (de-?) Europeanization process in the EU member state`s media.

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¹ This is the Czech quality newspaper with the highest circulation (with a circulation of 221,000 copies per day in 2011). It is of a mainstream orientation and politically right-of-centre.

² This is aimed at younger and better educated readers, and it is of a right-of-centre political orientation. In 2011 its circulation was over 42,000 copies per day.

³ This is a daily specializing in economic matters, also of a right-of-centre political orientation. In 2011 its circulation was over 42,000 copies per day.

⁴ This is the only daily with a left-of-centre political orientation. In 2011, its circulation was over 119,000 copies per day.

⁵ The decrees (a series of laws) were issued in 1945 by Edvard Benes, the President of Czechoslovakia. They provided a legal basis for the eviction of ethnic Germans and Hungarians from Czechoslovakia with exception of antifascists. Germans and Hungarians were stripped off their citizenship and their property without compensation, and expelled from the country. Frequently, there are demands for opening the issue again, annulling the decrees, and for restitution of confiscated property. A right-wing extremist party and Czech communist party used the topic of the Benes Decrees as their political agenda in 2002, frightening the public that entering the EU would lead the property claims of expatriated Germans.

⁶ The issue of deep economic crisis in Greece was picked up by right-wing politicians and was remade into one of fundamental themes in NP election campaign in 2010, serving almost exclusively the aim to discredit their left-wing political opponents. It was argued that politics of welfare state, labeled as leftist, leads to political corruption, and more broadly, irresponsible behaviour. In other words, leftist politics was said to lead irreverently to financial crisis – as is evident in the situation in Greece.