

# Transformations of the EU Agenda in the Pre-Election Czech Press: A Comparative Content and Discourse Analysis

## Introduction

Public support for membership in the EU is dramatically declining in the Czech Republic. The Pew research indicator “the EU favourable rating” showed that support for the EU is lowest in the Czech Republic (Table 1). The EU has even more support in Greece than in the Czech Republic. Since 2009 the belief that European economic integration has weakened the national economy has increased by 22 percent in the Czech Republic. And, since 2007, the favourability of the European Union as an organization has fallen by 20 percent in the Czech Republic.

**Table 1: The EU favourable rating (%)**

1. Poland	69%	5. Italy	59%
2. Germany	68%	6. Britain	45%
3. France	60%	7. Greece	37%
4. Spain	60%	<b>8. Czech Republic</b>	<b>34%</b>

Pew Research Center (May, 2012)

Besides the role of the economic crisis as one of the important variables which emphasize these negative attitudes towards the EU, there are some other deeper reasons which determine the fact that only one third of Czech citizens are satisfied with membership in the EU. To explain this trend as traditional Czech Euro-scepticism is too vague. In our opinion, there have been two important variables which have determined this 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 accept the disinterest of the main political parties.

Our research project tried to continue in the relatively broad research field of media representation of the EU agenda. However, there has been little research dedicated to the representation of the EU agenda in the media coverage of the national parliament (NP) agenda. This is where the present focus is situated.

The main objective of our research was to analyze trends in news media strategies used in the last three NP election campaigns. We started with the 2002 campaign before the Czech Republic entered the EU, and compared this “zero sample” with data collected in the 2006 and 2010 campaigns. In other words, we tried to analyze how the media picture 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 the Czech press has played in the well-discussed process of Europeanization.

## **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, Beiler, Fischer 2006). More specifically, the mass media can fasten and deepen the European integration process by diffusing various ideas about appropriate forms of political governance and 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. In general, the research on agenda setting, priming and framing shows that the mass media have a strong influence on what issues people consider important and how they evaluate these issues, as well as the actors involved (Shah et al. 2009). 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 shows that the EU agenda plays only a marginal role in media reporting (e.g. Machill, Beiler and Fischer 2006, Peter and De Vreese 2004; Peter, Semetko and De Vreese 2003; Leroy and Siune 1994). 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 come 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).

Theoretically, the interest in media coverage of EU issues is rooted in broader concepts of democratic deficit and the European public sphere as one of its potential cures. The European Union is based on the idea of democratic cooperation, which is unthinkable without interaction between the member states and the engagement and support of its people. However, 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). The public sphere is a precondition for the realization of popular sovereignty because it enables critical discussion without any limitations, autonomous opinion formation, and empowers citizens to influence the decision

makers (Brüggemann and Schulz-Forberg 2009). 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, Beiler and Fischer 2006, Trenz 2004), or, according to some authors (Peter and De Vreese 2004; Peter, Semetko and De Vreese 2003), does not exist at all.

In the literature, the European public sphere is conceptualized in two different ways (Machill, Beiler and Fischer 2006): 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*. 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, Beiler and Fischer 2006). The transnational media are rather rare and do not reach broad audiences the way national media do (Brüggemann, 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), specifically 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, 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.

## **Methodology**

This study aims to analyze the hot phase (the last three weeks before election day) of the last three Czech NP election campaigns (in 2002, 2006, and 2010). Unlike previous studies, which concentrated either on a key-events period or routine periods, this study focuses 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. To put it simply, the EU and its institutions plays 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 are therefore interested in answering the question of to which extent

the EU agenda is present in the media coverage of the Czech NP election campaigns.

The **goal** of this article is to contribute to the body of research on the European public sphere and to explore the media coverage of the EU agenda in the hot phase of the Czech NP election campaigns. More specifically, in order to detect possible trends in development, the last three campaigns are examined – 2002 (before the Czech Republic entered the EU), 2006, and 2010.

The **main research question** goes 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 last three Czech NP election campaigns?* In particular, we focus on four specific sub-issues, leading to the following four subsidiary questions.

Firstly, we are interested in the visibility of the EU agenda. The **first subsidiary research question** is therefore as follows: *What were the trends of the EU agenda coverage in the last three Czech NP election campaigns?* The question is motivated by the assumption that the visibility of the EU in the media is 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). The visibility is given by the frequencies of the articles in the selected time periods; besides this, we also examine the prominence of these articles (number of words, page number, and genre composition).

We suppose that visibility is a condition *sine qua non* for the emergence of the European public sphere; it is also necessary to take into account the content and the meaning of the articles referring to EU issues. The **second subsidiary research question** is therefore stated as: *What are the thematic and meaning transformations of the EU agenda?* More specifically, we focused on the rhetorical means used for denoting the EU, the actors of the articles on the EU agenda, the figures through which the EU agenda is represented, the referred policy fields of the EU agenda, and news frames (central organizing ideas) used by journalists in articles dealing with EU issues.

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 **third subsidiary research question** therefore is: *To what extent does the EU agenda serve as a direct election campaigns agent?*

Last but not least, generally we will analyze the coverage of EU issues in terms of the Europeanization of the Czech press media. Specifically, we evaluate the results from the viewpoint of four different patterns of Europeanization (Brüggemann, Kleinen-von Königslöw 2009), and examine to what extent the analyzed mainstream press participate in horizontal or vertical Europeanization.

We focused on the quality press, specifically the nationwide dailies MF Dnes<sup>1</sup>, Lidove noviny<sup>2</sup>, Hospodarske noviny<sup>3</sup>, and Pravo<sup>4</sup>. According to previous research,

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

EU issues are considered to be too complex and uninteresting for the media; the journalists often claim that the distance between Brussels and newsrooms in the member states creates a barrier, the EU decision making is too slow for the television news format, and that it is too difficult to access EU institutions and get inside its bureaucratic language (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 further decreases the interest of the media in EU matters. The quality press, which should be a storefront of critical discussion on serious matters, should be discouraged by these obstacles and touched by these trends to the least extent compared to other media segments.

In order to explore the coverage of EU issues, the relevant articles were content analyzed.<sup>5</sup> We conceptualized the EU agenda as content referring to the EU as a whole and/or an agenda referring to the member states. The articles used in the content analysis were selected on the following basis: by an article referring to the EU agenda, we mean an article discussing the topic(s) related to the EU as a whole, and/or to the member states, both in the case where it serves as a dominant issue or a minor issue of the article. 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. The time period is restricted to the hot phase of the last three Czech NP elections campaign, i.e. the three weeks before election day.

Consequently, a critical discourse analysis was performed using a selection of these articles in order to further investigate the process of framing EU issues. All the selected articles referred to the Greek economic crisis, which proved to be a dominant<sup>6</sup> sub-agenda of the election campaign in 2010.

## Results and findings

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

As a starting point for further analysis, we first investigate the main trends of the EU coverage - more specifically, the visibility of the EU agenda and its prominence (number of words, page number and genre composition). Visibility is 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 is not being fulfilled. As can be seen in Table 2, the visibility of the EU agenda in the hot phase of the NP election campaigns is rather low and has a clearly declining trend. In 2002, in each daily issue of the four dailies, almost 15 articles dealing with the EU agenda were

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<sup>3</sup> 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.

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

<sup>5</sup> The content analysis was carried out by the team of 14 coders trained and supervised by the authors of the research project.

<sup>6</sup> More specifically, 21 % of the articles dealing with the EU agenda in 2010 referred to this topic.

published compared to 14 in 2006 and only 10 in 2010.<sup>7</sup> In general, 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 *N<sup>th</sup>*-order NP campaign agenda, being more and more neglected over time.

**Table 2: The frequency of articles in the Czech left-wing and right-wing dailies**

DAILIES	2002	2006	2010	TOTAL
Left-wing (Pravo)	255 (25%)	240 (25%)	147 (21%)	642 (24%)
Right-wing (MF Dnes, Lidove noviny, Hospodařské noviny)	748 (75%)	730 (75%)	548 (79%)	2026 (76%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>1003 (100%)</b>	<b>970 (100%)</b>	<b>695 (100%)</b>	<b>2668 (100%)</b>

There are almost no differences in the number of news stories between the left-wing (rather “Euro-optimistic”) and the average of the right-wing (rather Euro-sceptic) dailies. As mentioned before, a sharp decline in the absolute number of articles occurred in 2010, which can be seen both on the side of the left-wing and right-wing dailies (by 28 % and 41 % respectively compared to 2002). In this year, a significant difference can be seen between the dailies: the number of articles published in the right-wing dailies is 20 % higher than the number of articles published in the left-wing daily. This suggests the pro-EU voice is clearly weakening.

The mere number of articles dealing with the EU agenda is not the only indicator of its importance to the daily broadsheet press: the two other indicators at disposal are the average number of words per article, and the average page number of the articles (both summarized in Table 3; for this analysis, only articles having the EU agenda as their main topic were selected).

**Table 3: The prominence of the articles with the EU agenda as their main topic (N=2668)**

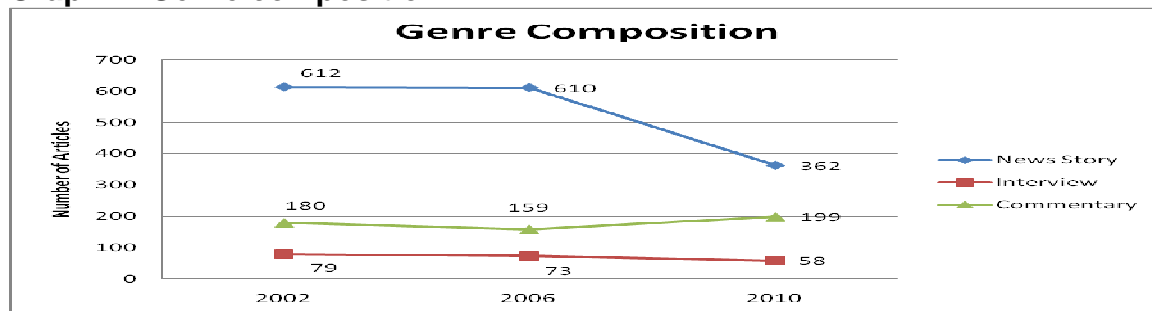
Year		2002	2006	2010	Total average
Left-wing daily	average number of words per article	375	305	328	332
	average page number	8.2	12.2	12	11
Right-wing dailies	average number of words per article	336	379	495	419
	average page number	9.6	11.9	10.5	10.8
Total	average number of words per article	356	342	411	376
	average page number	8.9	12	11.2	10.9

<sup>7</sup> The computation: 4 dailies (3 of them with 6 issues a week, 1 of them with 5 issues a week), three weeks, altogether 69 issues per period; the average number of news stories concerning the EU agenda in 2002 was  $(1003/69) = 14.5$ ; in 2006 it was  $(970/69) = 14.1$ ; in 2010 it was  $(695/69) = 10.1$ .

They suggest that the right-wing media open space for longer texts, which contradicts the general trends of the commercialization and tabloidization of the press, which leads to the shortening of articles. However, the price for the increased length of the articles is their shift to the back (less prominent) pages of the issues: from 2002 to 2010, the articles moved back two pages. It seems to us that this move to the back indicates a tendency to publish more analytical texts about the EU.

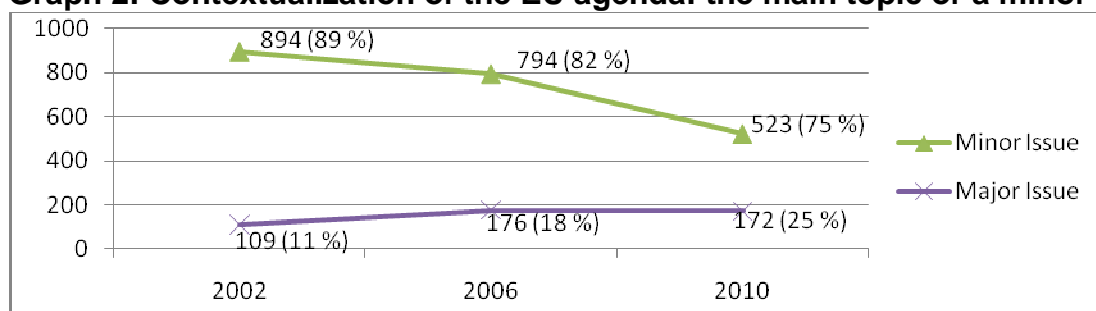
The trend of lengthening the articles and their shift to the back may have something to do with the change in genre composition, more specifically with a decrease in the number of news stories and an increase in the number of commentaries. In general, this could mean a more reflexive approach to EU issues. As summarized in Graph 1, 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 %. As an analytical genre, commentaries are usually longer than news stories and are placed on the back pages of an issue, which would explain the already mentioned increase in the average number of words per article and the shift of the articles to the back of the issues.

**Graph 1: Genre composition**



Another indicator of the positions of the EU agenda in the Czech press is whether this agenda plays a major or a minor role in the articles, i.e. whether it serves as the major topic (the EU issue is the dominant issue of the article) or a minor topic (the article contains rhetorical references to the EU or the member states, but the EU issue is not its dominant issue). Graph 2 shows that the EU agenda is most often mentioned as a minor topic (as it is in three quarters of the articles in 2010). However, the ratio of these articles is changing: in 2002, out of all articles referring to the EU agenda, 11 % mentioned the EU as a major topic, while in 2010, the proportion rose to 25 %. This suggests that in some sense the importance of the EU and its agenda has slightly increased.

**Graph 2: Contextualization of the EU agenda: the main topic or a minor topic?**



Key: The percentages represent the proportion of articles having the EU agenda as their major/minor issue from all the articles published in the given time period.

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, which 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 indicator of media attention paid to the member states is the number of articles which do not refer to any of them; in this respect, it seems that the visibility of the member states in the Czech quality press increases. In 2002, 64 % (641 out of 1003 articles) of the articles dealing with the EU agenda did not refer to any member state; in 2006 this proportion decreased to 53 % (517 out of 970 articles), and in 2010 it further decreased to 35 % (245 out of 695 articles).

From the viewpoint of their media coverage, who are the visible and invisible neighbours of the Czech Republic? The results, reported in Table 4, are consistent with the concept of news values. Attention is motivated by the value of proximity (from all the member states, one fifth of the references point to the four Visegrad countries), reference to elite nations (in the case of France it is 8 %, in the case of the UK it is 6 %), negativity (reporting on a country in crisis, Greece – 15 % of all of the references in 2010), and conflict (reporting on the German-Czech dispute – 34 % of all of the references in 2002). 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.

Throughout the analyzed time periods, the most prominent position consistently belongs to Germany: out of all references to the member states in 2002, 40 % were related to Germany; the proportion decreased to 21 % and 20 % in the following periods. This drop may be explained by the massive attention dedicated to the Czech/German relationship (specifically the issue of the Benes Decrees) in the 2002 campaign, and the abandonment of this topic in the campaigns in 2006 and 2010. In 2010, considerable attention was dedicated to Greece: this is related to the presence of the strong Greek sub-agenda in the 2010 campaign. Relatively a lot of attention was dedicated to the neighbouring countries of the Czech Republic, i.e. Slovakia, Poland and Austria, as well as Hungary as the fourth country of the Visegrad Group, and to France and the UK as traditionally significant EU member states.

**Table 4: Reporting on the EU member states: frequency and proportion**

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



### **Who speaks in the name of the EU?**

After an initial mapping of the terrain in terms of visibility and prominence of the articles referring to the EU agenda, we looked more closely at the origin of the actors who communicate the EU agenda in the analyzed articles. In short, our questions were: “Who speaks in the name of the EU?” and “What and who is most often hidden under the term ‘EU’?” Furthermore, in its media coverage, is the EU associated with the EU institutions, EU policies, and EU politicians, or, alternatively, is it used just as a label without any content and further specification? In this respect, according to the results summarized in Table 5, it seems that Czech journalists have learned to report on the EU agenda in a more structured way, and that they have incorporated the EU institution in their journalistic routines. However, in its media coverage, the EU still suffers from the invisibility of its representatives.

**Table 5: What represents the EU?**

	<b>2002</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
<b>EU policies</b>	240 (73%)	188 (65%)	177 (71%)	605 (70%)
<b>EU institutions</b>	254 (78%)	200 (69%)	219 (88%)	673 (78%)
<b>EU politicians</b>	38 (12%)	52 (18%)	32 (13%)	122 (14%)
<b>Total number of articles</b>	327	289	248	864

The EU is less and less often used as a blank term in the articles: the proportion of articles decreased from 50 % in 2002 (304 out of 604 articles) to 34 % in 2010 (130 out of 384 articles). In the case where the EU is not used only as a blank term, it is most often associated with EU institutions (in 78 % of the articles), and EU policies (in 70 % of the articles). However, the EU policies and institutions are not personalized: the proportion of articles referring to EU politicians constitutes only 14 %. This corresponds to the previous finding suggesting that the EU representatives are not present in media coverage, which would turn the EU into a representative democracy with invisible representatives.

In this sense, it seems that even after six years of EU membership, the Czech press journalists had not got used to addressing and quoting EU actors, and so EU politics appears faceless in its media coverage. As summarized in Table 6, 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 (more than three quarters of all the actors).

**Table 6: The origin of the actors**

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

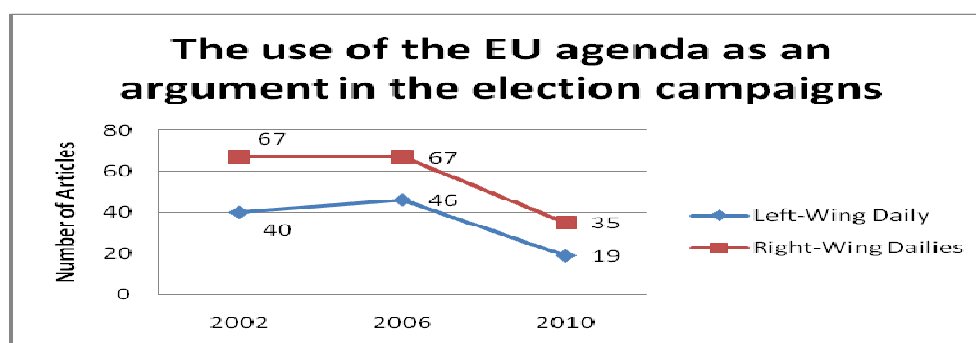
The number of actors from the member states is double that of the actors representing the EU as a whole. The ratios of actors representing Czech subjects, the EU institutions, the member states, and other subjects remain stable and do not significantly vary in the inspected time periods. This suggests that the editorial orientation of the Czech quality press is led by a rigid media logic and media routines.

### ***The EU agenda as a direct election campaigns agent?***

After analyzing the visibility and the prominence of the EU agenda in the media coverage of the Czech NP election campaigns, and the thematic and meaning transformation of this agenda, we will continue by investigating the role the EU agenda plays in the media coverage of the Czech NP election campaigns. 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. 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 towards each other.

In this section, we therefore look at the EU agenda from the viewpoint of its use as a means for supporting or weakening particular political parties. In other words, we are interested in the articles in which the EU agenda helps to differentiate between the political parties. 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. As depicted in Graph 3, this applies to both the left-wing daily and the right-wing dailies. From 2002 to 2010, the overall number of the articles in which the EU agenda is used as an argument supporting or weakening specific political parties decreased by one half. Put in another way: while in 2002, 11 % of all the articles on the EU agenda used the above mentioned argumentation, in 2010 the proportion decreased to 8 %. The proportion is higher in the right-wing dailies consistently throughout the analyzed periods, but we should keep in mind that while among the Czech quality press there are three right-wing dailies, there is only one left-wing daily. Overall, these results again lead to the conclusion that the EU agenda is only a minor agenda in the media representation of the NP election campaigns.

**Graph 3: The use of the EU agenda as an argument in the election campaigns**



Looking closer at the use of the EU agenda as an argument in the election campaigns coverage, it can be noted that from the viewpoint of the attribution of these arguments to specific parties, EU issues are largely neglected by both the

Euro-optimistic and the Euro-pessimistic parties, i.e. regardless of the parties' stance towards the EU. Moreover, the attention paid to the EU agenda has a decreasing tendency in both camps. In the bloc of Euro-optimistic parties, the EU agenda was used as an argument 50 times in 2010, while in the bloc of Euro-pessimistic parties, it was only used 37 times. However, it should be noted that there are only two Euro-pessimistic parties and seven Euro-optimistic parties. From this point of view, considering that there are just two Euro-pessimistic parties compared to seven Euro-optimistic parties, their voice is more vociferous. Although being in the minority, they are clearly not afraid of being isolated, and they speak out. Considering public opinion formation and change, this does not create the conditions for a spiral of silence (Noelle-Neumann 1974).

Political parties can use the EU agenda as an argument in election campaigns in two different ways: in an anti-EU (Euro-pessimistic) 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 7, the dominance of the pro-EU arguments is fairly significant: compared to the anti-EU arguments, their frequency is twofold in 2002 and 2010, and even threefold in 2010. Again, it can be noted that the use of the arguments, both pro-EU and anti-EU, has a decreasing tendency.

**Table 7: Political parties: pro-EU and anti-EU arguments**

	Year			Total
	2002	2006	2010	
<b>Pro-EU</b>	88 (62 %)	91 (73%)	49 (64%)	228 (66%)
<b>Anti-EU</b>	54 (38%)	34 (27%)	28 (36%)	116 (34%)
<b>Total</b>	142 (100%)	125 (100%)	77 (100%)	344 (100%)

Here there is the suggestion that the trend of overall decrease of the use of pro-EU and anti-EU arguments in the media coverage of the election campaigns goes hand in hand with the trend of homogenization and neutralization of political arguments. In the media coverage of the election campaigns, the differences between the parties which are considered Euro-optimistic and Euro-pessimistic are diminishing and fading out, suggesting to the readers that firstly the EU agenda is not worthy of attention and contestation, and secondly that the stance of the parties towards the EU cannot serve as a criterion for their differentiation.

In general, it seems that the EU agenda serves the interests of the national political representatives - the use of the conflict frame as well as the frequency of the articles reporting on specific member states indicate that the decisive factor of EU agenda coverage is the current interest of the Czech politicians in the specific sub-agendas pursued in particular election campaigns.

### **Conspicuous criticism, inconspicuous acceptance: the thematic EU agenda and its framing**

After analyzing how EU visibility in the articles has progressed and the actors communicating EU issues, we continue by investigating the reported policy fields of the EU agenda. In other words we stay before the two key questions: "What are the

topics through which the EU agenda is represented?” and “How have Czech dailies framed the EU agenda?” The answers are presented in the following tables and graphs.

Firstly, Table 8 clearly indicates that the EU is increasingly being 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 8: Issues of the EU agenda: policy fields**

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

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

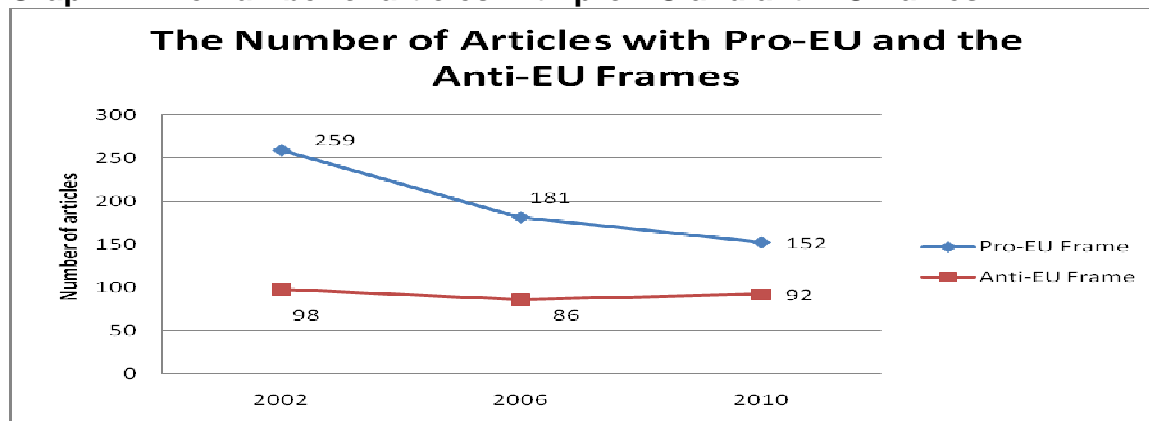
At first, we explored the use of pro-EU and anti-EU frames, then we turned to the frame interpreting the EU as “our” or “their” institution. Afterwards, we investigated the use of frames conceptualizing the relation of the Czech Republic with the EU as a whole and with the member states: the frames of comparison, cooperation, and conflict.

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 4. The number of articles with an pro-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.

In further inspecting the use of the pro-EU and the anti-EU frames, what specific benefits or weak points of the EU are accentuated in media coverage? The

results indicate, in accordance with our previous findings, the economization of the EU agenda, suggesting that the EU is mostly portrayed as an entity whose greatest asset is a pay-off (either economic or something other than strictly economic) to the members. On the other hand, in its media coverage, the EU is depicted as an organization which fails at solving problems, and moreover, which threatens national sovereignty.

**Graph 4: The number of articles with pro-EU and anti-EU frames**



As shown in Table 9, the most frequent pro-EU frames are the frames of the EU contribution to economic development (11 % of all the articles in 2010), and something other than economic development (12 % in 2010). The usage of all the pro-EU frames has a clearly declining tendency.

**Table 9: Pro-EU frames**

	Year			Total
	2002	2006	2010	
<b>The EU contributes to peace</b>	34(3%)	13 (3%)	18 (3%)	65 (2%)
<b>The EU contributes to freedom</b>	25 (3%)	13 (1%)	11 (2%)	49 (2%)
<b>The EU contributes to economic development</b>	89 (9%)	73 (8%)	73(11%)	235 (9%)
<b>The EU contributes to something other than economic development</b>	109 (11%)	74 (8%)	81 (12%)	264(10%)
<b>Another pro-EU frame</b>	82 (8%)	61 (6%)	28 (4%)	171(6%)

When considering the anti-EU framing of the EU agenda, it seems that in its media coverage, the main points of criticism are that the EU threatens national sovereignty, and that it is incapable of solving important problems. As summarized in Table 10, the proportion of the articles framing the EU as a threat to national sovereignty rose by almost 50 % from 2002 to 2010 (from 42 to 62).

**Table 10: Anti-EU frames**

	Year			Total
	2002	2006	2010	
<b>Disability of the EU to solve substantive problems due to bureaucracy</b>	16 (2%)	34 (4%)	34 (5%)	84 (3%)
<b>The EU as a threat to national sovereignty</b>	42 (4%)	39 (4%)	62 (9%)	143 (5%)
<b>The EU suffers from a democratic deficit</b>	17 (2%)	7 (1%)	9 (1%)	33 (1%)
<b>The EU is a propagandistic concept</b>	11(1%)	9 (1%)	2 (<1%)	22 (1%)

<b>Another anti-EU frame</b>	82 (8%)	61 (6%)	28 (4%)	171(6%)
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The number of articles framing the EU as an institution unable to solve substantive problems due to bureaucracy more than doubled from 2002 to 2010 (from 16 to 34). An important frame indicating the extent of the Czech acceptance of the EU in its media coverage is the conceptualization of the EU as “our” or a “foreign” institution. In this respect, one can see a clear move to framing the EU as “our” institution, as “us”.

As demonstrated in Table 11, in 2002 (i.e. before entering the EU) the EU was framed as a “foreign” institution in more than twice as many articles as it was framed as “our” institution. This ratio was reversed in the subsequent years: in 2010, the EU was almost four times as often framed as “our” institution as a “foreign” institution. This can be considered as an indication of acceptance of the EU in its media coverage in the Czech press.

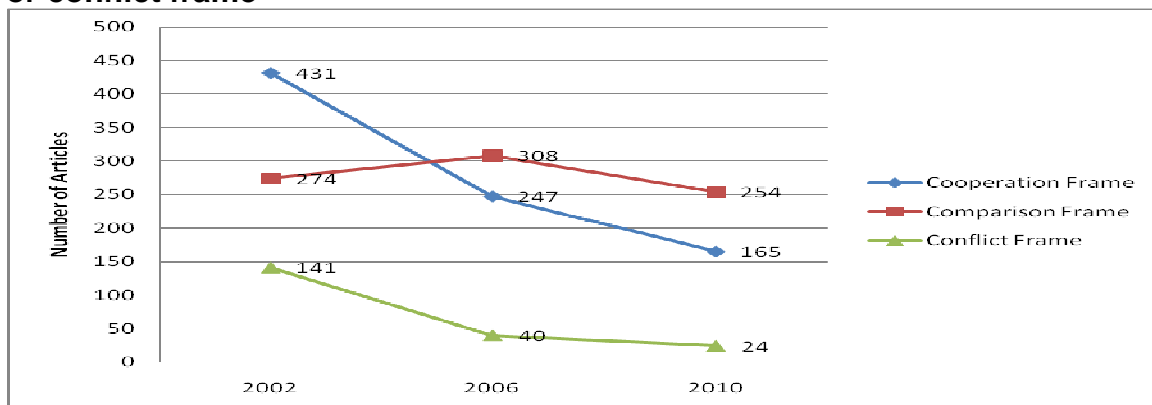
**Table 11: The “us” versus “them” frame**

	Year			Total
	2002	2006	2010	
<b>The EU as “our” institution</b>	69 (27%)	162 (72%)	113 (78%)	344 (55%)
<b>The EU as “foreign” institution</b>	183 (73%)	63 (28%)	32 (22%)	278 (45%)
<b>Total</b>	252 (100%)	225(100%)	145 (100%)	622 (100%)

After analyzing the overall stance towards the EU in its media coverage and the extent of its acceptance, we focus 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 be understood as an indicator of the extent to which the EU and the member states are taken into consideration during the NP election media agenda.

In general, as can be seen in Graph 5, 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 5: 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. 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 conflictual issue of the Czech-German relationship, more specifically the issue of the Benes Decrees.

The next step in the analysis was the further exploration of the use of the comparison, cooperation, and conflict frames. When considering the comparison frame, the results summarized in Table 12 indicate that in the media coverage, the benchmark for the Czech Republic is increasingly constituted by the member states, not by the EU as a whole. In 2010, comparison with member states was indicated in three times as many articles as comparison with the EU. Among all the member states, Germany serves as the benchmark most often (in 20 % of cases), followed by the Visegrad Group and neighbouring Austria, and France and the UK as traditionally important member states. These results are consistent with the already discussed overall frequency of the articles reporting on the specific member states (Table 2), motivated by the news values of proximity, affiliation to elite nations and negativity. Having 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.

**Table 12: The frame of comparison with the EU and the member state(s)**

		Year			Total
		2002	2006	2010	
<b>Comparison with the EU</b>	Count	121 (1003)	99 (970)	73 (695)	293
	%	12%	10%	11%	11%
<b>Comparison with member state(s)</b>	Count	184 (1003)	260 (970)	219 (695)	663
	%	18%	27%	32%	25%

Unlike the case of the comparison frame, the articles using the cooperation frame mostly cast the Czech Republic as cooperating with the EU as a whole, not with an individual member state. As seen in Table 13, in 2010 the frame of cooperation with the EU as a whole was used in twice as many articles as the frame of cooperation with member state(s), although it was vice versa in 2002. It can be assumed that “cooperation” with the EU in fact means benefiting from the EU; thus, these results could suggest that the Czech Republic bonds with the donor but looks up to other member states for comparison. In other words, the dailies frame our relationship with other member states as an inconspicuous rivalry.

**Table 13: The frame of cooperation with the EU and member state(s)**

		Year			Total
		2002	2006	2010	
<b>Cooperation with the EU</b>	Count	214 (1003)	93 (970)	123 (695)	430 (2668)
	%	21%	10%	18%	16%
<b>Cooperation with member state(s)</b>	Count	262 (1003)	175 (970)	65 (695)	(2668)
	%	26%	18%	9%	19%

Where the conflict frame is used, who are the “enemies” of the Czech Republic? As summarized in Table 14, the Czech Republic is most often depicted as being in conflict with Germany (in 50 % of cases in 2002 and in 2006, and in 41 % of cases in 2010), followed by the EU (22 % of cases in 2002, 12 % of cases in 2006 and 27 % in 2010). Conflicts with Austria, present in 2002, gradually disappeared, while the quantitatively small conflict frame of “Greece” emerged in 2010.

**Table 14: The conflict frame: Who are the “enemies” of the Czech Republic?**  
(number of articles)

	2002	2006	2010	TOTAL
<b>Germany</b>	79	21	9	109
<b>EU</b>	35	5	6	46
<b>Austria</b>	22	5	2	29
<b>Greece</b>	0	0	2	2
<b>Other</b>	23	11	3	37
<b>Total</b>	159	42	22	223

Generally speaking, we see the role of situational political context or specific sub-agendas in the media coverage of the analyzed election campaigns, as already stated. In 2002, the coverage of the election campaign was dominated by the conflictual issue of the Czech-German relationship, more specifically the issue of the Benes Decrees: 17 % of all the articles dealing with EU issues referred to this topic. This led to the frequent use of the conflict frame in this time period and to the frequent depiction of Germany as the country with which the Czech Republic is in conflict. The use of the conflict frame in this time period could also be marked by the issue of Austrian animosity towards the Czech nuclear power station at Temelin. In 2010, an important sub-agenda of the election campaign was the Greek economic crisis: in this period, 21 % of all the articles dealing with the EU issues referred to this topic.

In the following discourse analysis, we will show how the media used this special agenda to delegitimize the EU and in some sense try to shape the behaviour of possible voters. Our preliminary two theses are the following: the portrayal of the economic crisis in Greece was one-sided and it served predominantly as a means to criticize the EU.

### **The sub-discourse of the Greek economic crisis in commentaries**

In a content analysis, one of the significant movements in the media coverage of the EU agenda at the time of the NP election campaigns was the clear increase of news articles referring to one EU member state, Greece (from 16 articles in 2002 to 129 articles in 2010) This could be brought about by an intercorrelation of two factors: firstly, the situation of the deep economic crisis in Greece is “newsworthy” in terms of one news values: negativity. Secondly, the issue was picked up by right-wing



politicians and was made into one of the fundamental themes in the respective NP election campaign, serving almost exclusively the aim of discrediting left-wing political opponents. In this part, we will try to explore what ideological effects both of these preliminary observations could have and how they influence meaning structures more broadly.

In our analysis, we draw on Fairclough's view on discourse as social practice, supposing that discourses "*do not just reflect or represent social entities and relations, they construct or constitute them*" (Fairclough 1992: 3). The analysis as conducted here does not fully comply with Fairclough's three-dimensional model for critical discourse analysis, mostly for the reasons of our different research aims. As already mentioned, the CDA presented here was carried out to function as a case study and this decision was based on the motivation to look in more detail at the process of framing the EU agenda in the Czech quality press during the NP election campaign. We specified the discourse under analysis as the "discourse of the Greek economic crisis in the commentaries of Mladá fronta Dnes (MFD)<sup>8</sup> during the NP election campaign in 2010". We will focus on three interrelated aspects of discourse: the representation of reality, the identities set up for those involved and the relationships set up between those involved (Fairclough 1994: 5). With the proposed modifications of Fairclough's original model of CDA, we need to reformulate these three key aspects of discourse as well. In the first feature, the **representation of reality**, we concentrate on events and the connection built between them. In its second feature, we will draw on the **identities** of subjects directly acting in these events (therefore, we have to marginalize the identities of the producer and reader in a broader sense and background the processes of production, distribution and consumption). Thirdly, we will look at the **relationships** between subjects identified in the previous step (so similarly, we have to neglect the relationships between the producer and reader in a broader sense). Our key aim was to analyze MFD coverage of the Greek economic crisis and the representation of the EU in this discourse.

### ***The representation of reality***

In the first step of the analysis, we focused on the ways reality is represented in our subject matter, the discourse of the Greek economic crisis in the commentaries of Mladá fronta Dnes during the NP election campaign in 2010. Firstly, we concentrated on which events and processes represented in the analyzed sub-discourse were foregrounded and which were backgrounded, and secondly, what connections were constructed between those events and processes.

The most prominent event referred to was the **Greek economic crisis**. The representation of this event is strangely reified: demonstrations in Athens and the resentment of ordinary Greek people was the prevalent and almost only piece of information the reader got about the contemporary situation in Greece. The wrath of the Greeks was presented as irrational (these "*raging crowds of people throwing fire bottles, who do not even know whom they are protesting against*") and as illogical because they evidently just "*have to pay for the luxurious way of life they were used to*".

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<sup>8</sup> The chosen daily, Mladá fronta Dnes, is the most widely read quality newspaper in the Czech Republic and so with respect to its intermediate position in the dialectical movement between social structure and social agents (Hall 1982), it can both reflect and influence the status quo.

MFD connected the Greek economic crisis agenda with the crisis in the EU as a whole. The case of Greece was exploited by MFD as a means of talking about something else, to vindicate a particular ideology while staying so well hidden. It is claimed that it is time to realize that “we, Europeans, have become a dumb herd of consumers” and that we have to become “responsible”, morally and economically. Furthermore, we need to recognize that persuading the general public about these facts will be no easy task for “*too long, politicians have taught the people they have rights and that they can demand [things].*” However, as discourse strategies teaches us, it is highly desirable (if not necessary) to overcome the contemporary “*European decrepitude of pseudo-social welfare*”. Of course, it has to be done as soon as possible because “*the threat of the significant decline of the living standards of large parts of the population, as has happened in countries governed by populists,*” is too dangerous to be neglected any longer.

Retracing the discourse strategies attentively, we can discern that the long-term aim of the discourse is to delegitimize the European Union as such, its ideals, institutions and overall politics. The main feature of critique of the EU is its immoderately leftist political orientation. Saying this, we can draw attention to another key aspect of the analyzed discourse: besides preferring right-wing political ideology, it tends to be more Euro-sceptic.

The second foregrounded event was the ongoing **restructuring movements and growing perturbation in the eurozone** and, conjointly with reference to the NP election campaign, discussions about adopting the euro in the Czech Republic. We can extend our observation about the tight connection constructed between the European and Greek economic crisis by enhancing it with some further statements. For instance, it is declared that in paying attention exclusively to the latter, “*we cannot see the whole of Europe burning*”. Of course, for any reasonable person it must be evident that the economic crisis in Greece is a “*much deeper problem affecting the whole of Europe*”, or in other words, it has become “*a question of the existence of the eurozone*”. As in the previous event, when the reader got the reified image of furious Greeks demonstrating against enforced financial cuts, now the picture is again simplified and one-sided. The key activity representing the whole event is that the political leaders of the EU cannot reach a compromise about how to proceed in the case of Greece<sup>9</sup> and because of this lack of mutual understanding their suggestions are sometimes “*acts of pure desperation*”. For these reasons, which from the Euro-sceptic point of view serve as a small but satisfactory example of the striking incompetence of the EU, it is not advisable to rave either about further integration of the EU or about Czech entry into the eurozone. Furthermore, it is claimed that:

People understand each year more and more that the euro is not a magic pill and that it is not going to make them wealthier. On the contrary, they realize the risks and problems introduced by the common currency more clearly. They see that the Czech crown works well for us. However, nobody knows what the euro will bring about. Why then give up the Czech crown?

This strengthens the positive portrayal of “us”, the negative representation of “them” and the EU as a confused and incompetent organization.

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<sup>9</sup> And more importantly, “if Greece will finally get the financial help, it will not be because of solidarity and Europeanism. It will be because of caginess for this help will be cheaper than failure of Greece as a debtor”. This example clearly shows a discourse strategy to deny the relevance of the concept of a common European identity and to persuade the general public about its mythic character. For the financial aid is not to help a “brother in need”, but to lessen the risk of one’s own loss.

The third event set out as noteworthy was the **challenge of opening a serious discussion about the future political orientation of the EU**. It is said that the contemporary economic and moral crisis in Europe has a certain positive aspect, which in a way mitigates all of those features which were deeply depressing and disgruntling. It helps us realize the crucial fact that “*Europe is at a crossroads*”. So, it gives us an opportunity to overcome narrow-minded and mostly bureaucratic discussions about common EU norms for everything and to take a look at Europe more attentively and more critically. The Euro-sceptic discourse predominant in the analyzed commentaries starts the polemics over the future political orientation of the EU with statements like “*all today’s Greek problems are the result of a deeply dysfunctional political system*”, or “*this is a live show of the crisis of the welfare state of the socialist type in many European countries*”. Furthermore, it is claimed that:

The effects even of the most sophisticated austerity measures will wear off if there cannot be found a way to change the dynamics of the political system.

It needs to be admitted that the EU misapplied the concept of social welfare and by doing this it contributed to the unprecedented spread of ideas of the consumption society. Here, the case of Greece again serves as an apt illustration of the overall situation in Europe, since:

The Greeks did the same as the whole Caucasian world. They lived beyond their means. They borrowed money and did not care when and how they would repay their debts. This is called the welfare state, solidarity, social justice. But these are just lies, leading not to beneficent, but contemptible ends: to political corruption.

The fourth significant event was the setting up of a **discursive struggle over European identity**. We could express the main features of this frankly by proclaiming that “*Europeanism ended in our own purses*”. With the great help of the representation of the EU as an organization puzzled and feckless at the moment of its first more serious crisis, the view that the idea of a common European identity is just a myth gets heavily promoted at this point. From now on, it seems that the discussion about the EU becomes intensively economized. The argumentation goes on as follows: because the EU is not based on commonly shared ideals, it is reasonable to analyze the gains and risks of being a member state foremost economically and rationally. It is declared that the EU is a political and financial project – it does not fulfil some pre-existent idea of Europeanism; it is a matter of business, not of passion. Thus, when its efficiency and sustainability becomes doubtful, it should be replaced without false sentiment. To give an example of such writing, see the following extract:

Union, it should have been happy terminal of history and nationalism. However, crisis blew out this illusion as easily as candle. It showed that there is neither single European identity and solidarity, nor something as commonly shared fate. Germans or Slovaks logically do not feel they should pull Greeks out of their misery. Old sins like Second World War and old prejudices as “those lazy Greeks” are forced out once again. Altogether, the crisis took off European costume from Europeans – and not surprisingly, there is still a national one beneath it.

To sum up what has been said so far, we can say the discourse of the analyzed commentaries heavily bears on a wider Euro-sceptic discourse. Regarding the notes on the first three events as particular fragments, we see they come to some sort of synthesis at the point of setting up a discursive struggle over European identity. A central ideological chain is created: being leftist means being individually and financially irresponsible, which means being irrational through and through, which means being addicted to empty formal structures, which means a tendency to

over-bureaucratization, which means contributing to the dissolution of human values, which means supporting the consumption society, which means living in falsehood, which means being evil, which means being leftist.

With respect to our key theoretical concept of Europeanization, we can set up an assumption that the analyzed discourse tends to deny the relevance of vertical Europeanization, leaving the question of horizontal Europeanization without a clear answer.

### ***Identities***

In the second step, we focused on identities set up for those involved in the commentaries. We identified four major actors: the EU, Greece, Czech Euro-sceptics and ordinary people.

Let us start with the identity constructed for the **EU**. In the key metaphor, the EU is portrayed as a dangerous and detrimental “weed”, or to be more precise, as the indubitable source of it. As we can see from the following extract, this metaphor is further elaborated by another one, the metaphor of “infection”:

The harmful weed has deep roots. You can cut off the sprouts with leaves, or even extirpate the whole plant of the ground, but in spite of all your effort it will grow up again. Our society probably does not have enough efficient antidotes to prevail over the weed and destroy it.

Both of these metaphors, that of “weed” and that of “infection”, share some basic aspects (their referents are unwished, dangerous, harmful, redoubtable, unjust or almost invincible) and therefore, by combining them, their malignant effects are underscored. What exactly is meant by the “weed” expanding from the EU to its member states? Re-reading our analyzed text carefully, we can see that it is the concept of the social state, represented in the discourse as seriously misapplied and misused by the EU. This is consistent with our previous finding: the revelation of the ideological chain in Euro-sceptic discourse. Subsequently, we would like to suggest that the bundle of metaphors of “weed” and “infection” functions fairly well as the centre of the ideological chain, guaranteeing its inner coherence and strengthening the structural relations among its elements. But to explore the identity constructed for the EU more thoroughly, we can set this aside for a moment and look at the characteristics ascribed to the EU.

Firstly, the EU is depicted as a rigid bureaucratic organization. It has the overwhelming apparatus of expendable office workers and bloodless politicians, but no real charismatic leader, no relevant background idea which would legitimize its actions (the idea of European identity is categorized as a false illusion, as we have seen already). Roughly speaking, there is no good reason for its existence at all. Furthermore, the European Union is an empty but still a powerful construction, which heavily contributes to the debasement of true human values, for it teaches hordes of “ordinary people” to behave irresponsibly and irrationally, quieting them down with the statement that there will always be someone to save them (and pay their debts). It is evident that:

Political and bureaucratic responsibility is declining the more centralist and more estranged from real economic and social life it becomes. It pushes out the function of individual responsibility and of reputation in regulation of good manners in society.

Secondly, the EU is represented as incompetent and sometimes even reluctant to solve important problems. According to discourse strategies, this becomes evident when judging the EU’s tragicomic attempts to reach some agreement on how to deal

with the contemporary economic crisis in EU member states and in Greece particularly. The EU is criticized for dealing only with the corollaries of the crisis, not with its roots. This leads to multiple pleas for redefining the political system, as we have seen in the previous stage of analysis. In connection to this, it is claimed in a relatively affected tone that the EU childishly “*postpones Judgement Day*” thinking that everything will be OK again thanks to the “*money we will print out in Frankfurt*”.

Thirdly, it is claimed that the EU cannot be trusted because it does not respect its commitments: it does not keep its promises and often it mystifies people, mainly by distorting the concept of social welfare. In this respect, journalistic statements are mostly general and vague, like “*They [European politicians] cry out loudly: Solidarity! And they mean: Corruption!*”

In the analyzed articles we can see the successful completion of the process of the ideological closure of the words “European politicians”, which point to leftist politicians only and are added to the ideological core of discourse. Thus the negative connotations of the collocation “European politicians” are heavily emphasized and in conjunction with this, the preferred reading of the phrase gets much more visible as well.

To sum up our findings about identity constructed for the EU, we can say that it is represented as an organization which is bureaucratic, leftist, irrational, irresponsible, incompetent or sometimes even megalomaniac. This is expressed succinctly in the following extract:

Against the common sense and reason of every cogitative country woman, who knows: when you make the debts, you have the debts, there is a scientific-political symphony of blind men who did not see Greek crisis coming and do not see arrival of our crisis as well.

One already given remark is important by now: the issue of the economic crisis in Greece served predominantly as a means to criticize the EU, or to put it differently, there is no evidence of intensified interest in Greece itself.

## **Relationships**

In the third step of the analysis, we focused on the relationships set up between subjects whose identity was described, that is between the EU and Greece.

The **relationship between the EU and Greece** is clearly asymmetrical: the EU dictates conditions to provide financial help and Greece has to conform, “*with evident aversion and silent dissent*”. In a metaphoric expression, Greece has to “*be on prescribed diet*”, while the EU is in the position of the subject who controls and punishes, although it is quite a restless and powerless doctor, as we have seen when discussing the identity of the EU.

The relationship between the EU and “Greek politicians” is ambivalent: on the one hand, they are treated as peers (both are in the position of political leaders), on the other hand, “Greek politicians” are inevitably subordinated to the EU (they have to conform to its mandate).

To clarify this point, we can look at the **relationship between the EU and “ordinary people”**. Focusing on this already mentioned remark, there appears to be a clear, although vaguely defined relation of subordination between Euro-sceptic politicians and ordinary people. For example, a headline of one of the analyzed commentaries says: “debts will catch **you** every time”. This taken-for-granted knowledge of distribution of power continues with the delimitation of the participant’s roles in the first paragraphs, where the reader (voter) is the one who asks questions

and the author (politician) is the one who wisely and authoritatively answers them. We can see a similar pattern in description of the situation in Greece, where:

Most of them [ordinary Greeks] do not understand at all why the cuts are necessary and no one of politicians does even try to explain the situation clearly.

We saw a similar relation of subordination and dependence between the EU/leftist European politicians and ordinary people, where the EU was told to influence people's decision and value systems. So, while the EU's leadership is heavily criticized for demystifying and stupefying all citizens of EU member states, it is all the more presumable that the Euro-sceptics, whose position is defined as a contradictory one, do not really want to change this principle, the relationship of the subordination of the "ordinary people".

## DISCUSSION

Let us now evaluate the results introduced in the previous sections (namely, the visibility and the prominence of the EU agenda, the thematic and meaning transformation of this agenda and the use of the EU agenda as an argument supporting or weakening certain political parties) 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 election campaigns.

We conceptualized Europeanization as a form of transnationalization limited to the member states of the European Union (Brüggemann and Kleinen-von Königslöw 2009), specifically, as a form of transnationalization of reporting in the national media. It was assumed that as a result of the Europeanization of the national public spheres, a European public sphere would emerge. 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.

Considering the process of Europeanization in general, without distinguishing its two forms, we can conclude that the decreasing visibility of the EU issues in the analyzed dailies actually indicates a process of de-Europeanization. It can be assumed that after the goal of entering the EU has been accomplished, media attention towards the EU falls away.

A declining trend was also noted in the visibility of the arguments using the EU agenda for supporting or weakening certain political parties. In spite of the importance of the EU to the life of Czech citizens and Czech political governance, the arguments by the political parties using the EU agenda can be found only very rarely in the media coverage of the NP election campaigns. Moreover, the differences in the use of pro-EU and anti-EU arguments between the parties which are considered Euro-optimistic and Euro-pessimistic are diminishing and fading out, suggesting to the readers that the EU agenda, firstly, is not worthy of attention and contestation, and secondly that the stance of the parties towards the EU does not serve as a criterion for their differentiation.

Another argument speaking against the process of Europeanization lies in the use of the comparison, cooperation, and conflict frames. Based on their overall decline, we can assume that the amount of attention paid to the EU and the member states is decreasing, and that these entities are less and less often taken into account. Besides this, it seems that Czech journalists avoid quoting actors from the

EU: the actors representing the EU institutions constitute only a marginal fraction (8 %) of all the actors of the articles. Thus, how could we speak of the process of Europeanization if the EU's representatives are almost invisible? Next, considering the trend of the progressive economization of the EU agenda in its media coverage, it seems that in the media, the idea of a common European Union as a community of values is reduced to the mere exchange of goods and services. For instance, more than one half of the articles on the EU agenda refer to the field of economics; moreover, this field has a significant lead over all the other policy fields. Besides, in case the EU is depicted within a pro-EU frame, it is mostly portrayed as an entity whose greatest asset is a pay-off (either economic or something other than strictly economic) to the members. And, the economic agenda is the most common agenda in which the Czech Republic is compared to the EU/member states. From this point of view, even if we could speak of some form of Europeanization, it would be a Europeanization significantly reduced to the economic field.

On the other hand, although the quantity of the coverage of the EU issues has decreased, when the EU agenda does find its way into the newspapers it is treated in a more analytical way. There is a significant slant to a more reflexive approach to the EU agenda: the frequency of commentaries rises and the articles are longer. At this point, it could also be fruitful to carry on some further investigation because as we saw in CDA, the commentaries are affected by trends of infotainment and tabloidization. For these reasons, comparing the style of news stories and commentaries could be interesting.

Another point supporting the thesis of Europeanization is the clear move towards framing the EU as our institution, as "us", instead of a foreign institution, as "them". This can be considered as an indication of the acceptance of the EU in Czech media coverage. Also, the overall stance towards the EU in media coverage is better than one would expect on the grounds of the low visibility and prominence of the EU agenda. The tone of the articles is still rather favourable towards the EU, although the pro-EU voice is rapidly weakening.

From the viewpoint of horizontal and vertical Europeanization, we can conclude that the former clearly dominates. It seems that media attention paid to member states dominates over attention paid to the EU as a whole. Taking the findings of the CDA in account, this gives us a similar impression – the EU is under heavy attack and indirectly so; the need for vertical Europeanization is marginalized. In reference to horizontal Europeanization, the perspective discourse to be promoted remains rather ambiguous and indistinct. In the content analysis, there is a variety of indicators supporting the initial claim. Firstly, the EU agenda comes to the Czech readers through the backdoor, mainly in the form of references to the member states, not to the EU as a whole. In general, the attention paid to the member states is rising, which cannot be said in the case of attention to the EU as a whole. While in 2002 the analyzed dailies paid as much attention to the EU as to the member states, in 2006 and in 2010 there were considerably more articles referring to the member states than to the EU as a whole. Also, the proportion of articles dealing with the EU agenda which did not refer to any member state fell from 64 % in 2002 to 35 % in 2010.

Besides, when looking at the actors who communicate the EU agenda, the proportion of actors from the member states is twice as high as the proportion of actors representing the EU as a whole. The next indicator is the use of the comparison frame: in the media coverage, the benchmark for the Czech Republic is increasingly constituted by the member states, not by the EU as a whole. In 2010,

the comparison with member states was indicated in three times as many articles in comparison with the EU. Considering the use of the conflict frame, the Czech Republic is most often depicted in dispute with Germany, i.e. a member state, and not with the EU as a whole, which again supports the assumption that horizontal Europeanization prevails over vertical Europeanization.

In fact, the only indicator of vertical Europeanization is the use of the cooperation frame. In 2010, the cooperation frame with the EU as a whole was used in twice as many articles as the cooperation frame with member state(s), although it was vice versa in 2002.

## 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?* In this sense, the analysis brought several interesting conclusions. **Firstly, we assume that rather than the process of Europeanization, our results indicate the analyzed dailies have helped to trigger the process of de-Europeanization.** 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 declined. In media coverage the EU agenda is rarely used as an argument supporting or weakening certain political parties, and the parties do not use this agenda as a mean for their differentiation.

On the other hand, although the quantity of the coverage of the EU issues has decreased, **when the EU agenda does find its way to the newspapers, it is treated in a qualitatively and structurally different way.** Firstly, the frequency of commentaries rises in spite of the general decrease in the number of articles dealing with the EU agenda; also the length of the articles is on the rise. Next, the EU is usually framed as “our” institution, as “us”, and the tone of the articles is still rather favourable towards the EU, although the pro-EU voice is rapidly weakening.

**Even if we could speak of a process of Europeanization, it would be only a partial and reduced form of Europeanization.** Firstly, EU representatives are invisible in media coverage, which forces us to ask how could a European public sphere work if the political representatives are unknown and unheard? Secondly, in the media coverage, the EU agenda is mostly reduced to an economic agenda, which goes against the idea of the European Union as a community of values.

Our results suggest that **the Czech quality press tends towards a segmented Europeanization, characterized by the presence of vertical and the absence of horizontal Europeanization** (Brüggemann, 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. Also, in the media coverage, the benchmark for the comparison of the Czech Republic is increasingly constituted by the member states, not by the EU as a whole.

Another interesting finding is that it seems **the EU agenda serves the interests of the local politicians** - the use of the conflict frame as well as the frequency of the articles reporting on the specific member states indicate that the decisive factor of EU agenda coverage is the contemporary interest of Czech politicians 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 in 2010). The analysis of the last one was further elaborated in CDA and according to its findings we can once again confirm the statement that Czech politicians use the European agenda for their own specific interests and objectives. More particularly, in the case of the Greek economic crisis, the issue was exploited by right-wing political parties and was made into an ideological weapon not only against their Czech political rivals, but also against the leftist political ideology as such and consequently against the EU as the main source of it.

Considering the frames of criticism of the EU as stated by Habermas (2001), it seems that three weeks before election day to the NP, the Czech quality press suggests to the readers that the main problem of the EU is 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 is still presented as rather enjoyable, mostly due to its economic convenience, neither the problems of the EU nor their solutions are discussed in greater depth.

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