"Banal" Europeanized National Public Spheres?
Framing the Eurozone Crisis in the European Elite Press

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The article discusses the findings of a frame analysis of the eurozone crisis in the elite national press in member states of the European Union (EU). Its premise is that the eurozone crisis generates "banal" Europeanized national public spheres. In this study, the leading press in the four European countries under scrutiny ultimately function as a producer of homogeneous narratives that favor a particular form of political economic behavior, but also dismiss, silence, and marginalize "story lines" that derail from the set course. Thereby, the study shows the existence of a public sphere, which is salient, seamless, and, ultimately, banal. The crisis, we argue, in particular, has given rise to a no-thrills inclusion of EU dimension in all mediated debates in the elite press.

Keywords: European public sphere, crisis, media, discourse, banality

This article revisits and problematizes the concept of the European public sphere (EPS) in view of debates about common European identity, democracy in the European Union (EU), and the future of European integration, against the backdrop of the inherent socioeconomic conditions of a nearly decade-long eurozone crisis. It seeks to move the discussion by drawing on the notion of "banality" coined to explain nationalism in contemporary societies (Billig, 1995) and the absence of critical thinking (Arendt, 1963) as core elements in mediated public spheres: The study explores the question of "what Europe means" in media coverage of the pre-electoral periods of 2012 and 2015, as these emerge within the context of the financial crisis in opinion-leading European newspaper presses and, in particular, the extent to which Europe (as the EU) is expected to act as a legitimate actor in this crisis. Such an exploration not only provokes a discussion associated with a normativized EPS but also aims to add new critical heuristic value to the concept of a banal Europeanized national public sphere. So far, research on the public sphere has focused heavily on the existence or not of a system of preconditions that implied the "normality" and "success" of deliberation, and hence an ideal form of democracy when the "right" factors coincide. That has meant exploring the notion of EPS largely in times of relative wealth, political stability, and prosperity in the EU, as well as from the perspective of national public spheres, associated with an EPS "loss." Most research recognizes "only" a

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process of understanding, agreement, and consensus based on "truth and reason" in public spheres (Habermas, 1979)—a view that has been criticized repeatedly for missing out on varied forms and functions of the public spheres (Johnson, 1998; McCarthy, 1982). In our case, the research explores the frames and discourses activated in the contrast between the exceptional momenta of elections and the banal continuity of communicative conditions "that permit the circulation of information, ideas, debates" (Dahlgren, 2005, p. 148).

The European Public Sphere, the Media, and an Ongoing Crisis

The problematic notions of public sphere and EPS have been approached at length by scholars largely adopting and/or criticizing the rigidity of the Habermasian definition "as an arena for the perception, identification, and treatment of problems affecting the whole society" (Habermas, 1996, p. 301). The notion of the Europeanization of national public spheres is traced back to Gerhards (1993, 2000), who conceived an increased coverage of European issues in national media and presentation of these topics from a European, rather than a national, angle (Risse & Van de Steeg, 2003). On the level of the nation-state, citizens are subject to the decisions made by the governing powers they elect; at the European level, however, decision makers, such as the European Council and the Council of the European Union, are not elected directly by the EU citizens (Gerhards, 2001). This is seen as a democratic deficit to be linked to the lack of an EPS:

> A deficit of the public sphere exists when more and more political decisions are not made by the nation-states but by the EU, but public debate is about national issues and does not, or only to a limited degree, inform about European decisions and discussions. (Gerhards, 2001, p. 152; emphasis omitted)

Eder (2000) speaks of a transnational public sphere and assumes a polity or a network of political and economic actors that dominates issue-specific communicative spaces (p. 167). In this context, communication is understood as elite communication, which deals with specific issues in specific media outlets, commonly "elite quality newspapers" (de Vreese, 2007, p. 9). Eder (2000) and Kantner (2004) do not speak of a commonly shared European perspective, but rather of a common communicative space. More specifically, Kantner speaks of commonly shared frames or master frames of an issue, whereby the national media frame controversial topics in the same way across national boundaries but not necessarily from the same perspectives (p. 155). The underlying idea of this approach also echoes van de Steeg (2002), who argues that "at a certain point in time, the same topic is discussed by actors who are, in one way or another, in contact with each other" (p. 507). For Risse (2010; see also Risse & van de Steeg, 2003), national public spheres and identities have not been substituted by an EPS or a collective European identity—they have been, rather, Europeanized.

However, most research has dealt with the question of whether the media cover EU issues from an "EU perspective" as opposed to national ones and/or whether there is an EPS (or is ever possible to exist) given the national organization of media landscapes. Although this may be a valid question and set of criteria at times of relative stability, it is counterproductive to reduce a communicative phenomenon to the same questions at times of crisis, especially when crises are seen in a longitudinal perspective (e.g., the nearly

decade-long financial crisis) and when they are of a multiple character (e.g., debates and even referenda of various forms of "exits" from the EU). European integration scholarship has by and large concluded that the EU project is one in which ultimately the role of the nation state may have changed, but the state itself has been "saved" from "withering away" under supranational and intergovernmental EU governance. Here the argument is that at times of crisis, and to face challenges posed by global integration processes and globalization, the nation-state has given up some of its sovereignty to supranational actors, such as the polity. Hence, if a common understanding of the EU project itself is the practice of effective governance vis a vis global challenges, the global financial crisis is one of the most recent, continuous (since 2008) "test cases" for the European Union.

For the purposes of this article, a mediated-driven public sphere is a multiperspectival open public space that enables citizens to debate common issues, connect with political actors and which entails the possibility of political participation (de Vreese, 2007; Eder, 2000; Kantner, 2004). An EPS is the sphere where, at the very least, deliberation takes place about issues of European reach in meaning and relevance (i.e., reach that is clearly both national and cross-border and reflects upon issues where citizens are expected subjects in the deliberation process).

To appreciate manifestations of an EPS fully, we draw on notions of banality as the phenomenon of "unnoticed," "taken for granted," underlying, and presumed basis of ways of thinking and action. In other words, we challenge the established assumption that an EPS is manifest in concrete, clear, distinct, and ideal ways and instead engage in an attempt to identify the salient, "unassumed," and partially invisible spaces where issues, deliberation processes, and actors connect and disconnect along a common axis. We locate and examine this way of thinking in its mass mediated and politically leading vessels—the prominent presses. We are interested in the ways in which EPS becomes one of banality, assuming the existence and presence of both the EU and common affairs, albeit not necessarily or exclusively built on the Habermasian assumptions of reason, truth, or equality of interlocutors (Habermas, 1996). We use the tools of framing analysis to explore this question and draw on Billig's (1995) notion of "banal nationalism," which suggests that the omnipresence of symbols of nationalism go "unnoticed," and thus nationalism is reproduced and normalized in everyday life. Billig argues that political and media elites "flag" nationhood, daily, in the eyes of citizens. "In routine practices and everyday discourses, especially those in the mass media, the idea of nationhood is regularly flagged. . . . Through such flagging, established nations are reproduced as nations, with their citizenry being unmindfully reminded of their national identity" (Billig, 1995, p. 154). In his "Day Survey" of British newspapers, Billig (1995, pp. 11, 111, 117) found that routine deictic pronouns, such as *we, our, us, this,* and *here*, were commonly used by journalists to point to the national homeland as the homeland of the readers. He argued:

> People today go about their daily lives; carrying with them a piece of psychological machinery called "a national identity." Like a mobile telephone, this piece of psychological equipment lies quiet for most of the time. Then, the crisis occurs; the president calls; bells ring; the citizens answer; and the patriotic identity is connected. (Billig, 1995, p. 7)

There has been critique to Billig's (1995) arguments: Rosie et al. (2006) consider that several understandings of what national means might coexist in differentiated audience settings, and this might

jeopardize the straightforward link between media and collective identity. Similarly, Skey (2009) points out that a national audience is not homogeneous, and thus the idea of nation is not necessarily shared by all of the members of the audience. This aspect was highlighted by Slavtcheva-Petkova (2014) discussing banal Europeanism in Bulgarian and British media, exploring "whether banal media representations transfer into banal identities among a specific audience and are indeed the means through which European identity is" ` revitalized" (p. 44). Scholars have focused on the connection of representation and identity as one of direct effect, by pointing to the difficulties of applying Billig's assumptions on identities beyond national borders on the one hand, and given variations of identities within borders on the other. Underpinning Billig's use of the notion of banality of the "national" in its uncritical, deep engrained "-isms" normalized through the silent omnipresence of their symbols is Arendt's (1963) candid analysis of the "lack of intentions," or the apolitical in policies. Arendt's analysis of Eichmann's testimony provides a critique for understanding both the ways in which policies, and hence, political action, are presented as technical, taken-for-granted courses of action and how these are also understood and communicated by the media. Arendt was shocked by the idea of policies implemented by humans without "intentions" in the usual sense. "To have 'intentions' in her view was to think reflectively about one's own action as a political being, whose own life and thinking is bound up with the life and thinking of others" (Butler, 2011, para. 4). Arendt (1963) said,

> It is important to the political and social sciences that perhaps the nature of every bureaucracy, is to make functionaries and mere cogs in the administrative machinery out of men, and thus to dehumanize them. And one can debate long and profitably on the rule of Nobody, which is what the political form known as bureaucracy truly is. (p. 135)

The governance of the financial crisis, with its highly technocratic austerity measures, contrasts with its vivid outcome of impoverishment and deeper debt, as well as with the process of election that raises the idea of the citizen's choice (i.e., *intention*). Elections are considered to be the defining moment for expressing an "intention" for political direction in a democracy. Elections can be seen as a speech act that solidifies people's voices and strengthens the place of the nation-state in the European context. They act as catalysts for change and democratic debate in a country, but they can also trigger assumptions about *banalized* collective understandings of the nation, nationalism, and the nation in Europe.

The purpose of this research is to identify what kind of Europeanism the crisis activates. This involves the analysis of the ways in which the media *remind* citizens of a Europe to which they might—or might not—belong in relation to a threatening and boundaries-setting exercise in the coverage of the crisis and to which a specific EU is called to respond.

Methodology

To explore aspects of a banal character of the Europeanized national public sphere, we focused on the ways in which key events during the eurozone crisis are presented in leading national daily presses. Thereby, we identified common news frames generated about the crisis and about Europe, beyond national borders.

We chose framing as a tool of approaching the ways in which the same "problems" (i.e., "issues") are presented in opinion-leading presses. These "schemata of interpretation" (Goffman, 1974, p. 21) allow individuals or groups of people "to locate, perceive, identify, and label" (p. 21) issues and events within the meaning and premises of their own experiences and cultural backgrounds. Presses apply the *intention* to discuss the crisis:

> To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described. (Entman, 1993, p. 52)

Journalists frame events and occurrences by selecting or highlighting particular aspects in an effort to "simplify, prioritize and structure the narrative flow of events" (Norris, 1995, p. 357). In this article, we focus on the *issue-specific frames* that are "pertinent only to specific topics or events" (de Vreese, 2005, p. 54) produced by the particularity and complexity of the current economic and political conditions in Europe.

Our premise is that crisis and Europe are intensive and sustained topics (and constructions) over a long period of time across all European countries, whether or not these are directly (i.e., visibly) affected by the crisis. The emergence of parallel political and economic events, such as the realization of multiple national elections at the same time, makes visible an EPS flagged banally across the European elite press promoting either a common or a diversified Europe-wide geography for the crisis (that sets a certain system of European inequalities) and eventually a common or several dissenting understandings of Europe (e.g., promoting "fair" competition between states in a "neutral" market). Having qualitatively observed the press coverage of crises in Austria, Germany, Greece, and the United Kingdom, between 2011 and 2012 and for 12 continuous months, we noticed an underlying assumption across borders that the crisis *is* a European matter to which the EU is called—*expected*—to respond, as a *legitimate* governance actor.

Following these premises, the main research question that guides this article is:

RQ1:   What kind of "Europe" emerges in times of crisis in opinion-leading national presses during (pre-)electoral periods?

We chose two political moments—national elections—to explore the latent continuity of banal Europeanized national public spheres. The two moments were May and June of 2012 and December and January of 2014–15. The former period, in 2012, included major national-driven but European-focused events, such as the Greek general elections (May 6), the Spanish petition of a financial bailout (June 9), the second wave of the French legislative election between Sarkozy and Hollande (June 10), and the second round of the Greek parliamentary elections (June 17). The latter moment, in 2014–15, included the Eurogroup's decision to support a two-month program extension for Greece (December 8), the negative outcome of the Greek Parliament to elect a new president for the Republic (December 17) combined with the political crisis that burst in the country, the Greek parliamentary elections (January 25), and the Eurogroup revealing the intention of the finance ministers to discuss the state of play of Greece's economic

adjustment program at their forthcoming meeting right after the national elections, which spoke intensively of a (forced) "Grexit" (January 26).

We collected and analyzed editorials of two national "quality" newspapers in each of the four European countries: Austria, Germany, Greece, and the UK. The selected countries occupy different positions in relation to the measures taken by the European Commission: Germany represents a country of growth and hegemonic position in the EU; the United Kingdom intervenes from outside the eurozone, but with its own financial crisis and austerity policies; Greece is considered the main crisis hot spot and carried out two national elections within two years, and Austria appears to remain a politically and financially "stable" least affected country in the period examined. Historically, Germany is one of the founding countries of the EU; the UK became a member in 1973, Greece in 1981. and Austria in 1995.

For each country, we chose two leading newspapers according to the following criteria: First, they are "quality" dailies, with high circulation figures and nationwide readership. Second, their ideological affiliation occupied differentiated positions in the political spectrum (see Appendix, Table A1). Third, the selection of newspapers was system sensitive to satisfy the criteria of functional equivalence; that is, the selected newspapers had to perform the same functions for political information in the respective countries (Livingstone, 2003; van de Vijver & Leung, 1997). The editorials were collected via digital databases (LexisNexis University and WISO Praxis) and/or via the newspapers' online archives to maximize and ensure that all relevant texts were retrieved. Moreover, the results of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung, Der Standard,* and *Die Presse* have been counterchecked with their hard copies in the National Austrian Library because their online archives or digital databases did not allow to search only for leading articles, but included opinion pieces (i.e., commentaries) in their results. In the corpus, opinion editorials, which contain the author's name in a byline, and institutional editorials, which do not, can be distinguished. In particular, for *The Guardian,* only institutional editorials were collected: the corpus for the *Daily Telegraph, Der Standard, Die Presse, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Süddeutsche Zeitung, Ta Nea,* and *Kathimerini* contains only bylined editorials relating to the eurozone crisis.

The focus on editorials enabled analysis of the political standpoint of each newspaper's editorial line, where the "topic is shifted from its news value to its background, conditions, meanings and consequences" (Neidhardt, Eilders, & Pfetsch, 2004, p. 15). The assumption is that the selected newspapers represent a specific segment of the national public spheres and are expected to span the options of the main political opinions. From the point of view of methodological value, editorials enact, overall, one single voice, actively manifesting *intention* toward specific courses of action and the struggle over a legitimate principle of order. Editorial analysis here is not informed so much by the question of *whether* there is a public sphere of a European character, but, rather, from an understanding that *there are* already Europeanized national public spheres (Koopmans, Erbe, & Meyer, 2010; Statham, 2010).

Although this is a qualitative analysis in its core approach, we did deploy secondary support from (traditionally seen as) quantitative methods. Therefore, we pursued coder training and conducted an intercoder reliability test (Krippendorff's alpha) to ensure common understanding of meanings. The overall intercoder reliability was α = .86. We used ATLAS.ti and SPSS for the coding and analysis of the frames**.**

Findings

All editorials were openly coded to identify common argumentation patterns and narratives (Dahinden, 2006). This close data analysis enabled identifying new potential frames. Thereby, we developed an extensive map, or matrix (see Appendix), of common narratives of variations and understandings that feed the EPS in relation to European identity and the crisis. We organized our findings around two broad frames derived from our analysis: *geographies of crisis* and *understandings of Europe*. Each one of them involved several levels and aspects articulated in the analysis.

The frame geographies of crisis either addresses the crisis in terms of geography (i.e., spatial "lieu"/scope [a situation in a specific country]) or describes the crisis as a European-wide state of affairs (i.e., a common European problem). It reflects the critique of democratic deficit and skepticism about European integration on the basis of Europe as a terrain of nations and nationalisms rather than on the basis of a unifying common identity and democratic state of politics. Subframes emerged defined around the tension between "renationalization" and *"Europeanization"* (of crisis as a policy challenge). Frames of renationalization were used to identify texts that described national interests as a legitimate strategy or as a way for supporting or criticizing actors from within the national scene, locating the crisis—as a problem or its solution—with national actors and "interests" (and faults). "Renationalization" is also found in articles that focused on the stalemate between the German and the French government, often viewed as a hindrance to solving the crisis. Renationalization became, then, the category that helped identify three aspects: national interests, public damage, and the hegemonic conflict in relation to the geographies of crisis.

A second category related to the geographies of crisis was "Europeanization," or framing understandings of the crisis as European or transnational as the result of a divergence of national interests concerning European fiscal–economic policy, as a consequence of dysfunctions of the architecture of the monetary union, or "simply" as a problem of the common currency. These were also the three aspects where the idea of Europeanization of the crisis referred to the geographies of crisis.

The understandings of Europe frame is organized along three subframes: the EU as a *polity regime*, as an *agora* of political participation, or as a *community* of identity and values, reflecting the large literature on European integration. The first subframe regards Europe as a structural framework (EU institutions, EU law, treaties, the Eurogroup, the EU as banks, markets) that sets the rules for solution. This aspect is operationalized by two frames: a first subaspect expressing the idea that the regime is *legitimately* governed from "Brussels," the "seat of Europe" (i.e., by the European Council and the European Central Bank [ECB]), and a second subaspect that references the *ineffectiveness* and inadequacy of this *regime*. The idea that the EU is a polity regime included yet two more aspects: one pointing at the (arbitrary or legitimate) power of Germany (as an hegemonic actor) to sanction members that do not follow austerity policies and one that sees European integration as an opportunity for social improvement. These four aspects articulate the idea that the EU is a polity regime.

The second subframe considers Europe as an *agora*, a system of interdependent sovereign, equal states competing for influence in political solutions. Its four aspects refer to (a) the relative goals and positions of the states in relation to each other and (b) the negotiated issues or (c) their strategies and

actions or citizens' decisions (including civil society, demonstrations, assemblies) and (d) national parliaments' and governments' decisions. Finally, the last subframe of the understandings of Europe regards Europe as a *community* of identity, values, and culture as a pre- and-meta-institutional space beyond the institutions of government and expresses levels of symbolic agreement that hold Europe together as imagined community. This aspect is focused more on the people's Europe and is operationalized by appealing to a European identity that overtakes the national, by referring to Europe's common history or destiny, or by mentioning values such as solidarity as a deeper reason of the European integration.

Analysis and Discussion

In total, we analyzed 421 editorials on the crisis in the pre-electoral periods. The amount of editorials published between May 1 and June 30, 2012, is distributed fairly similarly among Austrian, German, and British newspapers; the number of editorials published by the Greek newspapers *Kathimerini* and *Ta Nea* accounts for more than two-fifths of the total amount of editorials under scrutiny (see Appendix, Figures A1 and A2). A similar distribution pattern across presses and countries can be seen in 2015. The overall number of editorials covering the eurozone crisis and the Greek elections, however, amounts to 149 and is, thus, lower in 2015 than in 2012 (see Appendix, Figures A3 and A4). The Greek parliamentary elections in 2015 were covered in half as many editorials as the two elections in 2012. Furthermore, in 2015, the Greek editorials account for more than two-thirds (67%) of the total amount of articles. A closer look at the published articles reveals a pattern of common topics in relation to the European crisis—not only per country and newspaper but also beyond national boundaries.

Despite promoting nationalistic filters, the representations of the geographies of crisis and the understandings of Europe along the analyzed corpus generate elaborated representations of Europe and crisis that extend as a common, albeit not identical, narrative across the European press. These representations neither contradict each other nor provide alternative points of view to the debates on crisis. The narratives on the Greek elections, or on the roles of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the European Commission, or the European Central Bank converge, discursively producing a largely homogenized public discourse—a common, *banal*, Europeanized discourse on nations.

In particular, the cases of the general national elections in Greece on June 17, 2012, and on January 25, 2015, mark a point of collision between a European and an internationally steered policy of "solving" the economic crisis and the right of citizens to engage in this process (even by rejection). There is an iterative narrative that refers to the European financial crisis as a story of nation-states struggling to assert their sovereignty in a supranational organization, which struggles to maintain its common currency, its role in the international loans market, and its existence per se; this representation is visible across all of the analyzed press. In this sense, the combination of economic indicators of gross production and risk premium form a constellation of situated assets that are presented as conditioning both the decision making at supranational and domestic levels as well as the diplomatic relations between the member states. National governments' decisions are framed as utmost—and *only possible*—measures to overcome the economic crisis. Austerity measures are heralded as the official actions that *must* be taken by national governments (e.g., Greece) to reduce their budget deficit. National presses portray the crisis as the results of "wrong" behavior and hence portray the politics as corrective, as a matter of technical, and hence, rather

unquestioned, course of action: "The view to Greece shows how much explosive is in a financial plan that is incomplete, signals future burdens and ignores risks. The country is dependent on foreign aid, teetering on the abyss and threatens to collapse" (*FAZ,* June 27, 2012, para. 2). Within this frame, a certain role of the EU is foregrounded, that of the moral adjudicator to force member states to do "the right thing" by imposing measures to correct "wrong" behaviour.

Another common thread is the one in which "Europe" is addressed as a union, but at the level of elites—that is, a set of states with common institutions, goals, and interests but not as a coherent polity, geographical space, or community of people. European identity is presented as opposed to the depicted urgent need of a deeper political and economic integration: the formation of a European financial authority. The Austrian newspaper *Die Presse* regards a closer monetary union as "the" remedy: "Should the euro zone survive in its current form over time, financial experts, business professors and politicians in unison warn that at least the states of the monetary union have to grow together more closely in the future" (*Die Presse*, June 28, 2012, para. 1).

A fortified "banal" thinking of administration as "unintentional" shows throughout in the press. For example, a narrative presents the complex system of the European Monetary Union as too fragile, whereas its core institution, ECB, as an almost neutral, decoupled from politics, actor: The British *Guardian* and the Greek *Ta Nea*, for instance, refer to the ECB as a weak, distanced, unintentional, and hence, apolitical body: "In practice, the ECB is constrained—a technocratic animal attempting unhappily to figure out how to survive in a political world" *(The Guardian*, May 1, 2015, para. 4), and "The real guarantor of stability is the European Central Bank. However, the central bankers' work is not to make policy" (*Ta Nea,* January 12, 2015, para. 1).

However, even this agora is not one of a community of equal members: Processes of othering—"us" versus "them"—primarily target single nation-states (Mylonas, 2012; Sarikakis, 2012; Tzogopoulos, 2013). The press coverage of the eurozone crisis is characterized by a prevalent system of inclusion/exclusion, with the consequence of actively constructing the "other." There is an underlying, and sometimes overt, moralizing discourse of punishment and reward, upon which the process of othering between "bad" and "good" European is built: the analyzed editorials draw heavily on *metaphors*. The most commonly identified metaphor is the medical metaphor that uses sick and healthy economies and contagion. Moreover, stereotypes are employed:

> You know the old euro-joke about heaven and hell. Heaven is where the British do the policing, the Italians are the lovers, the French are the cooks and the Germans do the engineering. Hell is where the British are the cooks, the Germans are the lovers, the French are the engineers and the Italians run the place. (*The Daily Telegraph*, January 30, 2012, para 1.)

Metaphors are used to underline the in/exclusion Europe as an analogy *to order and chaos*: "There is a great fear—for unemployment, poverty, economic disaster and return to drachma . . . in order to conquer fear, we must follow the road of Europe, the road of hope—even the road is full of difficulties" (*Ta Nea*, June 9, 2012, para. 7).

> The Greeks understood how much for them, for their country and for Europe was at stake in this election. The message has arrived. Many have yet voted for the conservative New Democracy: less out of conviction but hoping that this stabilization is achieved as a signal to the financial markets and other Europeans. (*Der Standard*, June 18, 2012, para 1.)

Opposing ideas are treated as threats, and the biggest fear would be to *fall* outside the euro: "if SYRIZA governs and follows its proclaimed programme, this will lead us with mathematical certainty out of the euro" (*Kathimerini*, June 3, 2012, para. 2). Or as *The Guardian* phrases it: "The northern-European strategy of forcing Greece's caretaker government to go faster and harder on spending cuts is meanwhile feeding support for extremist parties" (*The Guardian*, February 11, 2012, para. 3).

In addition to attributing responsibility to the EU, editorials also assume liability for nation-states. They do so by making use of national stereotypes, which echo in subjective, overgeneralized, and incomplete representations. Greece, for instance, is presented as a particularly "difficult" case: as inefficient, disobedient, and corrupt (Tzogopoulos, 2013). SYRIZA, the leading left-wing party in Greece, is presented as a threat to the future of the EU. According to *The Daily Telegraph*, "Syriza wants to stay in the club, but it wants to rewrite the rules in a manner that allows it to throw off the shackles of austerity" (*The Daily Telegraph,* December 30, 2014, para. 7)*.* Similarly, a few days after, the same newspaper states that "the Syriza party, has threatened to renege on part of Greece's (EURO) 240 billion debt to the international community, a move that would plunge Europe into a fresh crisis" (*The Daily Telegraph*, January 8, 2015, para. 2). Not only is Greece stereotyped, but the editorials also treat Germany as the European hegemon (whether despised or admired, handling "tough love" or despotic, depending on the national daily newspaper and story), as the one with (self-evidently) control over funds—a "paternal" figure in charge:

> Europe's north will soon have to choose between renegotiating so the oxygen of liquidity can flow on less ruinous terms, or else standing back and watching the Greek banks go bust with a bang. Take the second course, and the amputation of the euro's first limb will follow. After this month's Spanish bank rescue failed to soothe market nerves, the immediate question would then be "who next?" (*The Guardian*, June 18, 2012, para. 4)

In relation to the crisis, the newspapers also portray an EU of two distinct groups of member states: those fallen into the crisis (especially Greece) and those capable of maintaining, or even enlarging, their power within the EU. This double structure, in turn, affects the narrative of crisis. A typical example of Germany's domination in Europe is given by the British newspaper *The Guardian:* "Europe, which in essence means Germany, will then have to decide whether to continue to play the hard man or to give Greece room to manoeuvre" (*The Guardian*, December 29, 2014, para. 6). This narrative of Europe around two types of countries also sets dynamics of power between the "two-speed Europe" (Charlemagne, 2011) that is firmly anchored in the spatial organization of European politics: between countries as "givers" and "takers." The north–south axis is a recurrent reference in the narratives and also works as a form of structural power in relation to the center–periphery dichotomy. In a rare critique of the "north": "It is not just Greece that needs a fresh start but the whole eurozone. It is time for the north to listen to the message from the south" (*The Guardian*, January 25, 2015, para. 6).

In this form, the head of state and prime ministers play a fundamental role because they are presented as embodiments of the national state and are responsible for its fate: "In order to maximise the benefits of Greece, the government should aim at restoring the credibility of the country. There is a necessity for political unity, thoughtful plan, and mostly actions!" (*Ta Nea*, June 30, 2012, para. 1). This is particularly visible in the field of domestic politics and foreign affairs. The high degree of personalization of the narrative has been detected from very early in the analysis, and beyond the journalistic rhetoric, it has implications as it creates one single voice—one person—not as representative of the plurality but of an assumed homogeneity of national interests that *eliminates* the possibility of dissonant voices.

Confronted with the personalized and domestic political environment, the *economy rules* as a logic outside the reach of national governments—or indeed much alternative understandings. Markets are presented as an external force, vaguely defined and outside the scope of regulation. Markets are presented as a permanent egalitarian neutral factor sensitive to change that acts as a natural "supervisor" to the EU and to any single member state: their "banality" is understood as higher authorities "reactive" to political decisions. The "voice" of the market/s comes from technocratic personalized authorities such as Christine Lagarde (managing director of the IMF); Mario Draghi (president of the European Central Bank); and distant, "neutral" market voices, the representatives of credit rating agencies (Moodys, Standard and Poor's, and Fitch), placing the latter at an equal or even superior stance in relation to states, international organizations, or political institutions: "In practice, the ECB is constrained—a technocratic animal attempting unhappily to figure out how to survive in a political world." (*The Guardian*, January 5, 2015, para. 4). The *Daily Telegraph*, likewise, is skeptical about the ECB's role in solving the crisis:

> All of a sudden, the wonders of unconventional monetary activism are back in the spotlight, with Mario Draghi, president of the European Central Bank, cast in the role of knight in shining armour, riding to the rescue of the beleaguered eurozone. (*The Daily Telegraph*, January 23, 2015, para. 1)

The press presents all political and economic action against the backdrop of an "existential" crisis— the threat of the disintegration of Europe. The Greek elections are framed as activators of the possible fragmentation of the EU and the collapse of the eurozone: "The election that the Greek Prime Minister, Antonis Samaras, has called after losing his gamble over the presidency on Monday represents the start of an even more uncertain era in Europe" (*The Guardian*, December 29, 2014, para. 1). At the same time, the portrayal of countries as successful versus unsuccessful fosters a discussion about adequate and effective (political) behavior of national governments that depict the costs imposed by bailout as a (fair) punishment and the coming out of the crisis as a reward. The narrative of moral superiority of a specific economic order identified in the warning undertone, in the national stereotypes and the reproduction of a discourse based on a "moral lesson," does not trace the roots of the crisis but settles for discussing its immediate effects and conditions:

> Here lies the problem: The new dynamics in the direction of the United States of Europe is not the result of fundamental considerations and a broad discourse among citizens of still sovereign member states together with a democratic decision on the future of Europe,

but the panic reaction of politicians who see that they have gambled too high and lost.
(*Die Presse,* June 8, 2012, para. 3)

These rather homogeneous narratives involving countries, Europe, crisis, and moral economy that can be traced across the European quality presses are also homogeneous in the aspects that the narrative omits. In this sense, the key is *the absence of citizenry* in the whole narrative: These are stories of national states struggling about a market in which citizens appear only as collateral damage and mostly as isolated cases in articles that are not the central voice of the newspapers. The second absence is the (critical framing of the role of) private global financial structures and international corporations. The centrality of the geopolitics of crisis and international diplomacy involves only state representatives and technocracies as representatives of transnational organizations that "interpret" the market, but the role of big global banking business or its interests is not mentioned in the analyzed press. Assuming that these financial structures are the actual receivers of most of the bailout, and that they are also those making direct profit of the European market in crisis, leaving them outside of the narrative constellation dramatically reduces the possibilities of understanding the actual range and social consequences of the crisis. It is particularly significant that the whole analyzed press—left or right, German or Greek, British or Austrian—misses the same spots. Similarly, there is an absence of the historical context and depth as in the fast economic recovery of a Germany that now plays a dominant position but that received a major bailout 60 years earlier; or the complete absence in the European quality journalism of Iceland either as a successful—or problematic—example of the way out of the financial crisis.

Conclusion

The media not only contribute actively to the construction of particular forms of Europe but also to the construction of particular forms of crisis. Both "issues," Europe and the crisis, function as discursively constructed entities built largely upon nationalistic fragments of stereotypically assumed dichotomies. The *continuous* construction of a (mediated) EPS through media practices is *accelerated* and *cemented* as the financial crisis constitutes a common and persistent point of reference for European national presses through which a range of understandings of and approaches to what constitutes Europe are rehearsed (Mylonas, 2012; Sarikakis, 2012; Tzogopoulos, 2013). Indeed "identities become salient and are fought over in particular historical moments, especially in times of crisis" (Risse, 2010, p. 2).

The analysis of the representations of the geographies of the crisis (whether actors, stories, or issues are seen as European or national) and of the understandings of Europe (as a political entity, a market, or a deliberative space and identity for citizens) in major opinion-leading newspapers of four European countries during 2012 and 2015 demonstrates that a common strand of discussion has been built, upon which at least a limited range of understandings of Europe as polity and as governance are presented and, at worst, a damaging discourse for European integration and the vision of a united Europe.

Our analysis indicates that the spectrum of understandings and approaches to the EU is limited and homogenous across the European elite press, despite being underpinned by national or even some ideological particularities. Indeed, it is dominated by "unintentional" policy justifications based on the moral superiority/inferiority of nations and people. It is through the banalization of the EU that further banal

nationalisms are activated. Leading national presses ultimately function as producers of commonly shared narratives that favor a particular form of political economic behavior but also dismiss, silence, and marginalize "story lines" that derail from core frames of the crisis. This study found that elite presses disregarded the citizenry as the leading purpose of any political action and civil society's place at the center of the debate. In other words, a "people's Europe" is not part of this mediated EPS, and the European Union is not presented as a space where citizens come together.

We rather argued that the EPS at work during the crisis becomes one of banality, which is operationalized through routine, repeated, and uncritical representations of understandings of the EU on the basis of its elites, and the European policy issue of crisis. In addition, it activates banal nationalisms as forms of EU identity, which is based on old-but-renewed dualisms on the basis of understandings of Europe as a spatial, political, and communal actor. Within those, we find subdivisions whose sum largely operationalizes an EPS around a Europe of caricatured nation-states, "sinners," elites, and governments, but not a Europe-agora of citizens, irrespectively of national or other identities. We explored the forms of Europe available in the media and we extend Billig's (1995) idea of a "taken-for-granted," uncritical form of "Europeanism" that operates in the press and public debates (Trenz, 2014).

Beyond the particularities of the analyzed months and presses and the issues of defining the/an EPS, our discussion suggests that such a discursive continuity across conservative and progressive newspapers and beyond national boundaries in relation to the crisis demonstrates the existence of an EPS, albeit not, perhaps, of the "Habermasian" type. This is a salient, seamless, and ultimately banal public sphere that extends silently across the European press as a dominant narrative that reaches several national territories but that at the same time enjoys a suspiciously homogeneous form. Kantner (2004) concluded that national media frame controversial issues in the same way but not necessarily from the same perspectives across national boundaries (p. 155). Likewise, we found that nationalisms, a national angle through which European events are viewed, were omnipresent in our corpus. Editorials continuously remind their readers of their national belonging, the assessed position of their native country in the EU club of states, and their "quarrel" with the "other." The supremacy of one state toward the other(s) was found throughout the national presses under scrutiny. The latter appears to be a common and banal by-product of news reporting.

The identified frames reproduce the banality of a dehumanized narrative about the crisis, including the national actors but avoiding the global corporate interests and the European citizenry. The uneven and incomplete communicative space represented through the spatial (in)justice is seen in the geographies of the crisis and in the very nationalized understandings of Europe.

Against this background, a common Europeanized national discourse, which this paper traced in the European elite press with regard to the eurozone crisis and the Greek parliamentary elections, endangers the legitimacy of the European project and invites further research to identify the particular mechanisms, alternatives, and consequences of a "banal" EPS.

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Appendix

Table A1. Newspapers Under Scrutiny.

Country	Quality Newspaper	
	Center-Left	Center-Right/Conservative
Austria	*Der Standard*	*Die Presse*
Germany	*Süddeutsche Zeitung*	*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*
Greece	*Ta Nea*	*Kathimerini*
UK	*The Guardian*	*The Daily Telegraph*
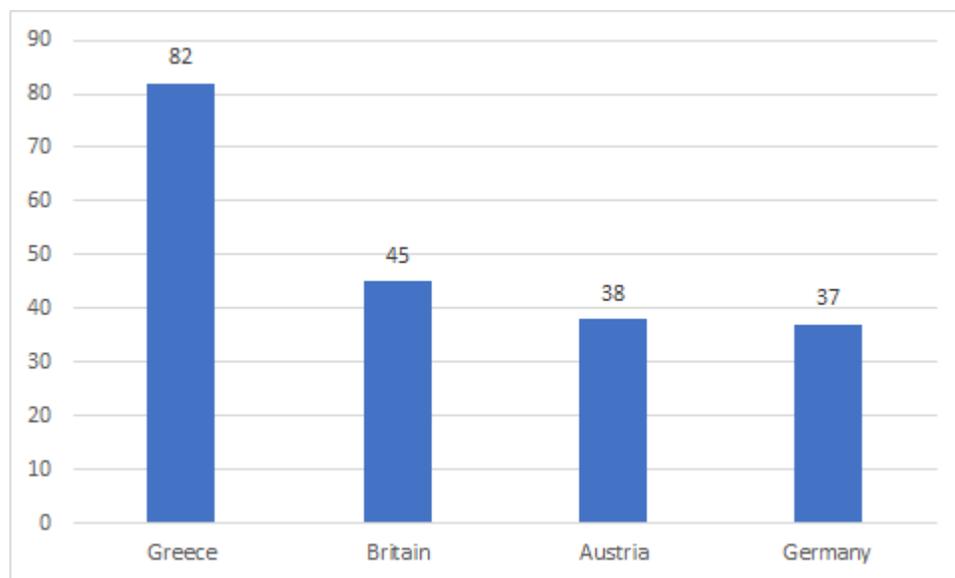
Figure A1. Volume of editorials on the eurozone crisis per country
***from May 1 to June 30, 2012 (*n = 202*).***
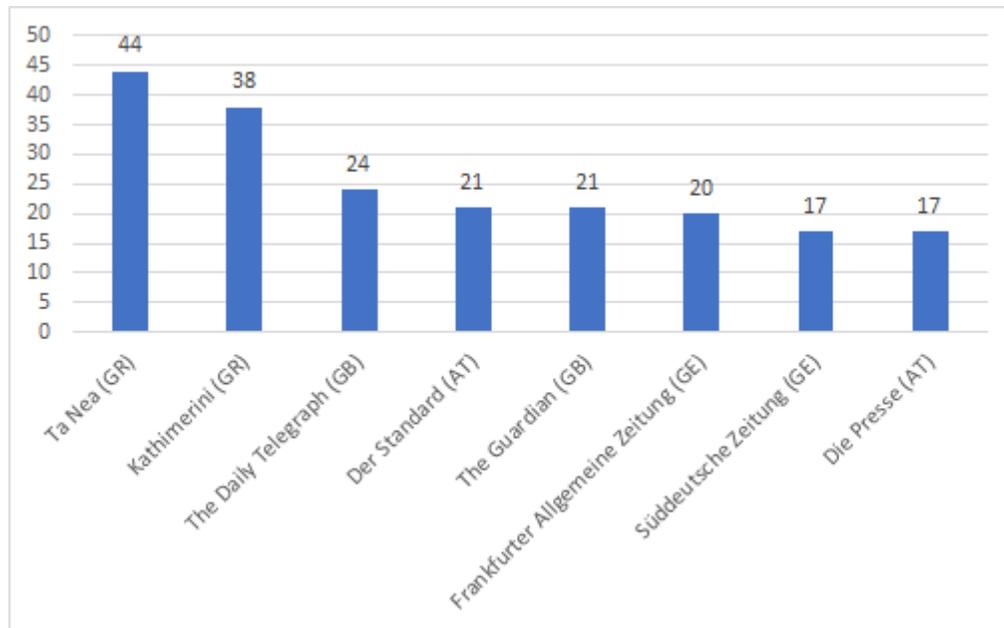
Figure A2. Volume of editorials on the eurozone crisis per newspaper,
*May 1 to June 30, 2012 (n = 202).*
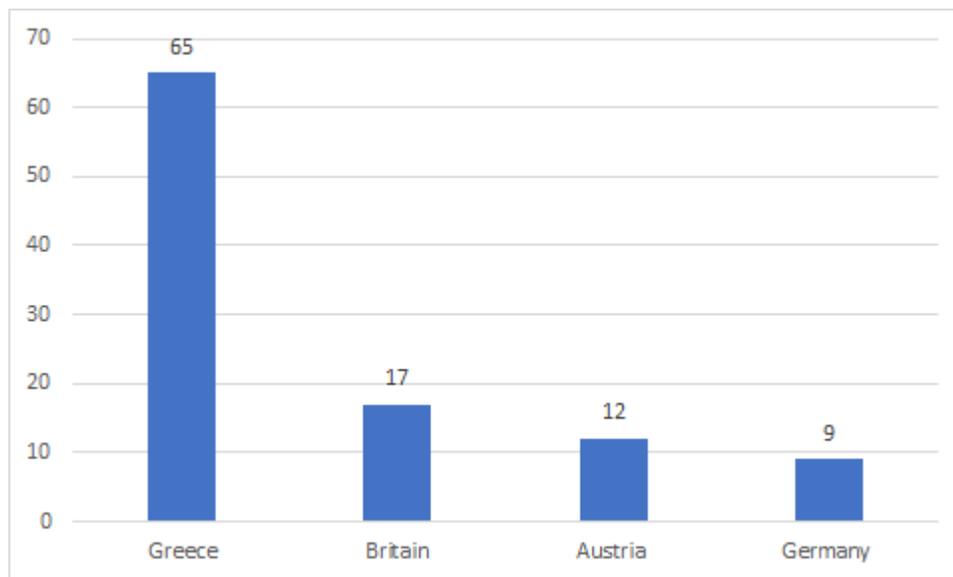
Figure A3. Volume of editorials on the eurozone crisis per country from
*December 1 to January 31, 2015 (n=103).*
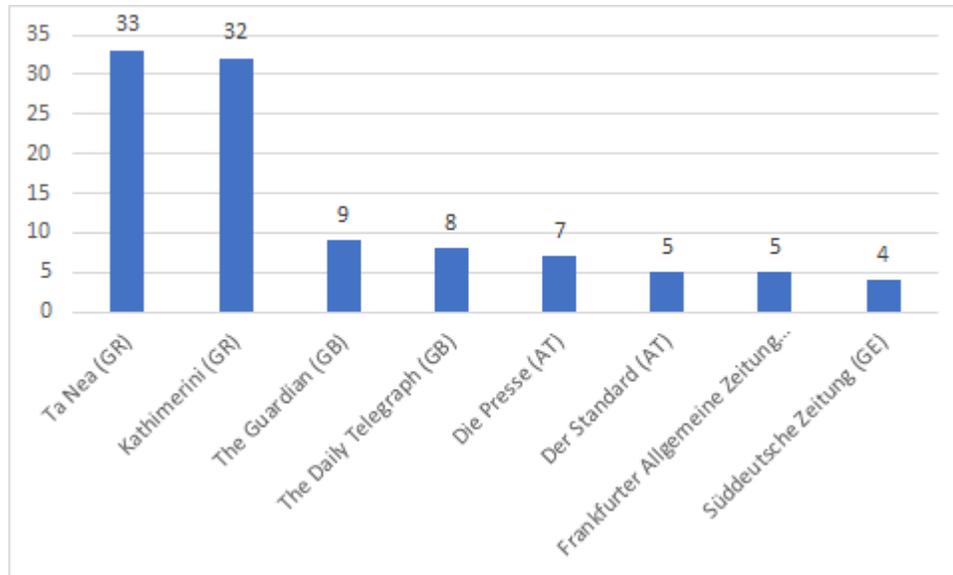
***Figure A4. Volume of editorials on the eurozone crisis per newspaper
December 1 to January 31, 2015 (n=103).***