

# EU Media Coverage in Times of Crisis

Citation for published version (APA):

Bijsmans, P. (2017). EU Media Coverage in Times of Crisis: Euroscepticism Becoming Mainstream? In M. Caiani, & S. Guerra (Eds.), *Euroscepticism, Democracy and the Media: Communicating Europe, Contesting Europe* (pp. 73-94). Palgrave Macmillan. [https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-59643-7\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-59643-7_4)

**Document status and date:**

Published: 01/01/2017

**DOI:**

[10.1057/978-1-137-59643-7\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-59643-7_4)

**Document Version:**

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

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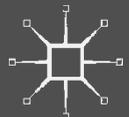
Palgrave Studies in European Political Sociology

# Euroscepticism, Democracy and the Media

Communicating Europe, Contesting Europe



Edited by  
Manuela Caiani and Simona Guerra



# Palgrave Studies in European Political Sociology

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Manuela Caiani • Simona Guerra  
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# Euroscepticism, Democracy and the Media

Communicating Europe, Contesting Europe

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Palgrave Studies in European Political Sociology  
ISBN 978-1-137-59642-0      ISBN 978-1-137-59643-7 (eBook)  
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-59643-7

Library of Congress Control Number: 2016958218

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This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by Springer Nature  
The registered company is Macmillan Publishers Ltd.

The registered company address is The Campus, 4 Crinan Street, London, N1 9XW, United Kingdom

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# EU Media Coverage in Times of Crisis: Euroscepticism Becoming Mainstream?

Patrick Bijsmans

## Introduction

Common understanding has it that media play an important role in democratic societies. This is one of the reasons for the emergence of an extensive body of research on different aspects of media coverage of EU affairs (see Risse 2015; Kevin 2003). Some scholars have argued that the misrepresentation of European affairs in national media is an important source of Euroscepticism (see Leconte 2010; Anderson 2004). Yet, surprisingly, despite the growing body of literature on EU media coverage and the extensive literature on Euroscepticism, there has been little dedicated research that combines both perspectives.

This chapter takes a more detailed look at the topic of media and Euroscepticism at a time when the Eurozone crisis has made many

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M. Caiani, S. Guerra (eds.), *Euroscepticism, Democracy and the Media*, Palgrave Studies in European Political Sociology,  
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-59643-7\_4

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headlines. The crisis saw a Eurozone on the verge of collapse, stringent austerity measures in several member states, and new steps towards further economic and monetary integration. Following Brack and Startin (2015, p. 240), these events have resulted in Euroscepticism becoming mainstream ‘in the sense that it has become increasingly more legitimate and salient (and in many ways less contested) across Europe as a whole’.

By means of a qualitative comparison of media coverage in 2009 and 2014, this study will explore if Euroscepticism has indeed become mainstream in public debates. This would entail changing mediated debates in which Eurosceptic rhetoric has not just increased but also become more hostile towards the whole idea of European integration and not just to certain characteristics of the EU. The focus will be on quality newspapers in Britain and the Netherlands. Britain is the archetypical example of a Eurosceptic member state and is not part of the Eurozone. The Netherlands is a Eurozone member where criticism towards the EU has been on the rise for some time now.

If the mainstreaming thesis is correct, Euroscepticism should certainly no longer be confined to Britain. Moreover, while the focus on quality newspapers may come with a certain bias towards an elite readership that is more likely to be interested in EU affairs (Conti and Memoli, this volume; Risse 2010), it is exactly in such newspapers that we should also expect critical and Eurosceptic discourses to have become more embedded for the mainstreaming thesis to hold.

## The Rise of Euroscepticism

As Caiani and Guerra explain in the introduction to this volume, Euroscepticism and opposition towards the EU and its policies have become more prominent than ever before. As a result, there has been a shift from a ‘permissive consensus’ to what Marks and Hooghe (2009) have called a ‘constraining dissensus’; from a situation in which the European citizens were latent about European integration, to one in which politicians are confronted with an increasingly critical public. The opposition raised in this context is, however, ‘multi-faceted’, takes different forms and its advance is far from uniform across member states (Guerra, this volume). Hence, the importance of expanding the scope of Euroscepticism research to areas such as media.

## Media and Euroscepticism

Most work on Euroscepticism is concerned with political parties and public opinion, whereas there has been relatively little attention for other related issues such as media and Euroscepticism (Usherwood and Startin 2013). This is quite surprising given the fact that media play such an important role in modern societies. Public debates are represented in media, which play an important role as sources of information for many citizens. They also shape debates through both their reliance on news values for selection and their active contribution to debates through, for instance, editorials (see Galpin and Trenz, this volume).

This does not mean that there has not already been some work that takes a more detailed look at this relationship. These existing studies have opted for different perspectives. Some scholars have looked into the extent to which media are Eurosceptic (see Anderson 2004), whereas others have examined the effects of media coverage on opinions about the EU, in general, and the spread of Euroscepticism, in particular (see de Vreese 2007). Media analysis has also been used as a means to explore other aspects of Euroscepticism, such as party competition (see Statham et al. 2010) and the role of stereotypes (Grix and Lacroix 2006).

These studies often focus on positions in favour of or against the EU, thereby overlooking the rich variety of opinions referred to in existing literature on Euroscepticism (see Guerra forthcoming2016). Yet, there are some exceptions to this. For instance, Startin (2015, p. 321; Leruth et al., this volume) proposes to distinguish between ‘Euro-positive’, ‘Eurosceptic’ and ‘Euro-ambivalent’ newspapers, which are ‘generally in favour of the European Union per se, not being clearly partisan either way with regard to ongoing measures designed to foster closer European cooperation and not necessarily covering EU-related issues with any great regularity and as a matter of priority’. De Wilde et al. (2013) devised a more elaborate new typology consisting of six possible positions towards European integration. These range from ‘Affirmative European’, which entails a positive assessment of European integration, to ‘Anti-European’, which represents a complete rejection of integration.

Other scholars have also drawn attention to the variety of possible positions towards the EU. Karner’s (2013) analysis of Austrian Euroscepticism reveals that a plurality of positions can be found in Austrian media,

including alternative pro-European evaluations of European affairs, particularly in quality media. Based on a claim-making analysis of political party positions as covered by the media, Statham et al. (2010) argue that integration as such is hardly questioned, though there are instances of constructive critique focussing on specific elements. In fact, most criticism concerned 'the substance of Europe'. Similarly, in their analysis of debates about the European Constitutional Treaty (ECT), Statham and Trenz (2013) refer to so-called 'Eurocritical claims': positions towards the EU that are based on alternative visions of Europe, rather than an outright rejection of European integration.

## Britain and the Netherlands in the EU

This chapter combines perspectives from media and Euroscepticism research by exploring to what extent Euroscepticism has become a mainstream phenomenon in mediated debates on EU affairs in the British and Dutch public spheres.<sup>1</sup> Britain and the Netherlands differ not only in terms of size but also in terms of political and media system and their stance towards the EU.

The 'awkward partner' (George 1990) Britain has always had a rather complicated relation with the EU and its predecessors, often following concerns about sovereignty and identity. Initially reluctant to take part in the European Economic Community, the country eventually joined in 1973, only to hold a referendum on continued membership in 1975. Startin (2015) believes that today a 'tipping point' has been reached in Britain's relations with the EU, with rational arguments having been surpassed by emotional ones. As a result, Britain 'could well be set on a path to becoming an "ex-partner"' (rather than just an 'awkward' one) (Startin 2015, p. 312).

British newspapers are generally seen as being very susceptible to Eurosceptic arguments, employing a rhetoric that, according to Daddow (2012), stresses 'destructive dissent' based on perceived 'threats to British sovereignty and identity' originating from a German-run continent. However, other scholars have shown that Euroscepticism is more vehemently pursued in some media than in others. Popular tabloids are usu-

ally most outspoken, whereas quality newspapers have allowed for a more diverse set of opinions (e.g. Startin 2015; Anderson 2004).

In contrast to Britain, the Netherlands has long been viewed as a pro-integrationist country, partly due to the fact that it was one of the EU's founding members (Schout and Rood 2013). The negotiations in the run-up to the Maastricht Treaty—when a far-reaching Dutch proposal for a new Treaty on European Union was rejected by all member states except Belgium—have played a key role in the rise of a more critical attitude towards the EU. Since then, the Dutch have grown more hesitant towards the EU, culminating in a rejection of the ECT in a referendum on 1 June 2005. This irreversibly made Eurosceptic arguments part of the national EU debate (van Holsteyn and Vollaard 2015).

Media coverage of EU affairs in the Netherlands is said to have been limited compared to coverage in other member states, such as Britain (see de Beus and Mak 2009; Kevin 2003). The little work that exists on Dutch media and Euroscepticism mostly deals with European elections. For example, fuelled by the 2005 referendum, there was rather substantial coverage of the 2009 elections (de Wilde et al. 2013) in which many identified Europe as a threat to the Netherlands.

## Varieties of Opposition to the EU in the Quality Press

Four quality newspapers have been selected for this study: the centre-left newspapers *The Guardian* and *De Volkskrant* and the centre-right newspapers *The Times* and *NRC Handelsblad* (see Leruth et al., this volume). Each of these has influential op-ed pages through which they play an important role in public debates. The focus on quality newspapers stems from the assumption that the mainstreaming of Euroscepticism should also be reflected in newspapers that are known to present a more balanced and elaborate image of politics than popular and tabloid newspapers.

Political orientations tend to be more visible in the British press than in many of their continental counterparts (see Hallin and Mancini 2004). Yet, *The Times* and *The Guardian* represent a more diverse set of politi-

cal beliefs than some of the other British quality newspapers and, hence, can be compared to the less outspoken Dutch newspapers. For instance, the centre-right *Daily Telegraph* could have been an option, if it were not for its consistent support for the *Conservatives* (hence its nickname ‘The Torygraph’) and its more one-dimensional approach towards European integration (e.g. Anderson 2004; Watts 1997).

Newspaper coverage of EU affairs in 2009, the year in which the economic and Eurozone crises really hit Europe, is compared with coverage in 2014, when the European economy slowly started to recover. Both countries experienced an economic slowdown during these years and, interestingly, both essentially pushed for further Eurozone integration, despite Britain not signing the 2012 Fiscal Pact (Mather 2015). Instead of looking into coverage of events or specific policies, this chapter takes a broader focus, taking into account all aspects of EU affairs. Yet, European elections took place during both years; elections which saw a rather substantial number of votes for Eurosceptic parties, such as the *UK Independence Party (UKIP)* in Britain and Geert Wilder’s *Freedom Party* in the Netherlands.

The analysis zooms in on the assessment of EU affairs as put forward by actors in the mediated public sphere—including national, European and international (representatives of) citizens, media, political actors (cf. Koopmans and Statham 2010).<sup>2</sup> This type of claim-making analysis tends to be used in more quantitatively oriented studies, but here a predominantly qualitative approach has been adopted. This allows for a more in-depth analysis, which can help to more precisely uncover the objects and nature of arguments (Hardy et al. 2004).

Constructed week sampling (e.g. Riffe et al. 1993) has been employed to select a manageable amount of articles for analysis. This form of stratified random sampling takes into account differences between weeks (mainly due to the impact of events on news coverage) and within weeks (more attention to, for instance, culture or sports on some days). Two weeks have been constructed for each year, meaning that for the first half of 2009 one random Monday, Tuesday and so on was selected, and so on for the second half of 2009 and for the first and second half of 2014. Since the two Dutch newspapers do not have Sunday editions, the constructed weeks cover Monday to Saturday (see Table 1).

**Table 1** Constructed weeks

Year	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
2009-1	2 February	9 June	22 April	7 May	30 January	11 April
2009-2	27 July	22 December	23 September	12 November	23 October	5 September
2014-1	24 March	28 January	12 February	3 April	27 June	31 May
2014-2	18 August	15 July	22 October	28 August	3 October	13 September

Articles were retrieved from the newspaper database LexisNexis employing the search key 'eu' (which retrieves all articles with words starting with 'eu'). Additionally, the search key 'Brussels' was used to find articles that may not specifically refer to Europe, European Union and so on. The focus was on news, background and analysis, as well as columns, opinion articles, readers' letters and editorials in national editions of the four newspapers. Claims were put forward directly by actors in the debate or indirectly, when newspapers referred to actors' claims or when, for instance, interviewed actors referred to claims put forward by others. They appeared in articles that were fully dedicated to EU affairs and in articles that discussed different issues, but did include at least one claim concerning EU affairs.

The challenge is how to conceptually approach the issue of media and Euroscepticism. Several detailed conceptual understandings of Euroscepticism have been put forward (see Guerra [forthcoming](#), 2017). Taggart and Szczerbiak's (2008) seminal distinction between 'soft' and 'hard' Euroscepticism has played a key role in this exercise. Yet, their work has been criticised for presenting a somewhat oversimplified view of what Euroscepticism might entail (Krouwel and Abts 2007; Kopecký and Mudde 2002). As highlighted before, despite these attempts to broaden our understanding of Euroscepticism and other forms of criticism towards the EU, empirical research on media and Euroscepticism tends to confine its focus to a pro-con EU discussion.

Some of the research that does apply a more extensive categorisation, limits itself to the issue of integration and does not cover policy (de Wilde et al. 2013) or is based on typologies that are useful for analysing overall positions of media towards the EU, but are less suitable for analysing specific positions taken up by a variety of actors in mediated debates (Startin 2015). Following these considerations, this chapter employs the

categories of soft and hard Euroscepticism, but contrasts these with pro-EU positions. In addition, it introduces what FitzGibbon (2013) has called ‘Euroalternativism’, which, as seen (Guerra, this volume) rather than being ‘rejectionist’ in nature, concerns expressions of ‘pro-system opposition’. Here, actors support the EU and European integration, but aim for alternative policies or institutional reforms. These four categories have been further refined to also distinguish between:

- (I) positions concerning the idea of European integration, including institutional design, EU membership and core elements of the EU (such as the Euro or Schengen) and;
- (II) policy fields and policy choices, including choices related to stricter budget norms versus more spending (i.e. related to the Euro) or choices related to whether or not to (temporarily) allow for internal border controls (i.e. related to Schengen).

Taken together, this results in the positions listed in Table 2 (Bijsmans forthcoming 2017a, forthcoming 2017b).

In this context, mainstreaming would entail a changing rhetoric in mediated debates, with actors putting forward soft and hard Eurosceptic

**Table 2** Possible positions on European integration and EU policies

Position	Aimed at	
	(I) Polity	(II) Policy
Support	Support for European integration and the existing institutional design	Support for the policies currently being pursued
Euroalternativism	Support for European integration, but arguing for a more supranational institutional design	Support for EU involvement in a new policy or arguing for a different approach in an existing policy field
Soft Euroscepticism	Support for a form of European integration, but arguing for a more intergovernmental institutional design	Opposition to EU involvement in a policy field or to a specific EU policy
Hard Euroscepticism	Principled opposition to integration and aiming for withdrawal from the EU <sup>a</sup>	

<sup>a</sup>Here, there is no distinction between claims aimed at polity or policy, as actors argue against the EU in all its facets

arguments (including rejection of the whole idea of European integration) at the expense of supportive positions and pro-system opposition. With a ‘tipping point’ apparently having been reached in Britain (Startin 2015), it can be expected that Eurosceptic arguments have not only gained more prominence but also become ‘harder’, even in the generally more pro-European *Guardian*. At the same time, the embedment of a more Eurosceptic discourse in the Netherlands (van Holsteyn and Vollaard 2015) can be expected to also be reflected in a more critical debate in the two Dutch newspapers.

## Findings

A total of 555 articles were selected, covering a variety of issues, with references to elections, institutions, directives and so on. They yielded a total of 1508 claims that were coded for analysis. More articles were analysed for 2014 (302) than for 2009 (253), as were more claims coded for 2014 (836) as compared to 2009 (672). The number of articles particularly increased in the British newspapers, but on average they contained slightly fewer claims. The increase of articles was more moderate in the Dutch newspapers, but here the number of claims per article increased. This suggests that not only has attention for the EU and its policies increased but also that Europe has become a more contested issue. As we will see below, this is matched by an increase of hard Eurosceptic arguments in the British media and an increase of soft Eurosceptic arguments in the Dutch media, with pro-system opposition being present in both.

## EU Affairs and Euroscepticism in the Press in 2009

Table 3 presents an overview of coded positions on European integration and EU policies in 2009, put forward by a wide range of actors. Supportive claims are in the minority when compared to critical and Eurosceptic claims, whether they concern pro-system opposition or opposition that raises more fundamental questions about the EU. In the British newspapers, 30 per cent of claims are supportive of the polity or its policies, whereas in the Dutch newspapers this concerns 41 per

**Table 3** Positions on European integration and EU policies (2009)

	Britain				The Netherlands						
	Guardian 205		Times 129		Subtotal		VK 126		NRC 212		
	(I)	(II)	(I)	(II)	(I)	(II)	(I)	(II)	(I)	(II)	
Support	53 (26%)	16 (8%)	17 (13%)	15 (12%)	101 (30%)	21 (17%)	22 (17%)	47 (22%)	47 (22%)	47 (22%)	137 (41%)
Euroalternativism	9 (4%)	45 (22%)	7 (5%)	36 (27%)	97 (29%)	8 (6%)	45 (36%)	9 (4%)	73 (34%)	73 (34%)	135 (40%)
Soft Euroscepticism	33 (16%)	27 (13%)	20 (16%)	17 (13%)	97 (29%)	19 (15%)	9 (7%)	9 (4%)	9 (4%)	9 (4%)	46 (14%)
Hard Euroscepticism	22 (11%)		17 (13%)		39 (12%)	2 (2%)		18 (8%)			20 (6%)
					334						338

cent. Yet, whereas most oppositional claims in the latter newspapers are of a Euroalternativist nature, soft and hard Eurosceptic claims outweigh Euroalternativist criticism in the British newspapers. Arguments for less integration or even withdrawal outweighed arguments supportive of the current situation in both *The Times* and *The Guardian*. Supportive polity-related claims may have been more visible in *The Guardian* because this more pro-European newspaper may feel a need to defend European integration in a country where many newspapers are seen as taking a more sceptical position.

A substantial part of claims put forward concerns policies rather than polity. In all newspapers but *The Guardian*, over 50 per cent of coded claims concerned EU policies, most of which asked for pursuing different policy options or for the EU to step up its efforts. However, in some cases, this does concern the question whether the EU should deal with a specific policy at all; in other words, a form of soft Euroscepticism in which there is a call for 'less Europe' or 'no Europe'. For instance, the working time directive and its consequences for patient safety were heavily criticised by the British medical profession (*TG* 11 April 2009),<sup>3</sup> whereas *Volkskrant* journalist Kim van Keken called the EU ban on incandescent light bulbs 'symbolic politics' (*VK* 5 September 2009).

It is when looking at polity-related claims when we gain a better insight into the debate about European integration in general and the EU in particular. Part of the related claims concerned issues in which we see the newspapers referring to actors in or from other member states. For instance, in light of the debate on possible Icelandic accession to the EU, *The Guardian* (30 January 2009) notes that Icelandic voters are not very supportive of membership, but 'see the euro as a safe haven to protect Iceland from a battering by the markets' (cf. *NRC* 7 May 2009).

Claims regarding the EU polity were very prominent in debates about events, such as the 2009 European Parliament (EP) elections and the second Irish referendum on the Lisbon Treaty on 2 October 2009. For example, *NRC Handelsblad* (9 June 2009) and *The Times* (9 June 2009) featured articles about the rise of populist right-wing parties. *The Guardian* (9 June 2009) asked a number of leading historians to discuss whether 'fascism [is] on the march again'. One of them, Norman Davies, distinguished between Britain's leading anti-EU party, *UKIP*,

which ‘thrives on the notion that the EU is the new Third Reich’, and the far-right *British National Party (BNP)*, which ‘is much more Anglo-centric; it wants to reclaim an imagined Albion dominated by white nationals’. *BNP* leader Nick Griffin himself claimed that the government was ceding freedom and sovereignty to Brussels, which the Brits fought so hard to defend during both world wars (*TT* 23 October 2009).

Many of the arguments put forward against the EU in the British newspapers focused on what Leconte (2010) has called political Euroscepticism, related to concerns about democracy and sovereignty. While European leaders ‘ritually declared that the Lisbon Treaty will make the EU more democratic, more open and more accountable’ (*TG* 23 October 2009), several actors in the British public sphere questioned the democratic nature of the EU. One reader wrote that

Britain’s strength, which justifies her sense of separateness from the Continent, has always involved rejecting European models of absolutism. The EU is the most recent of these antidemocratic models. (*TT* 30 January 2009)

The *Conservatives* were against the Lisbon Treaty, with David Cameron being ‘on a collision course with the EU’ (*TG* 30 January 2009). References to calls for a referendum on British EU membership appeared several times (*TG* 7 May 2009).

Brits who argued in favour of EU membership often talked in terms of its benefits (cf. utilitarian Euroscepticism; Leconte 2010). Reader Brian Hughes (*TG* 9 June 2009) mourned about the fact that ‘there’s no organisation in Britain willing and able to articulate the many benefits of the flawed but remarkably successful experiment in cross-border cooperation called the EU’. *Guardian* columnist Martin Kettle (*TG* 30 January 2009) argued that Britain would benefit from a stronger, more effective EU on the world stage.

In the Dutch debate, the solution for more democracy actually was not necessarily less EU, but rather a reformed EU, which could include Commissioners elected through national referendums (*VK* 30 January 2009). Still, there are also those who call for less Europe. For instance, *De Volkskrant* (11 April 2009) explained that Geert Wilders and his

*Freedom Party* aimed to limit European integration to economic cooperation—though *NRC Handelsblad* (9 June 2009) also labelled Wilders as ‘anti-Europe’, which suggests a hard Eurosceptic position. *Volkskrant* columnist Martin Sommer (9 June 2009) called the EU an ‘elite project’<sup>4</sup> and wrote that the Lisbon Treaty would not give member states more control, but simply meant more Europe and more European regulations. Yet, just like policy issues seemed to have been more important, overall most polity-related soft and hard Eurosceptic claims actually were put forward by non-Dutch actors. However, in this respect, we should not forget that media do select and may therefore include claims by actors that are seen as representing the broader debate about the EU and that tap into national EU debates.

## EU Affairs and Euroscepticism in the Press in 2014

A broad range of topics featured in the newspapers in 2014, with over half of the coded claims in the Dutch newspapers still pertaining to policy issues. At the same time, there was a more prominent exchange of arguments on integration and institutional issues (Table 4). Over 50 per cent of claims in both British newspapers concerned polity issues, but compared to 2009 the Dutch newspapers also paid more attention to such issues.

The increased attention for arguments for or against the EU seems to be related to attention for a number of issues that touched directly on European integration and EU institutions. These include EU enlargement, the referendum on Scottish independence, the growth of the Eurosceptic caucus in the EP, the debate about the *Spitzenkandidaten*, and, closely linked to the aforementioned points, British Prime Minister David Cameron’s EU membership referendum pledge. Cameron had made clear that he did not wish to leave the EU, but was expecting reforms.

Naturally, the Brexit debate featured prominently in the two British newspapers. Interestingly, hard Eurosceptic arguments appeared more in *The Guardian* in 2014 than they did in 2009. Yet, *The Times*, which tends to be seen as a more Eurosceptical newspaper than *The Guardian*,



displays an increase of supportive arguments. Its editorial positions were mostly supportive of the principle of cooperation between European countries, even though the EU is seen as being ‘over-regulated’ (*TT* 28 August 2014) and the British parliament had lost ‘too much power’ (*TT* 3 October 2014).

Once again, political arguments related to issues such as sovereignty and identity played a key role in the debate. The House of Lords supported a system by which national parliaments and governments could more easily propose and veto legislation (*TG* 24 March 2014; *TT* 24 March 2014). In a debate with *LibDem* leader Nick Clegg—generally seen as the most pro-European politician—Eurosceptic *UKIP* party leader Nigel Farage warned for violence in case the EU would not be dismantled democratically:

We are already, in some countries, beginning to see the rise of worrying political extremism. If you take away from people their ability, through the ballot box, to change their futures because they have given away control of everything to somebody else, then I’m afraid they tend to resort to unpleasant means. (*TG* 3 March 2014)

MP Mark Reckless (*TG* 28 January 2014) combined economic and political arguments when he claimed that ‘we would be better off as an independent country trading with Europe but governing ourselves’. Yet, economic arguments were more often employed by those who argued for EU membership, such as the Confederation of British Industry (*TG* 28 January 2014) and British carmakers (*TT* 3 April 2014).

The appointment of a new Commission President played an important role in the debates about the future relationship between Britain and the EU. Following the elections in May 2014, the European People’s Party again became the biggest group in the EP, yet its *Spitzenkandidaat* Jean-Claude Juncker was a controversial figure, especially in the UK. *The Times* (31 May 2014) dubbed Juncker an ‘arch-federalist’, whereas *The Guardian* wrote that Britain viewed Juncker as ‘a baby-eating federalist monster’ (27 June 2014). David Cameron wanted a Commission President who would be open to reforms and to carving out a new Britain-EU relationship (*TG* 31 May 2014; *TT* 3 October 2014). Quoted in *The Guardian*,

Jan Jansen, a retired Dutch civil servant, criticised the British position and called a possible Brexit a disaster:

It's crazy. In the First World War English people came here to defend Europe. The churchyards are full of young men who died for Europe. Now Cameron doesn't want Europe. (...)Then we'd just have France and Germany. The Dutch would never get a say. Cameron isn't such a bad guy. We always have sympathy for the UK. (*TG* 27 June 2014)

This sentiment resonated in the Dutch-mediated debate. Just like in the British newspapers, the appointment of Juncker was connected to the Brexit debate. Juncker was criticised for being the wrong person for the job; someone who stood for more integration at a time when European citizens were becoming increasingly critical about the EU. In *De Volkskrant* (27 June 2014), EU correspondent Bert Lanting suggests that the appointment of Juncker may result in a Brexit and professor Ton Nijhuis of the University of Amsterdam asks if we 'really want to lose Britain over Juncker'.

Whereas hard Eurosceptic arguments seem to have become more salient in the British-mediated debate (partly at the expense of soft Eurosceptic arguments), soft Eurosceptic arguments became more prominent in the Dutch debate, as did Euroalternative arguments about the EU polity. Soft Eurosceptic arguments often still concerned policy issues and especially gained importance in *NRC Handelsblad*. Part of this debate was about making sure that the EU would not be able to get involved in certain policies, such as social benefits (*NRC* 28 January 2014). However, many of these remarks were actually issued by actors from other European countries. Once again, media make choices based on news values and this may still be seen as representing an increased sensitivity to criticism about and opposition to the EU; in other words, criticism becoming a normal feature of debates.

Yet, generally the Dutch were identified as having become more critical, in particular in the aftermath of the European elections (*VK* 31 May 2014). *NRC Handelsblad* editor Hans Steketee (31 May 2014) argued that the good results for Eurosceptic parties in the EP elections showed that Europe had to change. Even though Wilders actually lost votes, he was still seen as the leading Dutch Eurosceptic politician; not just in the

Netherlands but also in Europe where he was planning to create a parliamentary group with Marine Le Pen's *Front National*.

Reflecting the increasingly critical stance of the Netherlands, Prime Minister Rutte, speaking in Berlin, argued in favour of a more influential role of national parliaments and claimed that the EU's chief role should be to stimulate prosperity (*NRC* 3 April 2009). When Dutch actors discuss European integration, costs versus benefits rather than identity and sovereignty seem to be most important. Rutte stresses this in the aforementioned speech when he argues that the Dutch people's uneasiness with the EU 'is largely due to the results of European cooperation'. As one interviewed citizen put it:

I am pro-Europe. But we should see how we can make the best of it. (*NRC* 31 May 2014)

## Discussion and Conclusion

Quality media are often said to represent a conventional, elite opinion, ignoring other currents of opinion. Yet, the findings presented below show that Euroscepticism and criticism are also becoming mainstream in these elite discourses, with the EU and its policies no longer being taken for granted, but increasingly being the focus of debate. This is reflected in the fact that hard Euroscepticism has become more important in the British debate and that in 2014 over 50 per cent of claims in both British newspapers concerned polity issues. The increase of supportive arguments in *The Times* could be interpreted as a reaction to this—and, hence, as further evidence of the fact that a more critical debate has emerged. In the Netherlands, mainstreaming was rather along the lines of an increase of soft Eurosceptic arguments calling for less EU, although there was also a reverberation of worries about the prospective Commission President's agenda for Europe.

Yet, the approach adapted here also calls for a more nuanced perspective and shows the limitations of opting for a more straightforward conceptualisation (cf. Vasilopoulou 2013, p. 156). First, despite popular views that media fuel Euroscepticism, we have seen a more nuanced picture, with many claims concerning policy instead of polity and with

soft and Eurosceptic claims occurring less frequently than supportive or Euroalternative claims. The latter may be critical arguments—of policy or policy—yet they are based on a generally positive stance towards European integration. Second, British quality newspapers appear to be more balanced in their coverage of EU affairs than one may expect (cf. Daddow 2012). This concurs with the cautious conclusions drawn by Touri and Lynn Rogers (2013), who assert that the British quality press' coverage of the financial crisis in Greece was less stereotypical than usual.

Even when specifically looking at policy discussions, we can see that arguments in favour of the current form of integration or institutional set-up and arguments calling for even further integration still outweigh arguments for less integration or even withdrawal from the EU. The debate in *The Times* was more balanced in 2014 as compared to 2009. In fact, the debate about 'Brexit' could have not just emphasised critical opinions but also increased the importance of pro-Europeans speaking out (de Wilde et al. 2013).

Supportive and Euroalternative claims are important and policy debates matter in Europe's public spheres. This is in line with other research too, such as the studies by Karner (2013), Statham et al. (2010) and Statham and Trenz (2013) referred to before. Moreover, this is also consistent with findings presented by scholars who have looked into attitudes towards the EU in crisis-struck member states (Katsourides 2016; Clements et al. 2014). Their studies reveal a nuanced picture, with criticism usually concerning qualified opposition to certain policies, institutional arrangements and so on, rather than opposition against the EU as a whole. We should therefore be careful not to conclude that soft and hard Euroscepticism are becoming the mainstream, but should remain open towards a broader perspective and a richer understanding of criticism about and opposition against the EU (Leruth et al., this volume).

Generally, the British debate seems to provide better context as to what Euroscepticism actually entails. For instance, *UKIP* tends to be identified with an anti-EU stance in British newspapers, wanting to withdraw from the EU and, hence, is clearly seen as being hard Eurosceptic. A softer version of Euroscepticism is to be found in an anti-federal criticism of the EU, a position taken by quite a few *Conservatives*. In contrast, in the Dutch debate it is less well defined. Actors are identified by the media as

being Eurosceptic, suggesting that they are against the EU, yet without clearly stating this (cf. *VK* 3 April 2014).

Scholarly work has widely discussed the fact that terms like ‘Euroscepticism’, ‘Eurocriticism’ and ‘anti-European’ are often used interchangeably—almost randomly even—in academic, public and political debates (e.g. Leconte 2010). While some have argued that a more critical EU discourse is actually a welcome development (Vasilopoulou 2013; Leconte 2010), the ambiguousness of Euroscepticism, combined with the tendency of media to at times misrepresent EU affairs, may actually obscure genuine political and public debates.

Media have to make choices and we cannot be sure that we are really witnessing a rise of Euroscepticism or rather media paying more attention to Eurosceptic parties and opinions (Galpin and Trenz, this volume). However, since quality media are important sources of information and platforms for debate for many in modern society, we may assume that the overview presented here does at least partly represent national debates. In addition, earlier work suggested that there is relatively little difference between coverage of EU affairs by quality and tabloid media (see Bijsmans forthcoming 2017a; de Beus and Mak 2009, p. 118). Yet, research on EU contestation in the online public sphere reveals a higher degree of opposition, with citizen contribution in particular being much more critical about the EU (see de Wilde et al. 2013). Hence, it is clear that more research is still necessary, because, as mentioned at the start of this chapter, studies combining insights from European public sphere research and Euroscepticism research are still rare.

## Notes

1. Part of the British debate on Europe also concerns the European Court of Human Rights and its jurisdiction (Startin 2015), yet this chapter focuses exclusively on the EU.
2. The approval of new legislation as well as opinions about policy implementation were included. Criticism from EU officials was also included, but their policy proposals were not as the latter tend to represent the topics being discussed in the public sphere.

3. From here onwards, references to articles will appear in this form, where *TG* stands for *The Guardian*, *TT* for *The Times*, *VK* for *De Volkskrant* and *NRC* for *NRC Handelsblad*, followed by date, month, year.
4. All translations are the author's.

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