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# **Eurosceptic candidate MEPs in the news: a transnational perspective**

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## **Abstract:**

This chapter investigates the extent to which transnational dimensions of Euroscepticism have become visible in the European public sphere. It does so by comparing the news visibility of Eurosceptic MEP candidates during the 2009 and 2014 election campaigns in nine countries from the North, South, East and West of Europe. The underlying rationale of the comparison is to test whether the Eurozone crisis has impacted on their transnational visibility. We indeed find that Eurosceptic candidate MEPs receive more news attention in the 2014 EP elections than in the 2009 election. However, only few prominent candidates receive transnational news attention.

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## Introduction

The eruption of the Eurozone crisis in 2009 marked a new period in the process of European integration, as it called into question the viability of the European Monetary Union (Glencross 2013; [Vasilopoulou 2013](#)). In this context of growing uncertainty regarding the future of Europe, Euroscepticism has now become more relevant than ever. While we do know that Euroscepticism is a persistent and embedded phenomenon in the EU (Usherwood and Startin 2013), few studies explore whether Euroscepticism is a transnational phenomenon, i.e. whether it goes beyond national boundaries and interests. This chapter addresses this gap from a political communication perspective. We choose to do so because the media is able to provide a forum for Eurosceptic actors to influence European public opinion, electoral outcomes and the EU policy process. European publics also depend on national media in order to gain knowledge on the possible alternatives from the current EU project ([Koopmans 2007](#); [Trenz 2008](#)). Our main aim is to contribute to the discussion on transnational Euroscepticism by exploring whether we may observe the development of Eurosceptic opposition in the national quality press. Can we talk about transnational Euroscepticism from a newspaper perspective? Are European publics exposed to Eurosceptic arguments from non-domestic Eurosceptic politicians? And, if so, what affects variation? Finally, has the crisis contributed to the development of this type of public sphere?

Previous research has investigated the news visibility of European political actors in general (e.g. [De Vreese et al. 2006](#); [Koopmans 2007](#); [Schuck et al. 2011](#)), and individual Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) in particular ([Gattermann and Vasilopoulou 2015](#)), but we know little about the transnational visibility of individual EU politicians (for an exception see Gattermann 2015 as regards the news visibility of the *Spitzenkandidaten* in 2014). If a ‘Eurosceptic public sphere’ were indeed emerging, then we would expect that national newspapers would report upon non-domestic Eurosceptic actors. To investigate the extent to which a transnational dimension of Euroscepticism has developed, we compare the news visibility of Eurosceptic lead candidates during the 2009 and 2014 election campaigns. We choose to focus on lead candidates because these actors are elected to the EP, which is the transnational European institution par excellence. We explore the extent to which

Eurosceptic lead candidates of a given country are reported upon by national newspapers from other EU member states. Our focus lies on the news visibility of both right-wing and left-wing Eurosceptic MEP candidates from Britain, France, the Netherlands, Germany, Denmark, Austria, Italy, Spain and Poland. The underlying rationale of comparing two EP electoral campaigns is to investigate whether the Eurozone crisis has impacted upon their transnational visibility, i.e. whether Eurosceptic candidate MEPs are more visible in national newspapers from other EU member states.

We find that most newspapers pay in general more attention to Eurosceptic lead candidates during the 2014 EP election campaigns compared to 2009. Our findings suggest that most European broadsheets increasingly report about foreign Eurosceptic candidates relative to their own Eurosceptic candidate MEPs when comparing the 2009 and 2014 campaigns. Yet, the majority of Eurosceptic candidates only receive coverage in the domestic press, and not abroad, in both election years. From a transnational perspective, the most prominent candidate in 2009 was Jean-Marie Le Pen, the (then) party and campaign leader of FN. In 2014 his daughter Marine Le Pen as well as Nigel Farage of UKIP were the most visible transnationally. A close analysis of their reportage reveals that these Eurosceptic candidates are linked with domestic issues as well as transnational themes. The predominant themes in 2014 comprise the common Eurosceptic and anti-EU agenda of these actors, the rising levels of popular disillusionment with centrist parties and the EU, and scenarios of Eurosceptic MEP cooperation in the EP (i.e. pan-European Euroscepticism, see introduction). Overall, our findings point towards the increased relevance of transnational Euroscepticism under conditions of crisis.

### **The development of a ‘Eurosceptic public sphere’?**

The process of political and economic integration at the EU level has brought change not only in the governance structures across Europe; but has also created new public political communication spaces. A public sphere is defined as a common communicative space ‘created when individuals discuss common concerns in front of an audience’ (Eriksen 2005: 341). While a ‘genuine’ European public sphere is far

from being fully created, research has shown that it is in the making (e.g. [Schlesinger 1999](#); [Koopmans 2007](#)). One of the mechanisms for the creation for such a public sphere is the increase in the European ‘audience’s attention to and awareness of European political communication regarding governance at the supranational, national or local level’ (Trenz and Eder 2004: 8). From a rational democratic theory perspective, receiving information through the mass media is crucial for citizens to hold representatives accountable. Information enables citizens to form opinions and empowers them to influence decision-making (Eriksen 2005: 342). As such, media reporting on EU-related issues may be used as a proxy for the development and existence of a European public sphere (Risse and van de Steeg 2003: 1). However, the absence of an EU-wide media system that would provide common information to all citizens residing in EU member states hinders the emergence of a European public sphere (see Gerhards 1993).

Scholars have studied the conditions under which the Europeanisation of national public spheres may emerge by examining ‘the ways in which European integration affects public debates in national news media’ (Koopmans 2007: 185). The distinction is between supranational, vertical and horizontal Europeanisation of national public debates ([Koopmans and Erbe 2004](#); [Koopmans 2007](#)). Supranational Europeanisation entails more attention to EU-level actors and horizontal Europeanisation means that actors from other EU member states are frequently referenced, while national actors explicitly address EU actors under vertical Europeanisation. Alongside this actor-centred definition of the Europeanisation of national public spheres, Risse and van de Steeg (2003: 2) define a broader perspective, which Risse (2010: 5) summarizes as follows: “[We] can observe the Europeanization of public spheres whenever European issues are debated as questions of common concern using similar frames of reference and whenever fellow Europeans participate regularly in these national debates”.

There is general agreement that the coverage of EU issues in national media outlets has increased over time (e.g. [Boomgaarden \*et al.\* 2010](#); [Koopmans and Statham 2010](#); [Wessler \*et al.\* 2008](#); [Grande and Kriesi 2014](#)). However, findings also indicate that Europeanised national political communication varies across issue fields ([Koopmans and Erbe 2004](#); [Koopmans and Pfetsch 2003](#)) and EU member states (e.g., [Machill \*et\*](#)

*al.* 2006; Risse 2010), and that political elites tend to be the primary beneficiaries of the Europeanisation of public debates (e.g. see Koopmans 2007; Díez Medrano 2010). On the other hand, research shows that there are similarities in the way the European integration process is framed by political elites across Europe (Díez Medrano 2010: 319); and that economic and political television news about the EU are commonly framed in terms of conflict across member states (De Vreese 2003). More specifically, Risse and van de Steeg (2003) find evidence for their thesis that similar points of reference and interpretation patterns applied in the extent to which national newspapers from different EU countries framed the debate about Jörg Haider's FPÖ entering a coalition government with the Austrian People's Party in 2000.

Politicization and contestation over European integration have also been identified as conducive to the creation of a European public sphere (Risse 2014). This refers to debate and societal conflict about the nature and scope of EU integration (de Wilde 2011; Hooghe and Marks 2009). It may also be thought as a normative requirement for the democratization of the EU. Voters are exposed to different arguments about the EU; therefore input-oriented participation is more likely to coincide with output democracy in the form of EU legislation (e.g. Føllesdal and Hix 2006). Eurosceptic political entrepreneurs are key to this process as they may provide a counter point to Europhile narratives. They contribute to the public discourse on the legitimacy of European integration by constructing and articulating political grievances against the EU in the public sphere (de Wilde and Trenz 2012). Therefore one of the preconditions for a 'genuine' European public sphere is the presence of Eurosceptic elites in national news who by expressing their opposing views contribute to the politicization of the EU, i.e. what we term in this chapter the 'Eurosceptic public sphere'.

Prior to the crisis, Eurosceptic actors tended to operate in the margins of their domestic party systems. The term Euroscepticism was used to describe to 'those who stand outside the status quo' not at the heart of their party systems or governments (Taggart 1998: 366). Single issue and protest parties of both the right and the left articulated concerns over the process of European integration. This has been progressively changing with Euroscepticism no longer being a peripheral phenomenon. The Eurozone crisis has triggered a fundamental change in EU citizens'

attitudes and has marked a new era where Euroscepticism is becoming increasingly mainstream (Brack and Startin 2015). Eurosceptic actors articulate a number of concerns against European integration. Their anti-EU message is not necessarily the same and neither is the extent to which they oppose the EU.

Eurosceptics of the right tend to formulate a ‘sovereignty-based’ anti-EU argument (Vasilopoulou 2011: 234). Given that the EU is by definition a multi-national organisation that transcends national boundaries, right-wing Eurosceptics view it as eroding national sovereignty and potentially creating an undesirable ‘cultural melting pot’. Multi-level governance and deeply interlinked structures of cooperation remove nation-states’ freedom of decision-making and intervene in domestic affairs. The cultural argument against the EU largely focuses on immigration. The EU is criticised not only for encouraging high levels of intra-EU migration, but also for causing the ‘Islamisation’ of Europe (Vasilopoulou 2014). The left-wing Eurosceptic argument, on the other hand, focuses on sovereignty but not culture. These parties seek the ‘emancipation and independence from great powers which are seen as exploitative of the popular classes’ (Halikiopoulou *et al.* 2012: 512). They criticise the EU for being a neo-liberal organisation that takes decisions, which benefit the ‘capital’, namely financial elites such as business owners, banks, industries, investors and multinational corporations at the expense of the popular classes. The EU is yet another external power, which promotes elite domination over the people.

Both right and left-wing Eurosceptic argumentation has an element of populism, i.e. it is premised on a distinction between the ‘good people’ and the ‘corrupt elites’ (EU and domestic; [Mudde 2007](#)). There is also a common underlying nationalist logic to their narratives ([Halikiopoulou \*et al.\* 2012](#)). The difference lies in the definition of ‘the good people’. Right-wing Eurosceptics equate the people with the nation whereas left-wing Eurosceptics equate the people with class. Whoever does not belong to the nation or to the popular classes is opposed as they are seen as belonging to the ‘corrupt elite’. The system that Eurosceptics propose, namely either a sovereign nation-state or an EU run exclusively by socialist principles, tends to run counter to the EU project as it has developed in the last decades. One way or another, both right and left-wing Eurosceptics tend to generally call for a ‘regression back to the nation

state as the basis of all legislative and political sovereignty’ (see introduction of this volume, p.3).

Linking this back to our term ‘Eurosceptic public sphere’, it would be useful not only to assess whether Eurosceptic candidate MEPs are visible in domestic news outlets, but also the extent to which national newspapers from other EU member states report upon them. That is, whether a *Eurosceptic public sphere* is under way. Extant research on the visibility of MEPs in domestic news across Europe has found that ‘who MEPs are’ in terms of office, seniority and status matters more for their domestic news visibility compared to ‘what they do in the EP’, measured by daily legislative activities (Gattermann and Vasilopoulou 2015). It has also been shown that non-attached MEPs tend to be more visible in their national press compared to those with political affiliation within the EP (Gattermann and Vasilopoulou 2015). This suggests that newsmakers tend to report upon ‘vocal’ radical Eurosceptic MEPs and relates to the negativity news value (Galtung and Ruge 1965: 65–71), which would expect that opposition is likely to be picked up by journalists. Moreover, research has shown that European political actors tend to receive increasingly more attention during EU elections over time and across Europe at the expense of national politicians (De Vreese *et al.* 2006; Schuck *et al.* 2011). We would thus expect that the news coverage of Eurosceptic candidate MEPs has also increased between 2009 and 2014.

The remaining of this chapter represents a first attempt at empirically assessing whether the foreign European press picks upon non-domestic Eurosceptic candidate MEPs. Our exploratory analysis seeks to go beyond debates on whether Eurosceptic actors affect debates in national news media in the member states where they are elected. It does so by examining whether this process is becoming transnational, i.e. crossing borders so that people from other EU member states are aware about the existence and activities of Eurosceptic actors abroad. Through their opposition, Eurosceptic MEPs contribute to the contestation and politicization of the EU. Their narratives also constitute prime examples of negativity news. In a context where the Eurozone crisis has increased the salience of European integration across the Union, we expect that the Eurosceptic argument may have transnational resonance, which we explore below.



## Data and method

To examine the news visibility of Eurosceptic candidate MEPs during EP elections, we designed a dataset in which our unit of analysis represents individual lead candidates of Eurosceptic parties from nine EU countries. We consider 49 MEPs and 59 MEPs during the 2009 and 2014 EP election campaigns, respectively. These MEPs represent the lead candidates of domestic Eurosceptic parties – of either constituency or nation-wide lists<sup>1</sup> – who were elected to the EP and subsequently took up their seat. We chose to focus on lead candidates as they are most likely to be visible transnationally, due to their status.

For each of the 108 MEPs, we collected all articles in domestic and foreign quality newspapers that explicitly referred to them. Our country selection comprises Britain, France, the Netherlands, Germany, Denmark, Austria, Italy, Spain and Poland. We thus consider EU member states from the North, South, West and East of Europe, which have joined the EU at different stages of integration. In each country, we chose one major politically left-leaning broadsheet. These include, respectively: *The Guardian*, *Le Monde*, *De Volkskrant*, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, *Politiken*, *Der Standard*, *La Stampa*, *El País* and *Gazeta Wyborcza*. Broadsheets tend to have the most comprehensive coverage of European affairs compared to tabloids and television (e.g. De Vreese *et al.* 2006). Our newspaper selection excludes right-leaning broadsheets. The choice of one newspaper per country allows us to increase the country sample to nine EU member states and evaluate the general patterns in the transnational coverage of Eurosceptic lead candidates. This would not have been possible if we analysed more than one newspaper per country due to limited data availability in some of the chosen countries. The advantage of selecting newspapers with a similar political affiliation lies in their comparability across country. The chosen quality newspapers also have the potential to provide a ‘proxy’ for other media content (Boomgaarden *et al.* 2010: 511). The time span comprises the four weeks prior to the first Election Day in both years, i.e. 6 May to 3 June 2009 and 23 April to 21 May 2014, respectively. Our total number of articles is 699.

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<sup>1</sup> Nation-wide lists apply to Austria, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands and Spain. We consider constituency lists for the UK, Poland, France and Italy. An overview of the Eurosceptic parties considered in 2009 and 2014 is available from the authors upon request.

Table 1 provides an overview of the number of articles collected for each newspaper during each election campaign. It shows that more articles that refer to Eurosceptic lead candidates were published during the 2014 campaigns (433) than in 2009 (266). The majority of newspapers published far more articles in 2014, especially *The Guardian*, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *El País*. Only the Austrian newspaper, *Der Standard*, has decreased the attention paid to Eurosceptic candidates by 61 articles, which is probably owed to variation in the salience of domestic (party) politics at different points in time.

[Table 1 about here]

In the following, we provide detailed insight into the varying patterns of the news visibility of Eurosceptic lead candidates across newspapers and over two time periods. We complement our quantitative results by a qualitative analysis of the issues associated with the most visible Eurosceptic lead candidates in our sample.

## **Findings**

One major question that we pose in this chapter is whether we see an increase in newspaper attention paid to Eurosceptic lead candidate MEPs from other countries from 2009 to 2014. Figure 1 provides an overview of visibility patterns of lead Eurosceptic candidates. At first sight, there are no major differences between the campaigns in 2009 and 2014. Out of the 49 candidate Eurosceptic MEPs considered in our analysis of the 2009 pre-electoral period, 21 received no coverage at all (43 per cent); in 2014, 26 out of 59 candidate Eurosceptic MEPs received no attention in European newspapers (44 per cent). 31 per cent (15 candidates) and 32 per cent (19), respectively in 2009 and 2014, were only reported upon in their domestic newspapers, but not in any other foreign newspaper. Yet, two Eurosceptic candidates (4 per cent) were solely referred to in foreign newspapers in 2009; and 22 per cent (11 candidates) also received attention abroad in addition to their domestic coverage. In 2014, slightly more Eurosceptic lead candidates were also mentioned in foreign newspapers, that is 14 out of 59 (24 per cent).

[Figure 1 about here]

While these findings do not at first sight suggest the emergence of a ‘Eurosceptic public sphere’, the comparison of newspaper coverage reveals that most European broadsheets pay increasingly more attention to foreign Eurosceptic candidates compared to their own Eurosceptic candidate MEPs. Figure 2 shows the extent to which newspapers reported on domestic vs. foreign Eurosceptic candidates in 2009 and in 2014. *El País* solely reported on foreign Eurosceptic candidates in 2009, which might be due to the fact that no prominent Eurosceptic MEP from Spain was elected in that year. Yet, this newspaper still devotes more than 80 per cent of its coverage about Eurosceptic candidate MEPs to foreign candidates in 2014, which is the most comprehensive attention in relative terms compared to other newspapers. *De Volkskrant* also devotes about 76 per cent of its coverage to foreign candidates in 2014, which is a rise of about 50 per cent compared to its coverage in 2009. Only the *Frankfurter Rundschau* and *The Guardian* pay slightly less attention to foreign candidates in 2014 than they have done in 2009. One explanation in case of the *Frankfurter Rundschau* may relate to the Alternative for Germany, which had been newly founded in 2013 just one year prior to the EP election and was the first German party that focused on the EU and the Euro in particular as a predominant issue (see Arzheimer 2015). In case of *The Guardian*, Nigel Farage stirred up domestic political debates, which gave him a lot of attention. The remaining newspapers paid more attention to foreign Eurosceptic candidates in 2014 compared to 2009. These findings appear to be in line with previous research on the news visibility of political actors during EP election campaigns, which finds that European actors have become slightly more visible between the 1999 and 2009 elections compared to domestic political actors, although cross-country variation still prevails ([de Vreese et al. 2006](#); [Schuck et al. 2011](#)).

[Figure 2 about here]

Furthermore, we noticed that 20 out of our selected 59 lead candidates in 2014 had also been standing in the 2009 EP elections (not shown here). 13 of them did not receive more attention, if at all, in foreign news during the 2014 campaigns. And while two right-wing and two left-wing Eurosceptic candidates, namely the Dane Morten Messerschmidt (Danish People’s Party) and the Pole Ryszard Legutko (Law & Justice) as well as the Frenchman Jean-Luc Mélenchon (Front de Gauche) and the

Dutchman Dennis de Jong (Socialist Party) were not reported abroad in 2009, each of them featured in a few foreign newspaper articles in 2014 (ranging from one to four articles). Moreover, the coverage of Marine Le Pen (FN) and Nigel Farage (UKIP) was significantly higher in both domestic and foreign news during the 2014 campaigns compared to 2009. Marine Le Pen was reported five times in *Le Monde* and twice abroad in 2009. In 2014, when she was national party leader of FN, the number of articles increased to 46 and 57, respectively. Nigel Farage was only referred to in three articles at home and four times in foreign news in 2009. During the 2014 election campaigns, *The Guardian* published 91 articles about him, and the foreign press reported on him in 47 cases.

However, Jean-Marie Le Pen (FN) received less attention abroad in 2014 (7 articles) compared to 2009 (17); his domestic coverage did not even increase (8 articles in each year), presumably because his daughter Marine had taken over the party leadership in 2011 (Mayer 2013; Shields 2013). In 2009, *Le Monde* mostly published articles that related to the Jean-Marie Le Pen's electoral campaign and party disagreements with previous Front National MEPs Carl Lang and Fernand Le Rachinel. One article covered the EP reform to stop Jean Marie Le Pen from chairing the first EP session as the oldest MEP. This reform was also discussed in other newspapers, including *Der Standard*, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, *Politiken* and *De Volkskrant* at the beginning of May 2009. The British *Guardian* took a largely domestic perspective: it only reported upon Jean-Marie Le Pen with reference to the Conservative Party's pledge to quit the European People's Party and the possibility of sitting with the "non-attached" MEPs at the back of the parliament alongside MEPs from the Front National. Similarly, the Dutch newspaper *De Volkskrant* reported about the possibility of the Dutch Freedom Party (PVV), led by Geert Wilders with Barry Madlener as lead candidate, forming an EP group with Jean-Marie Le Pen's Front National, which was debated with scepticism by journalists and reportedly also other Dutch politicians in the news. Other newspapers, including *Der Standard*, also reported about French domestic politics, with reference to the Front National under the leadership of Jean-Marie Le Pen; *Frankfurter Rundschau* compared their success to the marginal relevance of German populist right parties in German politics. Interestingly, *Politiken* published a short profile of Jean-Marie Le Pen on its front page on 28 May 2009.

When looking at the most visible Eurosceptic candidate per country, i.e. taking into account the total number of articles in both domestic and foreign news, only few candidate MEPs stand out (Table 2). During the 2009 campaigns, Morten Messerschmidt was one of the most prominent candidates in terms of number of articles (25) that referred to him. Yet, these articles only appeared in domestic news. Conversely, Jean-Marie Le Pen was more visible abroad than at home: 68 per cent of all 25 articles were published in other newspapers than *Le Monde*. Nick Griffin, the then leader of the British National Party, was referred to in 6 out of 26 articles abroad; and more than a third of the Northern League's Umberto Bossi coverage was in foreign newspapers. As also shown above, Marine Le Pen and Nigel Farage were very visible in domestic and foreign news in 2014. Yet, the majority of Marine Le Pen's coverage concerned foreign newspapers (61.17 per cent), whereas Nigel Farage was more visible at home in relative terms (65.94 per cent). The remaining candidates received comparatively little attention abroad, especially in absolute terms, during both campaigns.

[Table 2 about here]

Nigel Farage had the most comprehensive domestic coverage than any other Eurosceptic lead candidate in the run-up to the 2014 EP elections. As previously mentioned, *The Guardian* reported on him 91 times. Although the newspaper was generally critical of Farage, one of its articles admits that '[t]he news can't get enough of Nigel Farage because he adds a bit of colour, which is ironic considering what he represents' (The Guardian 20 May 2014), lending support to the applicability of the negativity news value (Galtung and Ruge 1965). *The Guardian's* reporting focused largely on the party's anti-immigrant and anti-EU agenda; and what the party's success could mean for the UK's place in the EU. Another domestic dimension of the reporting was the impact of UKIP's increasing success on Labour party success and the extent to which the Conservative Party would be able to attract the Eurosceptic vote (e.g. Ford and Goodwin 2014). A number of articles mention domestic politicians' response over Farage's alleged racist comments during the campaign. The topic of political disillusionment across Europe also featured (e.g. The Guardian 21 May 2014); but was much less prominent compared to the domestic angle of UKIP's success.

As regards Marine Le Pen, the focus of the 46 articles in *Le Monde* was largely on the potential of the Front National gaining more electoral support in the EP election compared to the centre-right Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) and the centre-left Socialist Party (PS). The prospect of the EP electoral outcome marking the start of a solid three-party system (PS-UMP-FN) with the Front National possibly topping the polls in 2017 heavily featured in the domestic press (e.g. *Le Monde* 21 May 2014; *Le Monde* 30 April 2014). Domestic journalists often reported upon the Front National leader in articles that provided a general analysis of populism and Euroscepticism across the EU; and they did so with reference to other Eurosceptic parties of the right, such as UKIP and the PVV.

Finally, we examined which foreign Eurosceptic lead candidate received most attention in each national newspaper. Table 3 shows a much clearer pattern. During the 2009 campaigns, Jean-Marie Le Pen was the most prominent foreign candidate in five out of eight newspapers (bar the domestic newspaper), namely *The Guardian*, *De Volkskrant*, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, *Politiken*, and *Der Standard*. Yet, the absolute number of articles in 2009, ranging from 2 to 4, is lower compared to the number of articles referring to Eurosceptic candidates in 2014. In 2009, Umberto Bossi was prominent in the Spanish *El País* (5 articles); and Nick Griffin was reported twice in *La Stampa*. *Le Monde* and *Gazeta Wyborcza* either paid little or no attention to Eurosceptic lead candidates from abroad.

[Table 3 about here]

In 2014, Marine Le Pen was the most prominent Eurosceptic lead candidate from a transnational perspective. While *Gazeta Wyborcza* only reported twice about her, she received more attention in the British, Dutch, Italian and Spanish newspapers with 8 to 13 articles in each press. *Der Standard* reported very little about foreign candidates, and only published one article each on Marine Le Pen and Morten Messerschmidt in 2014. Similar to the nature of her domestic coverage, the French Eurosceptic candidate MEP was reported upon in articles that covered the general problem of political disenchantment among European publics in all foreign newspapers. Interestingly, *El País* reflected upon why in Spain there is no equivalent to UKIP's Nigel Farage, the Front National's Marine Le Pen, the PVV's Geert Wilders, the Northern League's Roberto Maroni, the Golden Dawn's Nikolaos Michaloliakos and

others (El Pais 12 May 2014). Most newspapers associated Marine Le Pen with strong anti-EU and anti-immigration rhetoric and mentioned potential collaborations at the EP level, thus focusing on the potential for further pan-European Euroscepticism. *The Guardian* and *La Stampa* reported on Marine Le Pen with reference to the possibility of forming a common ‘front’ in the EP with UKIP and the Northern League respectively (The Guardian 21 May 2014; La Stampa 5 May 2014). The Dutch *De Volkskrant* focused especially on the plans of Geert Wilders to enter a coalition with Marine Le Pen (e.g. 10 May 2014). However, this newspaper also devoted considerable attention to French domestic politics, as it had done during the 2009 campaigns. The respective articles included an interview with “the second man of the Front National” (14 May 2014), Florian Philippot; reflections on the French election campaigns; and the domestic debate concerning France’s membership of the Eurozone (21 May 2014). Another common theme in the Dutch and Danish newspapers was the relationship and influence of Vladimir Putin as regards Eurosceptic parties across Europe, including Marine Le Pen’s FN (e.g., De Volkskrant 3 May 2014; Politiken 20 May 2014). *Gazeta Wyborcza* also reported about Italy’s Five Star Movement as well as the pan-European lead candidates (*Spitzenkandidaten*) nominated by the five major EU parties during the 2014 elections in relation to Marine Le Pen, but did not devote much attention to her individually (15 May 2014; 20 May 2014). Lastly, as an anecdote, *Politiken* also provided an overview of the most active politicians on Twitter during the 2014 campaigns, with Marine Le Pen having allegedly the most Twitter followers (16 May 2014).

Table 3 further shows that Nigel Farage was most prominent out of all Eurosceptic candidates considered in our analysis in *Le Monde* (11 articles), *Frankfurter Rundschau* (5) and *Politiken* (8). The foreign press coverage focused on the theme of British politics and British exceptionalism (e.g., Frankfurter Rundschau 28 April 2014; 9 May 2014; Politiken 4 May 2014) and the British debate about immigration from the new EU member states (*Gazeta Wyborcza* 14 May 2014). Nigel Farage was also subject to several and lengthy personal portraits abroad, focusing on his pastime in British pubs (e.g., De Volkskrant 2 May 2014; Frankfurter Rundschau 14 May 2014). The transnational themes of EP cooperation and/or popular disillusionment featured much less in *La Stampa* and *El Pais*. *Le Monde* reported upon potential links between UKIP and Alternative for Germany (16 May 2014); compared Farage to

Marine Le Pen (29 April 2014); and discussed possible cooperation between Beppe Grillo and Nigel Farage (10 May 2014). The coverage of Farage in the Dutch *De Volkskrant* was similar to that of Marine Le Pen, focusing on the potential electoral alliance with Geert Wilders and the growing influence of Eurosceptics across Europe (e.g. 10 May 2014); and the influence of Putin (e.g. 30 April 2014). *Politiken* also took a transnational perspective on Eurosceptics and populists, for example discussing Nigel Farage in relation to the Dane Morten Messerschmidt (e.g. 14 May 2014; 16 May 2014).

Beyond references to the common anti-EU agenda of Eurosceptic actors, two main transnational themes emerge from our analysis. First the problem of political disillusionment that is witnessed across Europe. This is a general pan-European phenomenon that relates to lack of trust in politics, a general feeling of malaise, disenchantment with the system and fear of globalisation. The election of Eurosceptic MEPs (especially the radical / populist Eurosceptics) is partly a symptom of this political dissatisfaction. Second, issues related to the collaboration of Eurosceptic MEPs. These refer to right-wing Eurosceptics whose cooperation at the EU level has been historically proven difficult (Startin 2010) and tends to be resisted by mainstream parties across Europe. Both themes have pan-European resonance and relate directly to one of Risse and van de Steeg's (2003: 2) preconditions for the Europeanization of public spheres, i.e. debating Europe as an 'issue of common concern' across Europe.

## **Conclusions**

In this chapter, we have investigated the news visibility of Eurosceptic candidate MEPs during the 2009 and 2014 European election campaigns in order to assess the potential emergence of a Eurosceptic public sphere. Our findings indicate that most newspapers tend to focus primarily on their domestic Eurosceptic candidates and pay less attention to other Eurosceptic candidates from abroad. A closer look, however, indicates that most newspapers pay generally more attention to Eurosceptic candidate MEPs when comparing the 2009 and 2014 campaigns. We also find an increase for most newspapers between 2009 and 2014 in the extent to which they pay attention to



foreign Eurosceptic candidates compared to their own Eurosceptic candidate MEPs. We find that right-wing Eurosceptics stand out in terms of prominence abroad. Jean-Marie Le Pen received the most attention in foreign news in 2009. Marine Le Pen and Nigel Farage were most visible transnationally in 2014. Given their prominence, we chose to take a closer look at the newspaper articles in order to contextualise their coverage. Our qualitative analysis of the articles reporting on these three candidate MEPs reveals that newspapers mention them both with reference to domestic issues relevant to their country of origin but also with reference to transnational themes. We may identify three general transnational themes during the 2014 election campaigns. These are: (1) the common Eurosceptic and anti-EU agenda of these actors; (2) the rising levels of popular disillusionment with centrist parties and with the EU; and (3) scenarios of Eurosceptic pan-European cooperation in the EP.

Our findings show that the foreign European press picks upon Eurosceptic candidate MEPs, and it does so particularly when it comes to right-wing Eurosceptics. This suggests that the right-wing Eurosceptic arguments that refer to sovereignty and culture have more transnational resonance compared to the left-wing EU critiques. Some right-wing Eurosceptics, such as Jean-Marie Le Pen, Marine Le Pen and Nigel Farage, put forward a ‘hard’ Eurosceptic argumentation criticising every aspect of the EU and ultimately seeking their country’s withdrawal. This strong opposition to the EU makes their message more attractive to newsmakers in line with the ‘negativity’ news value (Galtung & Ruge 1965: 65–71). In addition, right-wing Eurosceptics tend to find transnational political cooperation at the EP level problematic (e.g. Startin 2010). In contrast to left-leaning Eurosceptics who have established long-standing EP groups, right-wing Eurosceptics tend to see cooperation more as a strategic necessity rather than the result of ideological affinity. As a result, patterns of cooperation tend to change often due to disagreements and rivalries, and a great part of pre-electoral campaigns is spent in an attempt to find partners, which is covered in the news. But it should be noted that our analysis was limited to newspapers with a centre-left political affiliation and countries in which right-wing Eurosceptics are electorally strong. Left-leaning newspapers are likely to have stronger views regarding the threat right-wing Eurosceptics may pose to democracy (especially parties such as the Front National), and given their centre-left stance they may not necessarily disagree with parts of the left-wing Eurosceptic argument which criticises the EU as being too neo-liberal.

Future research should extend the research design to politically right-leaning broadsheets as well as to tabloids, television and online media to study whether we find evidence for an emergence of a Eurosceptic public sphere. Furthermore, measures of MEP visibility in the news that would incorporate how many times each MEP is mentioned in each article and newspaper readership (e.g. [Gattermann and Vasilopoulou 2015](#)); or methods such as claims-making (Statham *et al.* 2010) or through the analysis of news frames (e.g., see de Vreese 2003) are likely to yield more precise results than a simple counting of the number of articles. Lastly, future research should compare the transnational visibility of Eurosceptic candidate MEPs to the news prominence of Europhile candidates (e.g. see Gattermann and Vasilopoulou 2015 for domestic news), and especially during non-election times (see Gattermann 2013).

Overall, our study represents a first assessment of the visibility of Eurosceptic actors in the European public sphere. Our findings indicate that Eurosceptic actors are contributing to the politicization of the EU not only in domestic but also in foreign news. This lends support to the progressive emergence of a Eurosceptic public sphere. The increasing levels of visibility of Eurosceptic candidate MEPs in the news imply that European citizens are becoming more aware of Eurosceptic players both domestically and from other EU countries.

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De Volkskrant (14 May 2014) 'De EU wordt alleen maar zwakker' - Interview Florian Philippot, tweede man van het Front National.

De Volkskrant (10 May 2014) Wilders' vrienden.

De Volkskrant (3 May 2014) Extreme vrienden.

De Volkskrant (2 May 2014) Campagne in straal van drie meter rond de biertap.

De Volkskrant (30 April 2014) De Poetin-doctrine.

El Pais (12 May 2014) Endofobia.

Frankfurter Rundschau (14 May 2014) No title [Frisch-herb, unkonventionell, überschäumend: ein Mann wie ein Bier].

Frankfurter Rundschau (9 May 2014) Farages Marsch nach Norden.

Frankfurter Rundschau (28 April 2014) Ukip liegt vorn - trotz Skandalen.

Gazeta Wyborcza (20 May 2014) Włoski komik znów w formie. Jego ruch w eurowyborach ma szanse na 25 proc. Głosów.

Gazeta Wyborcza (15 May 2014) Europa szuka czarnego konia.

Gazeta Wyborcza (14 May 2014) Polacy, Węgrzy i Czesi znów zalewają Wyspy. A Brytyjczycy obawiali się Rumunów...

La Stampa (5 May 2014) Berlusconi crede nella rimonta "Forza Italia arriverà al 25%.

Le Monde (10 May 2014) Beppe Grillo courtois par José Bové et Nigel Farage

Le Monde (16 May 2014) La poussée des souverainistes allemands.

Le Monde (21 May 2014) ANALYSE Elections européennes; Le Front national met l'UMP sous pression.

Le Monde (29 April 2014) Les europhobes à l'assaut du Parlement européen.

Le Monde (30 April 2014) ENTRETIEN: Cambadélis: Le PS fonctionne toujours sur de vieux logiciels.

Politiken (20 May 2014) Franske nationalister: Marine Le Pen hylder Vladimir Putin.

Politiken (16 May 2014) Populist-hit på Twitter.

Politiken (16 May 2014) Nationalister og EU-hadere i modkamp - men håber på samling efter valget.

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Politiken (4 May 2014) Storbritannien: Højrefløj æder fra jubeuropæere.

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The Guardian (21 May 2014) Nigel Farage hints at 'common front' with Marine Le Pen to block EU laws.

## Tables and Figures

Table 1: Overview of newspaper articles

Newspaper	Articles in 2009	Articles in 2014	Total
The Guardian	36	119	155
Le Monde	57	89	146
De Volkskrant	30	42	72
Frankfurter Rundschau	4	37	41
Politiken	34	60	94
Der Standard	71	10	81
La Stampa	21	29	50
El País	7	27	34
Gazeta Wyborcza	6	20	26
<b>Total</b>	<b>266</b>	<b>433</b>	<b>699</b>

Table 2: Most visible lead Eurosceptic candidate per country per year of EP election

Year	Country	Name	Party	Total no. of articles (domestic and foreign)	Share in foreign news (%)
2009	UK	Nick Griffin	British National Party	26	23.08
	FR	Jean-Marie Le Pen	FN	25	68.00
	NL	Barry Madlener	Party for Freedom	13	0.00
	DE	Lothar Bisky*	Die Linke	4	50.00
	DK	Morten Messerschmidt	Danish People's Party	25	0.00
	AT	Hans-Peter Martin	Liste Martin	34	5.88
	IT	Umberto Bossi	LN	22	36.36
	ES	-			
	PL	Michał Kamiński	Law & Justice	4	25.00
2014	UK	Nigel Farage	UKIP	138	34.06
	FR	Marine Le Pen	FN	103	61.17



NL	Dennis de Jong & Marcel de Graaff	Socialist Party	5	40.00
		Party for Freedom	5	0.00
DE	Bernd Lucke	Alternative for Germany	22	13.64
DK	Morten Messerschmidt	Danish People's Party	38	7.89
AT	Harald Vilimsky*	Freedom Party	9	11.11
IT	Matteo Salvini	Northern League	13	30.77
ES	Pablo Iglesias*	Podemos	6	16.67
PL	Janusz Korwin-Mikke	Korwin	10	40.00

Note: \* This is the only lead Eurosceptic candidate considered from the respective country at that time.

Table 3: Most visible foreign lead Eurosceptic candidate per national newspaper (no. of articles in brackets)

Newspaper	2009	2014
The Guardian	Jean-Marie Le Pen (3)	Marine Le Pen (8)
Le Monde	<i>Various</i> (each 1)	Nigel Farage (11)
De Volkskrant	Jean-Marie Le Pen (4)	Marine Le Pen (12)
Frankfurter Rundschau	Jean-Marie Le Pen (2)	Nigel Farage (5)
Politiken	Jean-Marie Le Pen (4)	Nigel Farage (8)
Der Standard	Jean-Marie Le Pen (3)	Marine Le Pen (1) & Morten Messerschmidt (1)
La Stampa	Nick Griffin (2)	Marine Le Pen (11)
El País	Umberto Bossi (5)	Marine Le Pen (13)
Gazeta Wyborcza	None (0)	Marine Le Pen (2)

Figure 1: Visibility patterns of Eurosceptic lead candidates

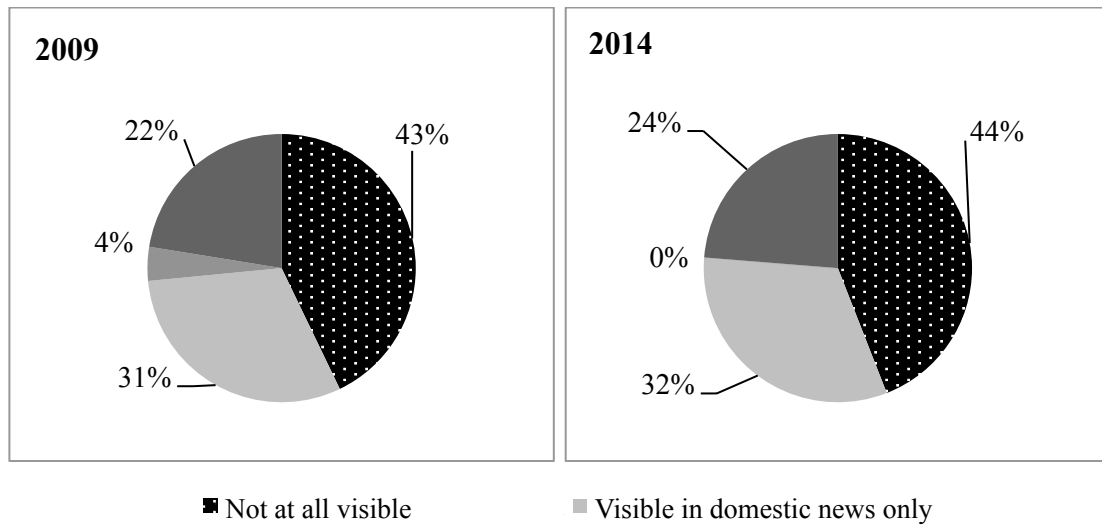


Figure 2: Attention to domestic vs foreign Eurosceptic lead candidates in each newspaper

