

The Interplay between Parties and Media in Putting EU-Issues on the Agenda.

A temporal pattern analysis of the 2014 European Parliamentary election campaigns in Austria, Germany, and the United Kingdom

Abstract

We investigate the interplay between party communication and media coverage in putting EU-issues on the agenda during the 2014 European Parliamentary election campaigns in Austria, Germany, and the United Kingdom. A temporal pattern analysis focuses on the dynamic perspective of media-parties' interactions based on a quantitative content analysis of (a) the press releases published by parties and (b) the coverage of two leading newspapers per country 12 weeks prior to the elections. We find that most public discourses are started by the media; however, political parties especially in Austria are also quite successful in initiating discussions about EU issues. Interestingly, once an issue has been placed on the agenda, only few parties take the chance of their issue ownership as response to the media agenda. On the other side, media react to publications of all party types, even radical parties.

Keywords

Strategic party communication, media coverage, agenda setting, election campaigns, temporal pattern analysis

Introduction

For a long time, researchers agreed that in public discourse Europe was a side- or even a non-issue (e.g. De Vreese et al., 2007). However, in 2014 the traditional second-order character of European Parliamentary elections was challenged: Never before has the European integration project been as contested on side of the citizens (e.g. Hurrelmann et al., 2015). We have seen new Eurosceptic parties emerging and segments of traditional parties becoming more critical about EU integration (e.g. Van Spanje and De Vreese, 2011). EU topics have become relevant news items lately (e.g. Kleinnijenhuis and Van Atteveldt, 2016). And finally, by introducing so called lead candidates for the President of the European Commission (e.g. Maier et al., 2017), the Europarties themselves expressed their hope that ‘This time [it would be] different’ (e.g. Van der Brug et al., 2016). In the light of these significant changes, our paper aims to understand *how political parties and mass media interact in setting the emerging European campaign agenda*. Thereby, our analytical approach allows the temporal analysis of *issue-specific reciprocal media-party interactions* which has urgently been called for (e.g. Meijers and Rauh, 2016; Van Aelst and Walgrave, 2011). The question who triggers European debates that are taken up by other societal actors has not been answered yet, although the evolution of a European public sphere has always been regarded as significant for the project of European integration (e.g. De Vreese, 2003). Numerous publications in the tradition of agenda-setting research come to the conclusion that mass media have a major impact on the political agenda (for a recent summary see, e.g. Thesen, 2013). However, other findings suggest that media depend on political parties to put issues on the agenda (e.g. Hopmann et al., 2012). And especially European issues seem to require such input on side of the national parties as their remoteness and facelessness in general has only little news value for the media (e.g. Adam, 2007; Jalali and Silva, 2011). During the last years, research has made great progress in explaining the strategic EU-related communication efforts of different party types (e.g. Hobolt and De Vries, 2015; Meijers,

2015; Van deWardt et al., 2014). However, it's likewise important to analyse the interactions between political parties and mass media to attain a full picture of who pushes and who impedes the development of a Europeanised public sphere and how such debates either get momentum as they get picked up by other actors or drain away – a process that we label agenda-dynamics. Therefore, our two guiding research questions are:

1. Who is successful in setting debates about Europe on the agenda that are picked up by other players?
2. Which factors – on side of the parties and the media – impact agenda dynamics?

To answer these research questions, we analyse party-media-interactions during the 2014 EP election campaigns in Austria, Germany, and the United Kingdom. We thereby rely on temporal pattern (T-pattern) analysis (Magnusson, 2000) of parties' press releases and newspaper articles to study interactions between both groups of players in detail. This method offers a promising analytical alternative to the field as it detects typical issue-specific patterns in the interactions between an (theoretically) unlimited number of actors allowing to study not only who is first to set a topic on the agenda, but also how media and party players interact with each other afterwards.

In the following, we will first summarise the state of research regarding interactions of political parties and media in (EU) agenda-setting and derive hypotheses and more fine-grained research questions. We will then explain case selection, data collection, coding and introduce T-pattern analysis before presenting findings and end with a summary and discussion.

Theory and hypotheses

The agenda-setting approach serves as the theoretical background for our study as its dynamic aspect allows us to focus on the temporal interplay between agendas, which is the key focus of this study.

Agenda-setting – Who leads the public discourse on EU integration?

Summarising the state of research, the question who leads whom in shaping the political discourse, i.e. who is successful in putting issues on the agenda which get picked up by other players, in general and with regards to European issues specifically cannot be easily answered. Even though the reciprocal, mutually dependent relationship between media (needing politicians as sources of political information) and politicians (relying on media as channels to reach their voters) is indisputable, there has been a most lively academic discussion regarding who plays the dominant role in setting the agenda (for an overview, see e.g. Walgrave and Van Aelst, 2006). While a number of studies finds bi-directional relationships (e.g. Vliegenthart and Montes, 2014 for Spain), other authors come to the conclusion that empirical evidence points to a stronger relevance of the mass media agenda for political parties than vice versa (for summaries, see Thesen, 2013; Van Aelst and Walgrave, 2011; Vesa et al., 2015). However, most authors agree that the political agenda-setting power of media is contingent and varies, e.g. depending on the type of discourse (stronger for symbolic discourses), issue (e.g. stronger for foreign policy), medium (stronger for newspapers), and time period (stronger in non-campaign times; e.g. Walgrave and Van Aelst, 2006). These examples already suggest that the influence of media on party agendas might be especially strong in cases that suit a typical media logic, increasing the news value of political issues and at the same time the incentive for political players to meet the media's criteria. In this sense, media-party agenda-setting has recently also been connected to the phenomenon of mediatisation (e.g. Meijers & Rauh, 2016; Thesen, 2013; also see Strömbäck, 2008). In addition, current research shows that media's attention to European issues has been growing during the last EP election campaigns (e.g. Boomgaarden et al., 2013; Kleinnijenhuis and Van Atteveldt, 2016), increasing the newsworthiness of the former second-order event (e.g. De Vreese, 2007). Summarizing these findings

regarding general media-party interactions and transferring these to the context of EP elections, we claim in our first hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1a: During the 2014 EP campaigns, media are most successful in initiating debates that are picked up by others.

However on the other side, empirical evidence exists that strategic communication of political actors, e.g. publishing press-releases, can also influence the media agenda (e.g. Froehlich & Rüdiger, 2006; Vliegenthart and Montes, 2014). Such *agenda-building* effects have been shown to be especially strong in times of elections (e.g. Brandenburg, 2002; Hopmann et al., 2012; Walgrave and Van Aelst, 2006), when it must be a major goal for parties to communicate positions to the electorate and for specific issues. Especially for EU-related topics, media salience depends on political actors who actively communicate about Europe, give the EU a face, and attach relevance to it (Adam, 2007; Jalali and Silva, 2011; Schuck et al., 2011). Regarding parties' willingness to engage in public discourse about the EU, current research shows that a growing number of political parties seems to have an incentive to become active. For a long time, most mainstream parties resisted politicizing EU issues (e.g. Hooghe and Marks, 2008), while challenger parties engaged in the role as issue entrepreneurs (e.g. De Vries and Hobolt, 2012) or aimed at exploiting wedge issues of mainstream parties (Van de Wardt et al., 2014). However, since the 2009 EP elections, there is evidence that mainstream parties also put EU issues on the agenda, either: in the sense of evasion, if they are in a weak position on the national level (Adam and Maier, 2016; Adam et al., 2016); or in the sense of contagion, if the electoral success of challenger parties forces them to also take a stance on EU issues (Meijers, 2015).

Summarising both aspects – media's dependency on parties' EU-communication and parties' increased willingness to get involved – it also seems justified to propose a counter-hypothesis

Hypothesis 1b: During the 2014 EP campaigns, political parties are most successful in initiating debates that are picked up by others.

Agenda dynamics I – Under which conditions do parties react to the media agenda?

Beyond the question who initially puts an issue on the agenda, the further interplay between parties and media has to be examined (for this demand see e.g. Van Aelst and Walgrave, 2011). From the perspective of parties, the question is, when do they decide to react if media have put EU issues on the agenda? Refining the notion of media superiority over political party agendas, several authors have called to consider the strategic component of parties' communication behaviour. For example, Van der Pas (2014: 43-44) claims that 'political actors have a *choice* whether to react or not to what the media are covering, and often consider this carefully'. The current state of research offers a multitude of factors, which could potentially explain parties' engagement in media-set public discourse about EU issues (e.g. Adam and Maier, 2016). In this analysis, we focus on the two factors, which have received most attention so far when analysing parties' willingness to adopt an issue from the media agenda, i.e. (a) issue salience on the media agenda and (b) issue ownership on side of the political parties. These can be nicely tied to literature on (a) context effects on parties' strategic communication behaviour and (b) parties' selective emphasis on strategically advantageous issues (for a summary see Adam and Maier, 2016). The first factor builds on the assumption that for the party it is only worth to deal with issues that reach a certain visibility in the media. Van der Pas (2014) could show the relevance of this salience threshold for EU issues and Swedish parties but not for the Netherlands. The second factor refers to parties' own stance regarding issues and their choice to selectively attach salience to issues in their public communication that are advantageous to their own party, e.g. because the party is judged as competent to solve the respective problems (e.g. Green-Pedersen, 2007). Several studies have shown that in general parties have a higher probability to pick up an issue from the media agenda, which they own

themselves (e.g. Green-Pedersen and Stubager 2010; Vliegenthart et al., 2011) but also with regards to EU integration (Van der Pas, 2014). Based on this state of research, we pose the following alternative hypotheses:

Hypothesis 2a: Parties will be more likely to pick up issues highly visible in the media (media visibility thesis).

Hypothesis 2b: Parties will be more likely to pick up issues from the media agenda, which they own (issue ownership thesis).

Agenda dynamics II – Under which conditions do media react to the party agenda?

So far, we have tackled the question under which circumstances political parties hook up to the media agenda. The other perspective is when do media pick up issues from the parties' agendas? Research points to the following possibilities: First, several authors have shown that opposition parties' communication might be more likely to attract media attention as it usually fits more criteria of newsworthiness (e.g. negativity, attack frames; e.g. Thesen, 2013) than the communication of government parties. Another aspect feeding into this argument could be that research has shown that it is easiest for parties that are furthest away from governmental responsibility to put new issues on the agenda (e.g. Ellinas, 2010; Hobolt and De Vries, 2015), which could also add to the newsworthiness of their messages. In addition, Hopmann et al. (2012: 177) assume that especially in campaign times, journalists seek to achieve a 'politically balanced news coverage by including candidates from different parties in their news reports'. On the other side, authors have shown that media orient themselves towards the political mainstream (e.g. Bennett, 1990) and that incumbent parties 'experience a bonus in terms of media attention' (Hopmann et al., 2012: 176; also see Meijers & Rauh, 2016). In addition, media vary in their openness towards specific political actors, preferring mainstream in contrast to radical parties on the fringes of the political spectrum (Ellinas, 2010). This should work to the advantage of

mainstream and governing parties and make the access to the media agenda difficult especially for radical parties. We therefore pose the research question:

Research Question1: Which parties are more successful in triggering media reactions (in the sense that media pick up party issues)?

Design and data

We study the interplay between media and political parties by following and systematising their sequences of interactions, i.e. actions and reactions. Empirically, this analysis is based on a temporal-pattern analysis of disaggregated data of media publications and party communication (regarding this research desiderate see Van Noije et al., 2008). T-pattern analysis allows taking into account multiple interactions between media and political parties as the discourse about a specific topic evolves. In this way, we explicitly acknowledge the reciprocal character of media-party interactions as requested, e.g. by Van Aelst and Walgrave (2011). Such analysis requires the collection of process-oriented data in short intervals, i.e. day to day, and for a longer period of observation in order to be able to detect and systematise typical patterns. Therefore, we chose the 12 weeks prior to the European Parliamentary elections 2014 as period of observation.

Table 1. Criteria for the selection of countries.

| | Austria | Germany | United Kingdom |
|--|---------------------------|--|---|
| Communicative activity of parties ^a | 936 | 301 | 223 |
| Radical ideologies of parties ^b | FPÖ: 8.7 (Eurosceptic) | Linke: 1.2 (Eurosceptic) AfD: 8.9 (Eurosceptic) | Greens: 1.9 (Europhile) UKIP: 9.1 (Eurosceptic) BNP: 9.9 (Eurosceptic) |

a: Number of EU-related press releases of all parties with minimum 3%-vote share; 12 weeks prior to the 2014 EP elections. Own data.

b: Range left-right: 0-10. We define a party as radical if its left-right position is located between 0 and 2

or between 8 and 10. Party's position towards EU integration: scale 1-7. We define a party as Eurosceptic between 1 and 3 and as Europhile between 5 and 7 (both Chapel Hill Expert Survey 2014).

The analysis includes media-party interactions in Austria, Germany, and the United Kingdom. Besides the goal to generalise findings, variance regarding two criteria has led to this selection of countries (see Table 1): First, probability of interactions between media and political parties depends on parties' general level of publication activities (Hopmann et al., 2012), which varies considerably between the three countries. Regarding the publication of EU-related press releases, Austrian parties are most active (also due to the traditionally high relevance of party press releases in election campaigns in Austria, see below), followed by German parties, while British parties publish the fewest EU-related press releases. Second, our research question refers to the aspect whether radical parties are ignored as agenda setters due to perceived political (in-) correctness. For this reason, parties with radical ideologies were identified. Since we define a party as radical if its left-right position is located between 0 and 2 or between 8 and 10 according to the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (2014), the most radical parties are located in the United Kingdom, followed by Germany, and Austria.

In order to identify parties that own specific issues (hypothesis 2b), we rely on representative national surveys (Kritzing et al., 2014; Rattinger et al., 2014; Whiteley and Sanders, 2014) in which respondents named the most important problems and the parties able to solve the problems best. We define a party as issue owner if it is named most often and if the distance to the second party is greater than 10% points (Holian, 2004). If two or more parties are dominant in an issue field, issue ownership is regarded as shared.

Content analyses of media and party communication

On side of the media, the strongest agenda-setting effects have been shown for newspapers (Van der Pas, 2014). Therefore, we analysed the news reports in two leading quality newspapers per country, choosing one left- and one right-leaning newspaper each in order to control for potential partisan biases. We collected the left- and the right-leaning paper rotating on a daily basis and included the following newspapers: for Austria *Der Standard* and *Die Presse*, for Germany the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, and for the United Kingdom *The Guardian* and *The Daily Telegraph*. We coded the complete political/news section and the editorial section (including opinion and comments).

To study parties' communication several data sources have been taken into account in agenda-setting research (e.g. parliamentary questioning, manifestos, campaign ads etc.). All these data sources have their strengths but also their shortcomings (Hopmann et al., 2012; Netjes and Binnema, 2007). In order to analyse the sequences of media-party interactions in detail, parties' press releases seem the most adequate form of parties' communication for four reasons: First, press releases are specifically geared towards the media and therefore adequate for analysing party-media-interactions (Froehlich & Rüdiger, 2006). Second, press releases can be published independently from fixed schedules (different than, e.g. parliamentary questionings) and other external factors and also much more flexibly than campaign ads and manifestos. It's solely a party's strategic decision to launch a press release either actively pushing a specific issue or in reaction to events (e.g. media publications or activities of other parties). Third, researchers have argued that due to limited resources and time pressure journalists rely on routines and easily accessible information such as press releases (e.g. Hopmann, 2012). And fourth, the legal conditions for party communication are very different in the three countries. While in Germany and the United Kingdom, televised ads have a high relevance, parties in Austria face restrictions here and have to rely stronger on press releases and newspapers ads (the last being less common in Germany and the United Kingdom though; e.g. Dolezal et al., 2014). For these reasons, we choose

to base our analysis on press releases and take into account all press releases the national parties published 12 weeks prior to the 2014 European Parliamentary elections (see web appendix).

As we are interested in agenda-setting regarding European issues, only press releases and media reports that referred to *European policies*, *European institutions*, *European politicians*, and/or the *European Parliamentary elections* at least twice were included in the analysis. To identify relevant items, we compiled an electronic search string that contained relevant key words and word components (see web appendix). This search resulted in a total of 301 relevant press releases for Germany, 936 items for Austria, and 223 press releases for the United Kingdom. For Austria 439 newspaper reports were selected, 445 for Germany, and 245 for the United Kingdom.

We conducted a quantitative content analysis of the news items and press releases with the focus on main issues. In the case of party communication, only one main issue per press release was counted, however, in media reports up to three main issues were coded. We compiled an issue list containing 16 main issue topics (and 149 subtopics) that follows the PIREDEU (2009) issue catalogue (for details regarding the coding procedure see codebook in the web appendix). To ensure the reliability of coding, all coders participated in a comprehensive training programme, followed by a (researcher-coder) reliability test of 15 media reports and 25 press releases each. We tested for reliability of coding using Krippendorff's Alpha coefficient. Reliability tests delivered satisfactory results for both, press releases and media, with average results for *formal categories* (e.g. date of publishing, source, country, etc.) of Krippendorff's Alpha = 0.79 – 1.00 and 0.76 – 1.00 for *content characteristics* (e.g. main issue) across the three countries.

Analysis of sequential media-party interactions

In analysing media-party interactions, our approach is based on the assumptions that parties' communication behaviour is strategic in the sense that they will try to optimise their image and their election result. Such strategic behaviours have been shown to produce patterns of repeated behaviour (Mintzberg, 1978). For the media, we also expect to observe patterns in publication decisions as they follow certain routines (e.g. Shoemaker, Vos and Reese, 2009). Based on these assumptions, we try to detect *recurring patterns* in media-party communication by means of T-pattern analysis. T-pattern analysis (Magnusson, 2000) is a method to expose recurring structures in a stream of decisions with a special focus on interactions. Initially, it has been developed to investigate patterns in human (and animal) behaviour, for example, tactical moves in soccer (e.g. Borrie et al., 2002) or interactions with pets (for an overview see Casarrubea et al., 2015). Schwab and Unz (2008) have introduced T-pattern analysis to communication research as a way to describe patterns in media usage. Unlike other statistical methods that are widely used to examine longitudinal data, T-pattern-analysis is not based on the generalised linear model (GLM) and thereby better geared towards untangling complex and non-linear social processes. Additionally, T-pattern-analysis is based on non-aggregated data. Therefore, it is able to detect interactions that take place in short time intervals typical for media's issue attention and also for political parties' reactions (Walgrave and Van Aelst, 2006).

A typical dataset for T-pattern analysis contains several events that occur repeatedly during a certain period of time, e.g. party A publishes a press release regarding tax policy. The so-called 'critical interval detection algorithm' searches for an event B (e.g. a newspaper article on tax policy) that occurs after event A within a critical time interval more frequently than simply by random chance. The algorithm begins by testing wider intervals so that a large number of AB-Patterns is found; the intervals being so wide, it is not likely that the frequency of B is significantly higher than its basic rate. The algorithm then gradually narrows and tests smaller intervals until significance is reached or less than x (usually three) patterns can be found. In a next

step, this simple AB-pattern is combined with other events or patterns to more complex structures. The lower critical distance between event A and B can (theoretically) be minimised to $\text{Event A} + d_1 t = 0$. Also, the number of minimal occurrences required for a sequence to be considered a pattern can (theoretically) be set to any number >1 .

We conducted the T-pattern analysis using the software Theme 5.0 (Magnusson, 2004), running separate analyses for the three countries and for the three most important topics in each country (see Table A1 in the web appendix). The dataset was structured in half-day steps, assuming that newspaper articles (as reactions to press releases published on earlier days) could only be published in the morning, but that press releases (as reactions to newspaper articles) could also be issued during the same day. Setting the minimum number of occurrences per pattern to three and $\alpha = .05$, Theme found 104 patterns of media-party interactions (for an illustrative sample see web appendix).

To examine whether the patterns found are plausible, we drew a random sample of minimum 10% of the patterns found for every country and every topic. These patterns were verified based on a manual coding of the original publications. A pattern was considered plausible when at least 50% of publications automatically identified as following an initial publication and therefore assigned to a pattern cited the first publication in the pattern explicitly or referred to the same social discourse as the first pattern. Our first results suggested that most of the patterns found with T-pattern analysis were plausible with the exception of the issue *economy*. Economy as a broad category in our codebook included a wide range of specific topics. For this reason, we split economy into three sub-issues: economy 1 (economic policy, bank and financial sector regulation), economy 2 (trade policy) and economy 3 (state budget and debts). As economy 3 in the end still turned out to be too broad and not suitable for our purposes, we removed this category from our further analyses. The plausibility values of the found patterns are presented in Table A2 in the web appendix to this paper. In sum,

between 72 and 86% of the checked patterns found with T-pattern analysis contained plausible interactions of media and parties in the sense of explicitly citing each other or referring to the same issue.

In most of the papers that use T-pattern analysis a small number of interesting patterns is selected and analysed descriptively (see Casarrubea et al., 2015). In the following, we go one step further and systematise and describe the patterns quantitatively on an aggregated level according to our research question and hypotheses.

Findings

Who sets the agenda?

Through T-pattern analyses, we can see not only how often media and parties referred to European issues during the 2014 election campaign but also find out how often they were successful in initiating a discourse regarding this issue. We regard the agenda-setting as successful if the issue is also picked up by other players.

Table 2. Successful agenda-setting by media and political parties.

| Austria, top 3 issues: international affairs, social and labour market, economy | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|--------------------|--------|----------------------|--------|-------|-----|-------------|----------|--------------------|-------------|
| | ÖVP | SPÖ | Greens | FPÖ | NEOS | BZÖ | Parties | Standard | Die Presse | Media |
| publications ^a | 28 | 44 | 31 | 23 | 3 | 15 | 144 | 28 | 34 | 62 |
| t-patterns ^b | 19 | 20 | 12 | 9 | 0 | 5 | 65 (45%) | 12 | 22 | 34 (55%) |
| Germany, top 3 issues: international affairs, law and order, economy | | | | | | | | | | |
| | CDU | SPD | FDP | Greens | Linke | AfD | Parties | SZ | FAZ | Media |
| publications ^a | 10 | 22 | 9 | 18 | 27 | 7 | 93 | 34 | 30 | 64 |
| t-patterns ^b | 3 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 10 | 0 | 19 (20%) | 12 | 13 | 25 (39%) |
| United Kingdom, top 3 issues: international affairs, territorial questions, immigration | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Conser- vatives | Labour | Liberal Democrats | Greens | UKIP | BNP | Parties | Guardian | Daily Telegraph | Media |
| publications ^a | 3 | 14 | 17 | 4 | 17 | 28 | 83 | 35 | 22 | 57 |
| t-patterns ^b | 0 | 4 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 20 (25%) | 20 | 15 | 35 (61%) |

a: number of published press releases/newspaper articles.

b: number of press releases/newspaper articles that start T-patterns.

Table 2 presents the number of publications by media and political parties referring to the three most important issues during the 2014 election campaigns in each country. For Austria, the six political parties included in the study issued a total of 144 press releases during 12 weeks regarding the three most important issues (i.e. international affairs, social and labour market and economy¹⁺²), whereas the two leading media outlets published 62 reports. While the number of publications is comparable for both newspapers, the *SPÖ* published about twice as many press releases than the other parties, with *NEOS* and *BZÖ* being rather inactive.¹ In sum, 45% of the parties' publications start a T-pattern, i.e. lead to follow-up publications by media or other parties. Austrian media are even more successful in setting the agenda with 55% of their reports being followed by other publications.

In Germany, the top three issues during the 2014 EP campaign were international affairs (rank 1) and economy¹⁺² (rank 3) as in Austria and law and order (rank 2). Here, the six parties issued only 93 press releases, while the media published about the same number of reports as in Austria (i.e. 64). The high number of press releases published by the *Linke* is especially striking. However, in Germany only 20% of party publications are picked up by other actors. This success rate is higher for the media (39%), but also lower than in Austria.

In the United Kingdom, international affairs also was the most important issue during the campaign, however, territorial questions (i.e. EU-exit) and immigration rank second and third. Similar to Germany, the six parties launched 83 press releases, including a strikingly high number of press releases from the *BNP* and the two newspapers published 57 reports. With 25% of press releases being referred to in following publications, in

¹ The fact that mainstream parties in Austria and Germany did not publish less EU-related press releases than challenger parties illustrates our argument leading to Hypothesis 1b. Only in the UK, the *BNP* (but not *Greens* or *UKIP*) was more active than the mainstream parties.

the United Kingdom parties start public discourses about as often as in Germany; however, 61% of the media reports are followed by other publications, making this the highest success rate in all three countries.

In sum, it can be stated that most public discourses detected during the 2014 EP election campaigns by means of T-pattern analysis in all three countries are started by media publications, thus rather supporting Hypothesis 1a than Hypothesis 1b. Especially in the United Kingdom and also in Austria, the majority of newspaper reports are followed by other publications. Political parties in Austria are also quite successful at initiating discussions about EU issues; however, their communicative efforts using press releases are traditionally much more intensive than in Germany and the United Kingdom.

Under which conditions do parties react to the media?

The next question is under which circumstances political parties pick up EU-related issues from the media agenda. Hypothesis 2a claims that an issue's visibility in the media determines parties' attention, whereas Hypothesis 2b assumes that parties only hook up to issues which they own themselves. Table 3 shows to how many discourses started by media political parties respond implicitly by referring to the same issue or even explicitly by quoting the newspaper. For Austria, we find that the issue that receives the most attention in newspaper articles is international affairs (n = 29). Altogether, 12 press releases pick up this issue. However, social and labour market, which ranks only second in the media (n = 16), is picked up in 19 press releases, while both economic topics are reported by the media eight respectively nine times and picked up by parties only three times. In Germany, however, we find a different picture. Here, only the topic which receives the most media attention (i.e. international affairs, n = 33) is picked up in following press releases

Table 3. Issues picked up by political parties.

Austria, top 3 issues: international affairs, social and labour market, economy

| | la | sola | eco1 | eco2 |
|--|----|------|------|------|
|--|----|------|------|------|

Author

| | | | | |
|--|----|----|----|----|
| # newspaper articles | 29 | 16 | 8 | 9 |
| # press releases | 36 | 44 | 24 | 40 |
| # press releases contained in T-patterns started by articles | 12 | 19 | 0 | 3 |
| # press releases contained in T-patterns started by media or other parties | | | | |
| ... ÖVP | 0 | 6 | 0 | 7 |
| ... SPÖ | 4 | 16 | 5 | 4 |
| ... Greens | 7 | 5 | 0 | 6 |
| ... FPÖ | 5 | 4 | 0 | 7 |
| ... NEOS | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| ... BZÖ | 3 | 3 | 0 | 0 |

Grey: issue owners; Source: Kritzinger et al. (2014); ia: international affairs; sola: social and labour market; eco: economy.

Germany, top 3 issues: international affairs, law and order, economy

| | ia | lo | eco1 | eco2 |
|--|----|----|------|------|
| # newspaper articles | 33 | 17 | 6 | 8 |
| # press releases | 38 | 16 | 23 | 16 |
| # press releases contained in T-patterns started by articles | 26 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| # press releases contained in T-patterns started by media or other parties | | | | |
| ... CDU | 4 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| ... SPD | 8 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| ... FDP | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| ... Greens | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| ... Linke | 13 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| ... AfD | 0 | 0 | - | 0 |

Grey: issue owners; Source: Rattinger et al. (2014); ia: international affairs; lo: law and order; eco: economy.

United Kingdom, top 3 issues: international affairs, territorial questions, immigration

| | tq | ia | im |
|--|----|----|----|
| # newspaper articles | 27 | 19 | 11 |
| # of press releases | 40 | 23 | 20 |
| # press releases contained in T-patterns started by articles | 17 | | 11 |
| # press releases contained in T-patterns started by media or other parties | | 4 | |
| ... Conservatives | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| ... Labour | 3 | 4 | 4 |
| ... Liberal Democrats | 10 | 0 | 0 |
| ... Greens | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| ... UKIP | 6 | 0 | 3 |
| ... BNP | 3 | 0 | 7 |

Grey: issue owners; Source: Whiteley and Sanders (2014)

Issues: tq: territorial questions; ia: international affairs; im: immigration.

of the parties (n = 26); media reports dealing with the topics law and order (n = 17) or economy (n = 6; n = 8) are totally disregarded by the political parties. In the United Kingdom, the picture looks a bit different again, where the top media topic (i.e. territorial questions; n = 27) is picked up 17 times by parties, but the second

important topic (i.e. international affairs; $n = 19$) only four times; in contrast, the third media topic immigration ($n = 11$) is referred to in 11 party publications.

Based on these findings, support for Hypothesis 2a is at best mixed: It seems true that important media topics usually get picked up by the parties; however, this correlation does not seem linear in the sense that media visibility clearly predicts parties' reactions.

Looking at the reactions of parties who own the topics brought up by the media or other parties (i.e. issue owners, marked in grey in Table 3) also leaves us with mixed results. In Austria, the *SPÖ* picks up all media topics for which the party is regarded an issue owner and for social and labour market issues clearly marking its issue ownership with by far the highest number of press releases following respective publications of other actors ($n = 16$). However, the *ÖVP*, which owns most of the issues together with the *SPÖ*, does not respond to all these issues; whereas, the other parties do not hesitate to respond to publications on issues that they do not own themselves. In Germany, the governing *CDU*, which owns all four issues, does not take the chance of its issue ownerships. In the United Kingdom it is interesting to see that the most engagement in the discussion of territorial questions comes from the *Liberal Democrats*, who do not own this issue either. Taken together, Hypothesis 2b must be rejected.

To which parties do media react?

Turning to the question to which parties' agenda-setting media respond, we have posed the open research question whether media react more often to government parties' communication (government bonus) or to opposition parties' communication (mediatisation of opposition), or whether they react more often to opposition parties but disregard radical parties (political correctness). Our findings regarding these questions are summarised in Table 4. For Austria, it seems that the governing *SPÖ*, that publishes by far the most press

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releases, indeed is most successful in starting discourses also picked up by the media in the field of social and labour market, where they also publish the most press releases. Media attention to the national coalition partner *ÖVP* is lower and not higher than for some opposition parties (i.e. *Greens* and *FPÖ*). Contrary to the assumption that radical parties might be neglected by the media, *FPÖ* receives some media attention in the field of international affairs.

In Germany, we find a quite similar picture. The governing *CDU* is quite efficient with its statements regarding international affairs. However, the coalition partner *SPD* is not able to stimulate discussions in the media, while the opposition (*Greens*) and even radical parties (*Linke*) receive attention for their press releases. In the United Kingdom, the picture is more or less the same: Here the *Liberal Democrats* are successful with their engagement regarding territorial questions, but the opposition (*Labour*) and the radical *BNP* also are referred to in the media.

In sum, our findings do not support the assumption that only incumbent national parties are successful in shaping the media agenda; it also does not seem to be true that parties with radical positions are neglected by the media.

Table 4. Party issues picked up by the media.

| Austria, top 3 issues: international affairs, social and labour market, economy | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|------------|------|-----|-----|----------------------|------|-----|-----|----------------|------|-----|-----|---------------|------|-----|-----|--------------|------|-----|-----|-------------|------|-----|-----|
| Party | ÖVP (gov) | | | | SPÖ (gov/chancellor) | | | | Greens (chall) | | | | FPÖ (mop/rad) | | | | NEOS (chall) | | | | BZÖ (chall) | | | |
| Issue | ia | sola | eco | eco | ia | sola | eco | eco | ia | sola | eco | eco | ia | sola | eco | eco | ia | sola | eco | eco | ia | sola | eco | eco |
| # press releases | 4 | 6 | 6 | 12 | 9 | 22 | 8 | 5 | 8 | 7 | 3 | 13 | 9 | 4 | 2 | 8 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 1 |
| # press releases picked up by newspapers | 4 (67%) | | | | 14 (64%) | | | | 3 (43%) | | | | 3 (33%) | | | | | | | | | | | |

| Germany, top 3 issues: international affairs, law and order, economy | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|----------------------|----|-----|-----|-----------|----|-----|-----|-----------|----|-----|-----|--------------|----|-----|-----|-------------------|----|-----|-----|-----------------|----|-----|-----|
| Party | CDU (gov/chancellor) | | | | SPD (gov) | | | | FPD (mop) | | | | Greens (mop) | | | | Linke (chall/rad) | | | | AfD (chall/rad) | | | |
| Issue | ia | lo | eco | eco | ia | lo | eco | eco | ia | lo | eco | eco | ia | lo | eco | eco | ia | lo | eco | eco | ia | lo | eco | eco |
| # press releases | 4 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 9 | 3 | 6 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 6 | 4 | 4 | 15 | 2 | 5 | 5 | 2 | 0 | 5 | 0 |
| # press releases picked up by newspapers | 3 (75%) | | | | | | | | | | | | 3 (50%) | | | | 10 (67%) | | | | | | | |

| United Kingdom, top 3 issues: international affairs, territorial questions, immigration | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|-----------------------------------|----|----|--------------|----|----|---------------|----|----|--------------------|----|----|------------------|----|----|-----------------|----|----|--|--|
| Party | Conservatives (gov/primeminister) | | | Labour (mop) | | | LibDems (gov) | | | Greens (chall/rad) | | | UKIP (chall/rad) | | | BNP (chall/rad) | | | | |
| Issue | ia | tq | im | ia | tq | im | ia | tq | im | ia | tq | im | ia | tq | im | ia | tq | im | | |
| # press releases | 1 | 1 | 1 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 2 | 15 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 10 | 5 | 13 | 7 | 8 | | |
| # press releases picked up by newspapers | | | | 4 (80%) | | | 6 (40%) | | | | | | 4 (31%) | | | 3 (43%) | | | | |

Party groups: gov: mainstream government party; mop: mainstream opposition party; chall: challenger party; rad.: radical party;
 Issues: ia: international affairs; sola: social and labour market; eco: economy; lo: law and order; tq: territorial questions; im: immigration.

Summary and conclusion

In this paper, we have analysed the interactions between media and political parties in Austria, Germany and the United Kingdom when putting EU-related issues on the agenda during the campaigns before the 2014 European Parliamentary elections using T-pattern analysis. This approach provides us with the opportunity to take into account individual actions of all players and their communicative reactions to each other (for a similar idea see Thesen, 2013), significantly expanding the state of agenda-setting research with regards to its dynamic perspective. We first found that most public discourses were started by media publications, supporting the hypothesis that media and not political parties – even in campaign times – are the more important agenda-setters regarding European topics in all three countries. Political parties in Austria were also quite successful in initiating discussions about EU issues; however, their communicative efforts using press releases are traditionally much more intensive than in Germany and the United Kingdom. Regarding the conditions under which public discourse flourishes, our findings are mixed. First, for the question which media topics get picked up by the political parties, it seems true that important media topics usually also trigger reactions of the political parties. However, this correlation does not seem linear in the sense that the more visible topics are in the media, the more attention they also get from the parties. At the same time, issue ownership does not seem to be a reliable predictor either for the parties' engagement in the public debate. Finally, regarding the question which parties' communication efforts get attention by the media, we found that not only incumbent national parties are successful in shaping the media agenda, but also opposition and even radical parties can stimulate public discourse. Not in all but in some cases it seems that the engagement that parties show independent from issue ownership pays off. So, the take-home message of our paper is that media in general are the most relevant agenda-setters also with regards to EU-issues. However, all party groups have the potential to also shape the public discourse. It almost seems that on issues, which parties

engage with during the campaign, a real interplay takes place between media and parties, with parties reacting to the media agenda and the media taking into account parties' statements. This finding is in line with Thesen (2013) and Van Aelst and Walgrave (2011) who argue that neither media nor politics dominate each other but that media logics and political strategies overlap and reinforce each other.

Methodologically T-pattern analysis has proven to be a valuable tool to detect dynamic interactions among parties and media. However, our analysis also reveals that T-pattern analysis requires distinct and clearly delimited categories of events (in our case the issue category): Diffuse categories (e.g. the broad issue field *economy*) may lead to fuzzy patterns of events that do not refer to each other.

Finally, our study leaves open questions for future research. First, our analysis only takes into account the interactions between parties and media based on press releases and newspaper items; however, other forms of contacts as well as other media channels have to be acknowledged to provide a more complete picture of party-media interactions. Second, our analysis so far has been limited to agenda-setting and -dynamics on the issue-level. Of course, it is also an important research question how positions and evaluations – consistent or contradictory – evolve from these interactions (e.g. Froehlich and Rüdiger, 2006). Last but not least, the limited support for our hypotheses and the strong country differences show the necessity to keep party-media interactions on top of research agendas as more effort has to be put in understanding agenda dynamics. Future research needs to go beyond asking who leads the tango but has to explain how agenda dynamics unfold. To do so, we might need incorporate factors internal to the actors involved (cohesion of parties, left-right alignment of newspapers), strategic considerations of parties and media (e.g. Thesen, 2013; Van de Wardt et al., 2014; Vliegthart and Montes, 2014), as well as (changes in) the national contexts (e.g. public opinion towards Europe, support for challenger parties). If we study party-media interactions in relation to EU

integration, we may solve the puzzle of how debates on Europe evolve and under which conditions EU integration becomes politicised.

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