

RECIPROCAL PERCEPTIONS BETWEEN WESTERN BALKAN COUNTRIES AND THE EU: NEWS COVERAGE ON THE EU ACCESSION PROCESS IN DAILY NEWSPAPERS

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Abstract

Against the background of increasing EU enlargement fatigue amongst EU countries, and with the official accession negotiation process with the Western Balkan countries currently underway, a comparative analysis of current reciprocal perceptions between both sides is carried out to identify potential conflict lines, and to trace how the EU is currently perceived from inside and from. In an exploratory media study three EU countries (Austria, Germany, and the United Kingdom) and two Western Balkan countries (Bosnia and Herzegovina BiH and Serbia) are compared.¹ This paper shows that the reciprocal perceptions are not only shaped by assumed distance and difference, but also by proximity and similarities. However, the communicated boundaries and obstacles between EU and non-EU also show some indicate barriers for Western Balkan countries in the accession steps lying ahead. Furthermore, the media study suggests a broadening of the analytical spectrum to include thematic areas that go beyond political discourse.

Keywords: EU enlargement, Western Balkans, perceptions, media, news coverage

1. Introduction

As a number of political analyses and recent research studies have outlined, there is increasing Euroskepticism and fatigue among current EU member states as far as the further enlargement of the EU is concerned.² Some reasons for this growing

1 The media study was part of a collaborative project carried out between October 2010 and May 2011, financed in the framework of the Call for Research Cooperation and Networking between Austria and South Eastern Europe on "Changing Identities in South Eastern Europe", under the supervision of the Austrian Science and Research Liaison Office Ljubljana and the Center for Social Innovation Vienna (see http://www.aso.zsi.at/project_5_17_2010.html). The project partners were the Commission for Comparative Media and Communication Studies/Austrian Academy of Sciences in Vienna/Austria, the Mediacentar Sarajevo/BiH, the University of Belgrade/Serbia, and the University of Primorska in Koper/Slovenia. Additional contributions to the comparative media analysis came from Sanela Hodzic/Mediacentar Sarajevo, Isabella Purkart/Austrian Academy of Sciences, and Gazela Pudar and Prof. Gordana Djeric/University of Belgrade.

2 See: Helene Sjurson, ed., *Questioning EU Enlargement: Europe in Search of Identity* (London; New York: Routledge, 2006). Frank Schimmelfennig, "EU Political Accession

hesitation include the two latest accession rounds of 2004 and 2007, but also the signing of the Lisbon Treaty in 2007, or most recently the global economic crisis and its impacts on the European economy. This fatigue does not only apply to the political elites: Annual public opinion surveys show that the populations in many EU countries express a significant degree of skepticism with regard to a further EU enlargement: besides Turkey, the countries of the Western Balkan region (WBC³) thereby seem to have the hardest stance with regard to their membership endeavors. In the Eurobarometer Standard Survey 74 (Fall 2010), which included a specific survey section distinguishing different future EU member state candidates, when asked "Please tell me, whether you are for or against further enlargement of the EU to include other countries in future years," with regard to the countries of the Western Balkan region, an EU average of 45% of the population answered that they were against further enlargement to the region.

On the other hand, the populations in the WBC express considerable willingness to join the EU and have high expectations regarding this membership. At the same time, they are increasingly skeptical about how much they are appreciated and welcomed as new members by the population of the EU. In the Gallup Balkan Monitor Survey (2010) when asked, "Generally speaking, do you think that [your country's] membership in the EU would be a good thing?", in Serbia 44%, in BiH 69%, in Macedonia 60%, and in Kosovo even 87% of the interviewees said it would be a good thing. However, when asked "Do you think that the people in the EU want [your country] to join the EU?" in Serbia 36%, in Macedonia 28% in BiH 37%, and in Kosovo 14% assumed that most people in the EU would not want this. With the official accession negotiation process with WBC currently under way, this presents an unpredictable factor relating to whether or not and when those countries will actually become EU members, an exception here being Croatia as the only country of the region that has already signed the EU Accession Treaty, according to which the country will become the 28th Member State of the European Union on 1 July 2013.

Some studies suggest that growing Euroscepticism among EU citizens is determined by variables such as economic cost-benefit considerations, national political culture considerations, or (national) identity.⁴ However, a majority of those studies ignore

Conditionality after the 2004 Enlargement: Consistency and Effectiveness," *Journal of European Public Policy* 15, no. 6 (2008): 918–937. Deniz Devrim and Evelina Schulz, "Enlargement Fatigue in the European Union: From Enlargement to Many Unions," www.realinstitutoelcano.org (accessed September 16, 2011).

3 The political term is used by the EU and designates the countries Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia.

4 See Erik Jones and Niels van der Bijl, "Public Opinion and Enlargement: a Gravity Approach," *European Union Politics* 5, no. 3 (2004): 331–351. Jelena Subotic, "Europe is a State of Mind: Identity and Europeanization in the Balkans," *International studies quarterly*

that the formation of public opinion depends to a great extent on media information, and that mass media may have the capability to determine differing levels of Euroscepticism or support for EU enlargement. Because of the lack of first-hand experience, citizens retrieve the vast majority of information and analysis from their national news media.⁵ At the same time we cannot, from population surveys alone, fully retrieve insights into the images and perceptions of the EU or the WBC when people are asked about their support for a future EU enlargement.⁶ The potential conflict between differing expectations and the skepticism that may result from positions stated in those surveys can only be described and interpreted on a very general and abstract level, while the attitudes towards the EU cannot be traced to underlying political, economic, cultural or social principles and practices.

The state of research on EU accession-related topics still lacks more profound analyses carried out with regard to the perception of the news coverage on the WBC in EU countries. Therefore, we still lack more profound media data that we could consult to relate it to the mentioned survey results. Furthermore, the differing public attitudes with regard to EU enlargements as well as the increasing EU skepticism on both the EU side and the WBC side indicate a potential conflict in the accession process ahead. However, the current state of research still lacks systematic comparative analysis of the current public opinion in WBC with the public opinion in EU member states.⁷

55, no. 2 (2011): 309–330. Sophie Lechelera and Claes H. de Vreese, "Framing Serbia: the Effects of News Framing on Public Support for EU Enlargement," *European Political Science Review* 2 (2010): 73–74. Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks, "Does Identity or Economic Rationality Drive Public Opinion on European Integration?" *Political Science and Politics* 37, no. 3 (2004): 415–420.

5 Pippa Norris, *A virtuous circle. Political communications in postindustrial societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Claes de Vreese and Hajo G. Boomgaarden, "Media Effects on Public Opinion About the Enlargement of the European Union," *Journal of Common Market Studies* 44, no. 2 (2006): 419–436.

6 Thomas Risse-Kappen, *A Community of Europeans? Transnational Identities and Public Spheres* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2010), 34.

7 See, for instance: Katarina Ott, ed., *Croatian Accession to the European Union: The Challenges of Participation* (Zagreb: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2006). Nebojša Blanuša, "Euroskepticizam: razine istraživanja i oblici iskazivanja," *Anali Hrvatskog politološkog društva* 3 (1, 2007): 325–346. Vedran Džihic, Silvia Nadjivan, and Hrvoje Paic, *Europaverflucht begehrt: Europavorstellungen in Bosnien-Herzegowina, Kroatien und Serbien* (Wien: Braumüller, 2006). Silke Adams, "Domestic Adaptations of Europe. A Comparative Study of the Debates on EU Enlargement and a Common Constitution in the German and French Quality Press," *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 19 (4, 2007): 409–433. Cornelia Brantner, *Medien und EU: Europäisierung der österreichischen Öffentlichkeit?* (Saarbrücken: Südwestdeutscher, 2009). Juan Díez Medrano, *Framing Europe: Attitudes to European Integration in Germany, Spain, and the United Kingdom* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).

This article argues that mass media should be more strongly connected to public opinion, considering it a source of knowledge, especially when people's knowledge (of other countries or in the case of the EU of a transnational entity) cannot be developed solely from personal experience and networks, due to spatial distance or a high level of abstraction.⁸ At the same time, also the perspective of the EU out-group striving for membership should be included more systematically in the analysis of public opinion of EU enlargement, because for them this concept may be even more abstract and/or distorted. Also, taking the media into account here is crucial because aspiring member states may become subject to public approval by referendum during the accession process; just as the reciprocal knowledge in international relations forms an essential facet of public attitudes that leads us to a more detailed idea about what citizens and future citizens of the EU may conceptualize as a commonly shared collectivity.

To address some of the outlined gaps, this paper presents the results of an explorative media study. This study looked at the press coverage on the EU region in two WBC (Serbia and BiH) and the press coverage on the WB region in three EU member states (Austria, Germany, UK) for the year 2009. In a first step, the theoretical assumptions based on which the study was carried out will be outlined in more detail, and the methodological design will be described. Subsequently, some results of the media analysis will be presented and discussed. In a summary section, the news coverage will be related to the population surveys, and implications for further research will be derived.

2. Theoretical assumptions

Linking media content and public opinion can provide further insights into the way in which news coverage can affect support for a particular aspect of European integration. This expectation is based on the theoretical assumption that public support is of key importance for the legitimacy of any decision on the future enlargement of the EU, either because, indirectly, national governments can be held accountable (e.g., when the public may have an impact in European elections), or directly when possible referendums on the issue are carried out by national governments (e.g., on the Lisbon treaty).

It is assumed that mass media thereby frames certain topics to be transferred as relevant to the public with regard to the focus on the WBC in EU countries, and vice

8 See: Rens Vliegenthart, Andreas R. Schuck, Hajo G. Boomgaarden, and Claes H. de Vreese, "News Coverage and Support for European Integration 1990-2006," *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 20, no. 4 (2009): 415–439. Niklas Luhmann, *The Reality of the Mass media* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000). Benjamin I. Page and Robert Y. Shapiro, *The Rational Public: Fifty Years of Trends in Americans' Policy Preferences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

versa, and that those topics form the knowledge base for people's perception of the EU.⁹ Therefore, daily news coverage is considered to be a relevant contextual factor for people's perception of the world. Ordinary citizens usually do not have firsthand experience with either the EU or the WBC and, according to Eurobarometer surveys, EU citizens consistently identify newspapers and television as one of their most important sources of information about EU-related issues.¹⁰

In this context, the media does not merely serve as a channel of communication but can also assume the position of political actors themselves. They legitimately raise their own voice and thereby have an impact on political will formation or public opinion by assigning relevance to certain issues for public debate and by expressing their own positions on these issues or by considering the evaluation of actors involved in public debate.¹¹ In fulfilling these two functions – agenda setting and opinion leading – the media does not necessarily have to express beliefs identical with public opinion, but media opinion can and does reinforce and direct public opinion.¹²

A number of studies have shown that the mass media news coverage on the EU conditions public attitudes on EU topics such as EU integration or EU enlargement, and that the mass media's evaluation of EU enlargement as positive, negative, or mixed, that guides public opinion.¹³ Analyzing how the topic of EU accession is framed in news coverage can help to identify what aspects of the topic are emphasized, and what organizing principles may thus form the basis for a person's

9 Adopting the perspective of Robert M. Entman, *Projections of Power: Framing News, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004) and Maxwell E. McCombs, *Setting the Agenda. The Mass Media and Public Opinion* (Cambridge; Malden, MA: Polity Press; Blackwell, 2004).

10 See: Vliegthart et al., "News Coverage and Support for European Integration 1990-2006," 415. Jürgen Maier and Berthold Rittberger, "Shifting Europe's Boundaries: Mass Media, Public Opinion and the Enlargement of the EU," *European Union Politics* 9, no. 2 (2008): 243–267. Norris, *A virtuous circle*.

11 Pfetsch, "Agents of transnational debate across Europe," 22. But see also: Page et al., "What Moves Public Opinion?" 23–43. Michael Bruter, *Citizens of Europe? The Emergence of a Mass European Identity* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005). Barbara Pfetsch and Silke Adam, eds., *Massenmedien als politische Akteure. Konzepte und Analysen* (Wiesbaden: VS, 2008).

12 See: Shanto Iyengar and Donald R. Kinder, *News that Matters. Television and American Opinion* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

13 See: Andreas R. Schuck and Claes H. de Vreese, "Between Risk and Opportunity: News Framing and Its Effects on Public Support for EU Enlargement," *European Journal of Communication* 21 (1, 2006): 5–23. Maier and Rittberger, "Shifting Europe's Boundaries," 243-267. De Vreese and Boomgaarden, "Media Effects," 419-436.

understanding of and thinking about the EU enlargement process in the WB region.¹⁴

Framing theory offers an approach to analyzing those interrelations and how citizens make sense of politics through them, not simply by means of salience, but by defining frames as patterns of interpretation that are used to classify information and process it efficiently, stressing certain aspects of an issue over others. Frames offer citizens the possibility to choose from a spectrum of attributes, judgments, and decisions to make sense of EU related politics.¹⁵

A second theoretical assumption is that, for most European citizens, the EU still presents a rather abstract concept and social construction ("imagined community").¹⁶ Therefore, it does not pre-exist outside communication, but is created precisely when people speak to one another, be it in interpersonal settings or through certain media. Here mass media present an essential "communication arena" for the construction of the EU as a collective entity. Due to their widespread visibility and connectivity, mass media discourses are predisposed to the evolving and expansion of societal descriptions on unity.¹⁷

At the same time, the concept of the EU as a collective entity inevitably contains an in-group/out-group dimension: it relies on (real or constructed) boundaries between those who belong to the in-group and a conceptual out-group against

14 Claes H. deVreese, Hajo G. Boomgaarden, and Holli A. Semetko, "(In)direct Framing Effects: The Effects of News Media Framing on Public Support for Turkish Membership in the European Union," *Communication Research* 38, no. 2 (2011): 179–182.

15 Lechelera and de Vreese, "Framing Serbia," 76-78. See also Robert Entman, "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm," *Journal of Communication* 43, no. 4 (1993): 51–58; Dielram A. Scheufele, "Agenda-setting, Priming, and Framing Revisited: Another Look at Cognitive Effects of Political Communication," *Mass Communication and Society* 3, no. 2 (2000): 297–316. Stuart N. Soroka, "Media, Public Opinion, and Foreign Policy," *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 8 (1, 2003): 27–48.

16 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (Rev. London; New York: Verso, 2005), 14-15.

17 For theoretical discussion see especially: Christiane Eilders and Dennis Lichtenstein, "Diskursive Konstruktionen von Europa. Eine Integration von Öffentlichkeits- und Identitätsforschung," *Medien & Kommunikationswissenschaft* 58 (2, 2010): 199-201. Nancy Rivenburgh, "Social Identification and Media Coverage of Foreign Relations," in *News Media and Foreign Relations. A Multifaceted Perspective*, ed. Abbas Malek (Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1997). 79-91. Gabriele Melischek and Josef Seethaler, "Media and International Relations: An Attributional Analysis of In-group and Out-group Perceptions in European Press Coverage of the 2004 U.S. Presidential Election," *American Journal of Media Psychology* 1 (2008): 103–124.

which one's own concept of belonging can be demarcated.¹⁸ This social categorization helps to provide a system of orientation for self-reference, enabling people to define their own place in the European context and in relation to other European countries. The future EU enlargement to the WB region presents not only a (re)definition of actual EU borders but may also trigger negotiations and (re)definitions of the concept of the EU as a collective entity. Therefore, it is assumed that one crucial parameter for the current perceptions and relations between EU and WBC is this in-group/out-group dualism (EU vs. WBC), as well as both sides' underlying conceptions of the EU as a collective entity.

A comparative analysis of how the EU is currently perceived (1) from inside (i.e. when EU countries perceive and define a potential out-group and thus define the boundaries of their own EU collectivity) and (2) from the outside (i.e. when those who are not part of the EU but are striving for membership perceive the EU) may also track possible gaps in the perceptions and definitions of this concept of unity, and based on that possible barriers for WBC in the accession steps lying ahead.

3. Design of the Comparative Media Study

3.1. Data Sample

Based on these assumptions, a comparative media study was carried out in three EU countries (Austria, Germany, and UK) and two WBC (BiH and Serbia). As an explorative study of limited scope and resources, the main aim of the research was to provide some insights into the structures and spectrum of the news coverage on the EU enlargement topic as well as the current reciprocal frames of perception between countries of the EU region and the Western Balkans. The country selection was guided by the consideration outlined below.

For the EU sample, three diverse country cases were chosen, to encompass some of the range of variation among EU member states with regard to public opinion towards the EU and especially further EU enlargement: Germany shows low rates of support for future membership of the different WBC in the EU, while Germany's own EU membership is evaluated rather positively.¹⁹ In the UK, public opinion is

18 Arguing with Social Identity Theory; see especially: Richard K. Herrmann, Thomas Risse-Kappen and Marilyn B. Brewer, eds., *Transnational Identities. Becoming European in the EU* (Lanham, USA; Oxford, UK: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004). Dominic Abrams and Michael A. Hogg, "Collective Identity: Group Membership and Self-conception," in *Self and social identity. Perspectives on Social Psychology*, eds. Marilyn B. Brewer and Miles Hewstone (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004). 147-181.

19 According to EB74 (QA20.1-7), the German rates of support regarding the future EU membership are 14% for Albania, 25% for BiH, 40% for Croatia, 17% for Kosovo, 24% for

traditionally rather skeptical toward the country's own EU affiliation.²⁰ At the same time, British governments have traditionally strongly supported further enlargement in general, an enthusiasm that does not reflect in public opinion surveys to the same degree.²¹ Here, the consulting of mass media discourse may provide new material to explain the survey data. Thirdly, in Austria public opinion in recent years shows strong skepticism towards the own EU membership, and also the lowest rates of support for a future WBC membership in the EU.²²

Additional factors that may shape the level of attention paid toward the region were also taken into account: the variety of old and newer member states (Germany is a founding member of the EU, the UK is a member since 1973, Austria is a relatively new member since 1995); population size (large countries Germany, UK vs. small country Austria); different degrees of proximity to the WB region (UK very distant, Germany relatively distant, Austria very close). Finally, due to the limited scale of the project capacities, EU countries were chosen that could be analyzed by the Austrian team (i.e. that where either German-speaking or English-speaking).

For the WB region, Serbia was chosen as it is the largest country of the WB region and because it is strongly divided over EU membership.²³ While political factions in Serbia are divided with regard to the EU, public opinion polls show that the Serbian population supports the own EU accession process, but at the same time has substantive reservations about the EU.²⁴ National sovereignty is put above the own

FYR Macedonia, 28% for Montenegro, and 21% for Serbia. At the same time, for 2009, the German support rate for the own EU-membership is 61% (EB71) and 60% (EB72).

20 According to EB74, for 2009, the British support rate for the own EU-membership is 28% (EB71) and 30% (EB72), while the UK rates of support are 23% for Albania, 25% for BiH, 31% for Croatia, 23% for Kosovo, 27% for FYR Macedonia, 26% for Montenegro, and 25% for Serbia.

21 Adele Brown and Michael Attenborough, "EU Enlargement: the Western Balkans," *Research Paper 07/27*, www.parliament.uk/documents/commons/lib/research/rp2007/rp07-027.pdf (accessed February 21, 2012). Marcel Lubbers and Peer Scheepers, "Divergent Trends of Euroscepticism in Countries and Regions of the European Union," *European Journal of Political Research* 49, no. 6 (2010): 787–817.

22 According to EB74, for 2009, the Austrian support rate for the own EU-membership is 41% (EB71) and 42% (EB72), while the Austrian rates of support are 12% for Albania, 21% for BiH, 49% for Croatia, 12% for Kosovo, 17% for FYR Macedonia, 19% for Montenegro, and 18% for Serbia.

23 See Subotic, "Europe is a State of mind," 309–330.

24 For instance, Serbian parliamentary and presidential elections in 2008 led to a standoff between the pro-European and the anti-European forces. At the same time, according to the GBM 2010, the rates of support for the issue of whether or not Serbian membership in the EU would be a good thing declined from 61 to 44% between 2008 and 2010; also, in 2010 only 41% of the people surveyed thought that the people in the EU want Serbia to join the EU.

affiliation with the EU, especially with regard to issues such as the status of Kosovo, or the Serbian cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in The Hague, both crucial preconditions for Serbia's EU accession.

BiH was chosen because the EU enjoyed a strong rise in support from the population in recent years. This stands in contrast to the status of the actual accession negotiation process, in which the country currently lags behind other WBC, mainly because of internal ethnic disputes and political conflicts. These struggles result to a large extent from the politically decentralized structure defined by the Dayton agreement that also increasingly manifests itself in the social division of the country in the two entities (the Federation of BiH and the Republika Srpska).

Focusing on the year 2009, two daily newspapers were chosen for each country that are nationally available, have the largest distribution rates, and are considered as *Leitmedien* (opinion-forming newspapers) in the respective country; they are leading the societal discourse, and are observed by other media, because their topics and interpretations are considered as relevant.²⁵

For Austria *Die Presse* and *Der Standard* were analyzed. The German sample included the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, the British sample included *The Times* and *The Guardian*, and the Serbian sample included *Danas* and *Politika*. For BiH, due to the ethno-political divisions in the country that also affect the circulation range and relevance of newspapers, the sample consisted of *Dnevni Avaz* as a newspaper read by the Bosniak population, *Nezavisne novine* for the Serbian population, and *Dnevni list* for the Croat population.

The stratified random sample included twelve publication days (5 January/3 February/4 March/9 April/8 May/13 June/6 July/4 August/9 September/8 October/6 November/12 December 2009), i.e. for each month choosing one issue of each newspaper, taken from the second week of the month, forming two artificial weeks from Monday to Saturday (Sundays were excluded since not all newspapers have regular Sunday editions). This way, the news coverage in all countries could also be observed beyond specific events, to gain a general overview over the average level of attention paid to the reciprocal Other in both the analyzed EU countries and the WBC.

25 Otfried Jarren and Martina Vogel, "Gesellschaftliche Selbstbeobachtung und Koorientierung. Die Leitmedien der modernen Gesellschaft", in *Leitmedien. Konzepte, Relevanz, Geschichte*, eds. Daniel Müller, Annemone Ligensa and Peter Gendolla (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2009). 84-89. For rankings of newspaper circulations, see Hans-Bredow-Institut für Medienforschung, ed., *Internationales Handbuch Medien*, 28th ed. (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2009) and World Editors Forum / World Association of Newspapers, ed., *World Press Trends 2008* (Paris, 2009).

3.2. Analytical Steps

For each publication day and newspaper the entire newspaper edition was examined. In the three EU countries, all articles were selected that included references to the WB region, i.e. one or more of the countries Albania, BiH, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, or Serbia, to the transnational geopolitical categories [Southeastern Europe/the Balkans], [Western Balkans], or [Former Yugoslavia], or to actors or institutions from the region. This focus on the whole region was based on the assumption that all mentioned countries are currently in the process of EU accession, and that thus the accession process as such may also be referred to in the news coverage with regards to the whole region, and not just when individual countries are taken into view. In the two WBC, all articles were selected that included references to the EU region, i.e. to one or several of the 27 EU member states, to the [EU] as a geopolitical entity or to institutions from the EU region.

In a first analytical step, the geographical and the thematic spectrum of the reciprocal news coverage was identified. For that, the whole newspaper article was taken into account. For each article, all mentioned countries (in the EU region and the WB region) or the above mentioned transnational entity references were coded. Also, the thematic area in the context of which (1) in Austrian, German, and British newspapers the WB side, and (2) in Bosnian and Serbian newspapers the EU side was referred to, was identified. For each article, more than one thematic area could be coded. Subsequently, the identified geographical and thematic references were ranked based on a simple frequency analysis.

The identification of the geographical spectrum allows us to get an overview of what countries are perhaps more relevant in the context of the three EU member states, or whether the region may be perceived as a whole. Alternatively, the Bosnian and Serbian sample allows us to see whether an EU-related focus is dominating the news coverage or whether both countries also apply bi-national foci when countries of the EU region are taken into view. At the same time, including the whole newspaper edition and identifying the whole variety of thematic areas addressed when the reciprocal other is observed allows us to identify the whole spectrum of information provided for the readers of the specific country and on the respective other side (EU region, WB region), and to define how relevant the topic of EU-related issues and EU accession actually is.

In a second step, a qualitative content analysis of all articles focusing on the thematic area of politics was carried out, since the topic of the EU accession was predominantly addressed in that area. An inductive qualitative approach was chosen, meaning that the aim of this analytical step was to identify the way in which

the EU accession process of the WB region was framed in the news coverage. All given views and positions relating to the EU accession process or EU-related issues were identified in the articles that focused on political topics. Positions/views are defined as all statements about a topic that can be connected to speakers who hold or support a view in the respective article, either explicitly (direct or indirect quotations) or implicitly (when the medium expresses a view).²⁶

4. Reciprocal News Coverage between the EU Side and the Western Balkan Side

Overall the media study revealed that quantitative amount of the reciprocal news coverage of the EU countries and the WBC differs. In absolute terms, considering the whole newspaper edition, in the Bosnian (318 identified articles) and Serbian (317 articles) newspapers the focus on the EU region was significantly higher than the reciprocal focus on WBC in Austria (66 articles), Germany (73 articles), or the UK (69 articles).

4.1. Geographical and Thematic Spectrum of the Reciprocal News Coverage

In all three EU countries, the focus on the WB region was predominantly shaped by references made to individual countries. As shown in Figure 1 (all Figures in Appendix), most references were made towards Croatia and Serbia. In the Austrian newspapers, a significantly higher level of attention was paid to Kosovo, while in the German and the British sample, almost every fifth (Germany) or fourth (UK) article referred to BiH. The focus on other countries of the region (especially Montenegro) was only marginal.

In the Bosnian context, countries most often referred to here were the UK, Germany, Sweden, or Slovenia, while Serbian newspapers most frequently related to France, Germany, the UK, or Italy (see Figure 2).

All analyzed countries included a number of articles with references made to their own country when the reciprocal Other was under focus. Serbia and the UK stand out especially here with self-references in 85.8% of the analyzed Serbian articles and 76.8% of the British articles. Fewer national self-references were found in the Bosnian articles on the EU region (50.3%), or the Austrian (48.5%) and German newspaper articles (45.2%) looking at the WB region.

Furthermore, the newspapers of the three EU countries referred to the WB region using transnational categories infrequently (see Figure 3). While in the UK the only label significantly used was [Former Yugoslavia], in Austria and Germany the label

26 E.g., in opinion articles, but sometimes also when an article includes evaluations on a specific topic without any reference to an external source

most frequently applied was [Southeastern Europe/the Balkans], followed again by the categorization [Former Yugoslavia]. The category [Western Balkans] was only marginally applied.

In comparison, in Bosnian and Serbian newspapers the usage of transnational categories was much more frequent when the EU region was under focus, that is, when referring to the region as a geopolitical entity rather than as individual countries. Serbian newspapers more frequently applied the term [Europe], while in the Bosnian newspapers approximately every second article of our sample applied the term [European Union/EU].

Within this geographical spectrum, in all five countries we identified a similar range of thematic areas. What differed was the frequency with which those thematic areas came under focus (see Figure 4):

In Austria, BiH and Serbia the thematic area of politics was the main focus. Besides that, in Austrian newspapers the economy was a second thematic area frequently under focus, as well as articles relating to crime, catastrophes, or to migration issues. In Bosnian and Serbian newspapers sport formed a second relevant thematic frame of perception with regard to the EU region, followed by the economy as a third thematic area. Differing from this pattern, in British newspapers the central thematic area of perception was sport, followed by articles that focused on topics linked to the wars of the 1990s; the area of politics followed in third place. In the German sample the 1990s wars formed the central thematic area for the context in which the WB region came into focus, and politics followed. As in all other countries, apart from Austria, the thematic area of sport was a third important focus of the news coverage.

Altogether, the thematic ranking indicates that politics is not necessarily the first and foremost lens through which EU countries and WBC currently observe each other. However, it is in the context of those topics that most views and positions referring to issues at the European level and addressing the EU accession process of the region were found.

4.2. The News Coverage of the Western Balkan EU Accession Process in the Three EU Countries

In the Austrian newspapers articles with reference to the EU accession process of WBC frequently focused on the Croatian-Slovenian border dispute that has an impact on the Croatian accession negotiations, mainly because of Slovenia's blockades of these negotiations. Here, Slovenia was portrayed as seeing itself supported in its blockade position by the other EU member states, since some of

them also welcome a delay in Croatia's EU accession process.²⁷ Other identified statements reported that EU countries notice and appreciate the endeavors made by Croatia in the accession process.²⁸

Another focus identified in the Austrian newspapers were the political relations between Kosovo and Serbia. Here, the dispute was reported to block, or at least slow down, the EU accession process of both entities. The stated Serbian view was that Serbia still does not recognize Kosovo as an independent state, and that violent incidents between the two sides can be seen as an indicator of the instability and underdevelopment of Kosovo. The statements given by political actors of the EU side considered the EU accession of WBC as a chance for development and stabilization, especially with regard to Kosovo.²⁹

For BiH the internal political situation was specifically focused on as one obstacle to the accession process, especially the political disputes among the two entities as well as the necessary reforms of the political system (Dayton structure) and the role of the Office of the High Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina (OHR).³⁰

In the German newspapers the EU accession process also formed a central political topic when the WB region came under focus. As in the Austrian sample, the EU positions were portrayed as two-sided: overall, the newspapers portrayed most EU countries as supportive of the integration of WBC.³¹ However, especially with regards to Serbia, it was reported that the Netherlands have objections to the countries' EU accession, citing cooperation with the ICTY as a crucial condition for Serbian EU membership.³²

German newspapers also frequently focused on the border dispute between Croatia and Slovenia, with quoted EU countries assuring their support in solving the conflict, but not explicitly taking sides with one of the two parties.³³ As in Austrian

27 Thomas Roser, "Fatale Bruderzwiste auf dem Balkan," *Die Presse*, 5 January 2009, 5.

28 Regina Pöll, "Schwedischer Vorsitz: Tür für Türkei offen," *Die Presse*, 13 June 2009, 5.

29 Wieland Schneider, "Als Serbiens Macht im Kosovo zerfiel," *Die Presse*, 13 June 2009, 6.

30 Manuela Tomic, "Das europäische Stiefkind auf dem Balkan," *Die Presse*, 9 September, 5, and N/A, "'Aus Bosnien ein ganz normales Land machen'," *Die Presse*, 9 September 2009, 5.

31 E.g.: N/A, "Merkel: Kroatien schnell in die EU," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 9 April 2009, 4. N/A, "Proteste der britischen Konservativen gegen Cameron," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 6 November 2009, 7.

32 Enver Robelli, "Ratko Mladic, wie er singt und lacht," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 13 June 2009, 9.

33 E.g.: N/A, "Merkel: Kroatien schnell in die EU," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 9 April 2009, 4.

newspapers, the unsolved dispute over Kosovo's independent status was seen as a major obstacle for the progress of the EU accession process.³⁴ Lastly, with regards to BiH, also the German news coverage mentioned the Dayton structure as a major problem for the EU accession process, arguing that it blocks the political and economic development of BiH.³⁵

In contrast, in the two British newspapers we found no article focusing on EU-related political topics such as EU enlargement when political topics were covered.

4.3 The News Coverage of the Western Balkan EU Accession Process in the Two WBC

On the other side of the analytical constellation, the news coverage on the EU accession process in the two WBC revealed similar patterns. In the Bosnian newspapers, identified statements of both the EU side and the Bosnian side argued that BiH can expect help from the EU but has to solve its own problems and internal conflicts before it can become an EU member.³⁶

Quoted EU representatives emphasized that the internal political situation was still far below EU standards and that the progress towards reaching those standards was slow.³⁷ The major obstacle to the EU membership efforts of the country was the Dayton political structure, and Bosnian newspapers again pointed out BiH's self-responsibility for carrying out those reforms.³⁸ Especially the transformation of the OHR into the office of the European Union Special Representative was presented controversially – creating conflicts not only between the EU and the Bosnian sides, but also among the entities within BiH.³⁹

Despite the obstacles presented, the Bosnian perspective on its own EU accession process can be summarized as cautiously optimistic. Small steps towards the EU

34 Enver Robelli, "EU im Kosovo zum Einschreiten gezwungen," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 5 January 2009, 7.

35 Marieluise Beck, "Letzte Chance für Bosnien?," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 6 November 2009, 12.

36 Stevanović, "BiH bi mogla ispasti iz grupe za put ka EU," *Dnevni Avaz*, 3 February 2009, 4.

37 Škuletić, "BiH još nije izgubljen slučaj," *Dnevni Avaz*, 13 June 2009, 4.

38 SRNA, "Poziv BiH da izvrši promjene Ustava," *Nezavisne novine*, 8 October 2009, 5.

39 SRNA, "Poziv BiH da izvrši promjene Ustava," *Nezavisne novine*, 8 October 2009, 5. FENA, "Dodik protiv izaslanika SAD za BiH," *Dnevni Avaz*, 9 April 2009, 2. Sead Numanović, "EU izdala Incka," *Dnevni Avaz*, 13 June 2009, 1.

were emphasized, and the EU candidacy of BiH was portrayed as a realistic option.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, it was acknowledged that BiH still has to meet a number of conditions, especially when compared with other WBC.

In the Serbian newspapers, the question of Kosovo's independent status was of special relevance in the Serbian news coverage on the EU accession.⁴¹ In the context of this topic, the EU side and the Serbian side were presented as taking two opposing positions, with member states such as Germany approving further EU accession steps by Serbia only under the condition of recognition of Kosovo's independence, while Serbian political actors repeatedly emphasized that Serbia was willing to make compromises, but not with regard to Kosovo.⁴² A second frequent focus was on Serbian cooperation with the ICTY. Here, the Serbian newspapers acknowledged that some EU countries (Netherlands, Lithuania) block the accession negotiations because of the lack of full cooperation with the ICTY, especially with regard to the arrest of Ratko Mladić.⁴³ Other than in the Kosovo case, the Serbian side here was portrayed as being more willing to cooperate with the EU.⁴⁴

Despite those two obstacles, the Serbian EU accession perspectives were seen optimistically and Serbian newspapers frequently underlined the positive relations between the EU side and Serbia.⁴⁵ It was acknowledged, too, that the accession process has stabilized and will continue to stabilize the country.⁴⁶

4.4 Implications for Reciprocal Perceptions Between Both Sides

What implications for the reciprocal perceptions (the information and evaluation of the reciprocal Other in the context of the topic of EU accession) can thus be derived from the outlined exploratory study?

First of all, with exception of the UK, on the level of political topics, the analyzed reciprocal news coverage revealed a significant focus on the EU accession process in the WB region. This supports the assumption, noted at the beginning of this article,

40 E.g.: Goran Mrkić, "Bh. građani žrtve lažnih državljana," *Dnevni list*, 4 March 2009, 4. Škuletić, "BiH još nije izgubljen slučaj," *Dnevni Avaz*, 13 June 2009, 4. N/A, "UBBiH u EU bankarskoj federaciji," *Dnevni list*, 6 July 2009, 22.

41 Serbia does not recognize this independence; however full recognition presents a disputed point in Serbia's accession negotiations with the EU.

42 Snežana Čongradin, "Oli Ren ne može da ubedi Holandiju," *Danas*, 9 September 2009, 3.

43 Biljana Čpajak, "Brisel traži bolju regionalnu saradnju," *Politika*, 8 October 2009, 6.

44 N/A, "Pohvala za napredak u sprovođenju reformi," *Danas*, 3 February 2009, 2.

45 E.g.: Marković, "Kad nema odlikovanja, dobra I plaketa," *Danas*, 8 October 2009, 16. Preneto, "Moratinos u poseti Srbiji," *Danas*, 12 December 2009, 2.

46 N/A, "EU integracije sidro Srpske politike," *Danas*, 4 March 2009, 12.

that the political dimension of the EU accession process forms a crucial parameter in the current reciprocal perceptions between EU countries and the WB region. While the perspective on the WB region in the three EU countries was predominantly shaped by the perception of individual countries, from the perspective of the two non-EU countries, the news coverage on the EU region predominantly referred to a transnational level.

Secondly, in Austria and Germany the perspectives on the WB accession process reflected ambivalence. EU membership for the region was never fully rejected in the reported statements. However, it was indicated in many instances that the time for accession has not yet arrived and that some crucial preconditions have to be fulfilled. For Croatia this included the solving of the border dispute with Slovenia, for Serbia the recognition of Kosovo's independence, for BiH the solving of internal ethnic and political disputes, and for Serbia and Croatia the full cooperation with the ICTY in The Hague. In both these countries it was pointed out that the EU accession of the region was a chance for development and stabilization. Thus, the overall view that is communicated here is that EU accession is possible for the countries of the region but not yet, and only based on strict criteria that have to be met by each WBC. Political stability, the solving of bi-national and internal political conflicts, as well as a functioning democratic system can be derived as the crucial parameters for accession proposed here.

However, the outlined perceptions do not refer to *all* WBC. Articles in the German and Austrian samples mainly focused on Croatia, Serbia and BiH, but not on the EU accession process of Montenegro, or Albania. Furthermore, in the British newspapers sample no articles included a focus on EU-related political topics and the EU enlargement process in particular. Therefore, no British view on the (potential) change of EU boundaries could be derived from the British news coverage, and thus no information about that topic was provided for the readers.

On the WB side, in the news coverage of both Serbia and BiH the perspectives on the own future EU membership were positive and ambitious. This is indicated by the emphasis on small steps towards the EU and by the portrayal of BiH's or Serbia's EU candidacy as realistic options.

From the Bosnian perspective, the perception of the EU that can be derived from the statements is that of a "savior" who should step in when Bosnian politicians cannot find agreement on internal political matters. The EU accession process was seen as a path to solving the internal problems of the country (for example, constitutional reform, transformation of OHR into EUSR) to make BiH a functioning state. At the same time, it was acknowledged that BiH has to solve its own problems before it can receive full EU membership. Bosnian newspapers clearly express a skeptical view on the underperformance of Bosnian political actors, and signal

doubt with regard to the fulfillment of all necessary EU accession criteria in the near future.

In comparison, Serbian newspapers provide a more skeptical view on the country's EU membership, especially with regards to the outlined accession criteria. Here national interests were clearly put above the EU membership. Nevertheless, the EU position on a future EU membership for Serbia was not portrayed as wholly negative and the newspapers signaled a general willingness on behalf of the country to cooperate with the EU in the outlined issues. Overall, the Serbian perspective appeared to be more self-confident than the Bosnian one.

However, the assumption that the focus on the possible change of EU boundaries may also trigger explicit references to EU collectivity conceptions was not supported since no explicit statements were identified in the five countries. Thus, underlying EU conceptions can only implicitly be derived from the analyzed news coverage. However, the focus on individual WBC in the three EU countries rather than on the region as a collective entity also reflects a rather nation-centric self-perception rather than taking an 'EU perspective'.

5. Conclusions

Coming back to the starting point for the outlined media study – the identification of media discourses on the Western Balkan EU accession process in EU countries and WBC as a context factor and platform for information and knowledge about the respective Other, and the relation of this reciprocal news coverage to the populations attitudes towards EU enlargement – we can make the following observations.

While in the two WBC the attitudes expressed in the survey resemble the perspectives presented in the newspapers, in the two EU countries the positions of surveys and media coverage are only partially congruent.⁴⁷ In Austria and in Germany, the higher rejection of a further EU enlargement towards the WB region among the surveyed populations can only be related to the news coverage on this question to a certain degree, at least when only political topics and the news coverage of the EU accession topic is consulted. For the UK, no direct relation is possible, since no news discourses on the question were found in the analytical

47 In the EB74, which included a specific survey section distinguishing different future EU member state candidates, when asked "Please tell me, whether you are for or against further enlargement in the EU to include other countries in future years," with regard to the BiH and Serbia, in Austria 74% (BiH) and 77% (Serbia), in Germany 65% and 70%, and in the UK 56% and 57% of the surveyed people were against this enlargement. For Serbia and BiH, see 1. Introduction.

sample. Thus, the news coverage in the analyzed EU countries, in particular, can be related to the survey results only to a limited extent.

Three explanations may be consulted here, that also outline the limits of the presented elaborative study, and that may form starting points for further studies:

One explanation is that the surveyed populations answer questions on EU-related issues based on their positions towards the EU, or towards their own country. Thus a lack of news coverage on EU-related aspects with regard to the WB region may be the result of a general disinterest in or distance towards EU-related matters. Therefore, context factors such as the own country's EU affiliation and the general news coverage on EU-related topics beyond EU enlargement should be taken into account in further studies.

A second explanation is that *Leitmedien* largely replicate the elite discourses on EU enlargement, as Thomas Risse-Kappen outlined for the previous Eastern enlargement rounds of 2004 and 2007.⁴⁸ Thus, the news coverage on the EU enlargement in the media may only have limited impact on public opinion. This hypothesis should be tested in a subsequent study by including political discourses as context factors for media news coverage.

The media study's quantitative analytical step indicates a third explanation: as outlined in Figure 4, the question of EU accession was not the only lens through which EU countries and WBC currently perceive each other, especially when we broaden our analytical view to other thematic areas beyond politics. While in Austria, Germany and the UK the focus on the 1990s wars, economy, or on crime, catastrophes formed a crucial lens through which to view the WB Other; the two WBC but also the UK frequently observed the respective Other through the lens of sport. If mass media provide the knowledge frame based on which people may form their opinions about the world, we could assume that the news coverage *beyond* politics should be included in the outlined analytical design as well.

Thus, in a next analytical step, the non-political news coverage will be taken into view in order to identify the full spectrum of reciprocal perceptions as currently provided in the reciprocal news coverage between EU countries and WBC. If, for instance, in the Austrian news coverage we find a strong focus on criminal WB actors in Austria, this may also become relevant as a knowledge source based on which EU-related questions such as the EU membership for the depicted countries are supported or rejected among the Austrian population. At the same time, also the concept of an EU collectivity may address facets and degrees of unity *beyond* the political dimension. Those dimensions should be analyzed in more detail in

48 Risse-Kappen, *A Community of Europeans*.

future studies, here also by broadening the theoretical concepts (e.g., by including theoretical approaches on foreign news coverage, media and stereotypes)⁴⁹ with which those levels of news coverage could be approached and integrated in current political communication research on the question of EU enlargement and the definition of EU boundaries.

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49 See Stephen D. Reese, Oscar H. Gandy, and August E. Grant, eds., *Framing Public Life: Perspectives on Media and Our Understanding of the Social World* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2001). Kai Hafez, *Die politische Dimension der Auslandsberichterstattung* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2002). Jochen Müller, *Von Kampfmaschinen und Ballkünstlern: Fremdwahrnehmung und Sportberichterstattung im deutsch-französischen Kontext. Eine Presse- und Fernsehanalyse* (St. Ingbert: Röhrig, 2004).

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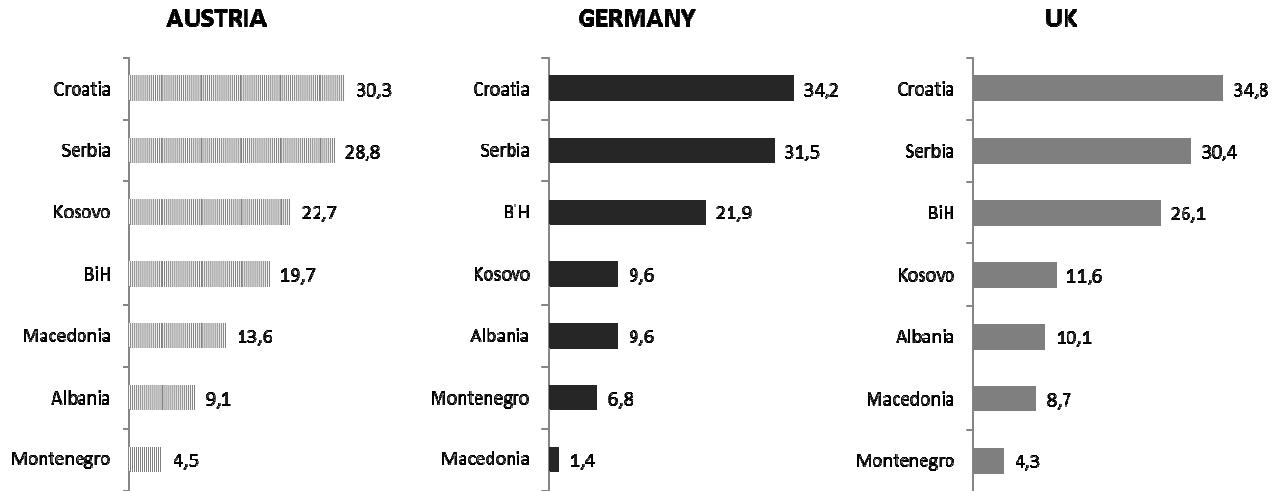
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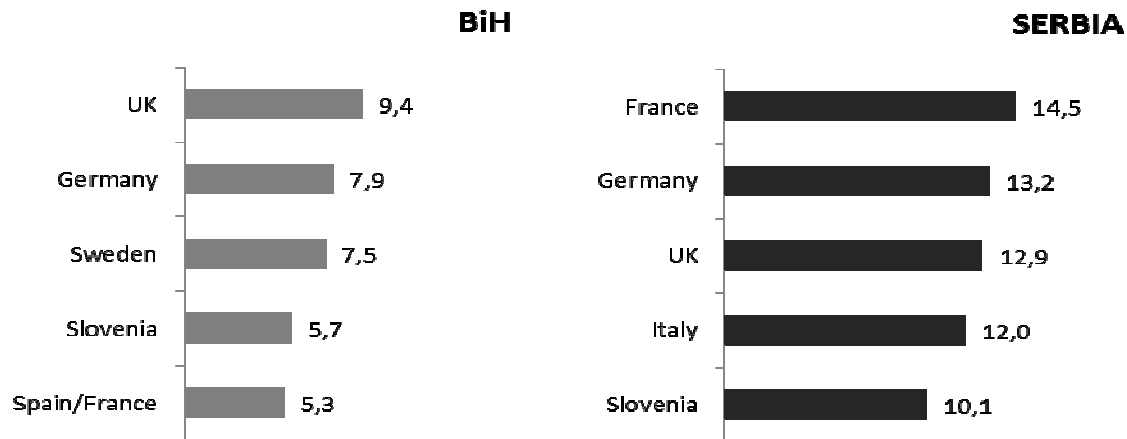
Appendix

Figure 1: Frequency of References to Individual Western Balkan Countries in...



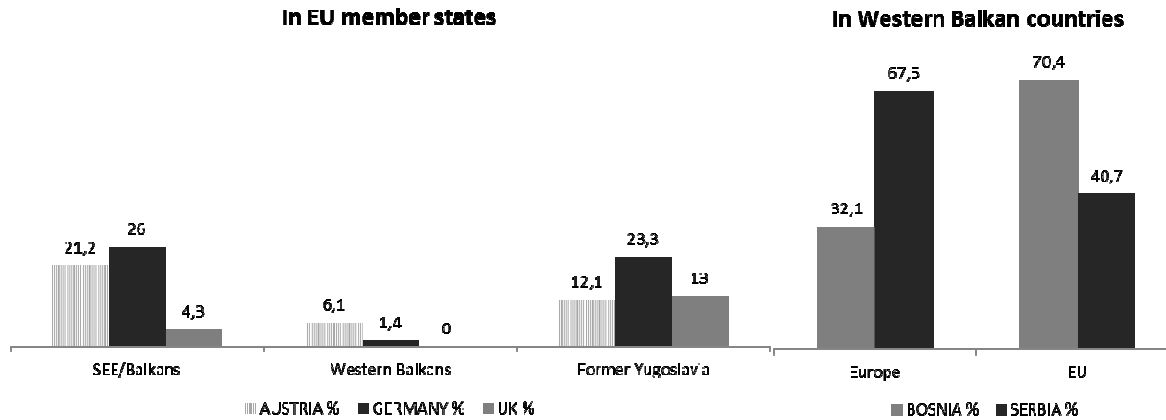
Note: Numbers refer to % of all newspaper articles per country sample in which country was referred to.

Figure 2: Frequency of References to Individual EU Countries in...



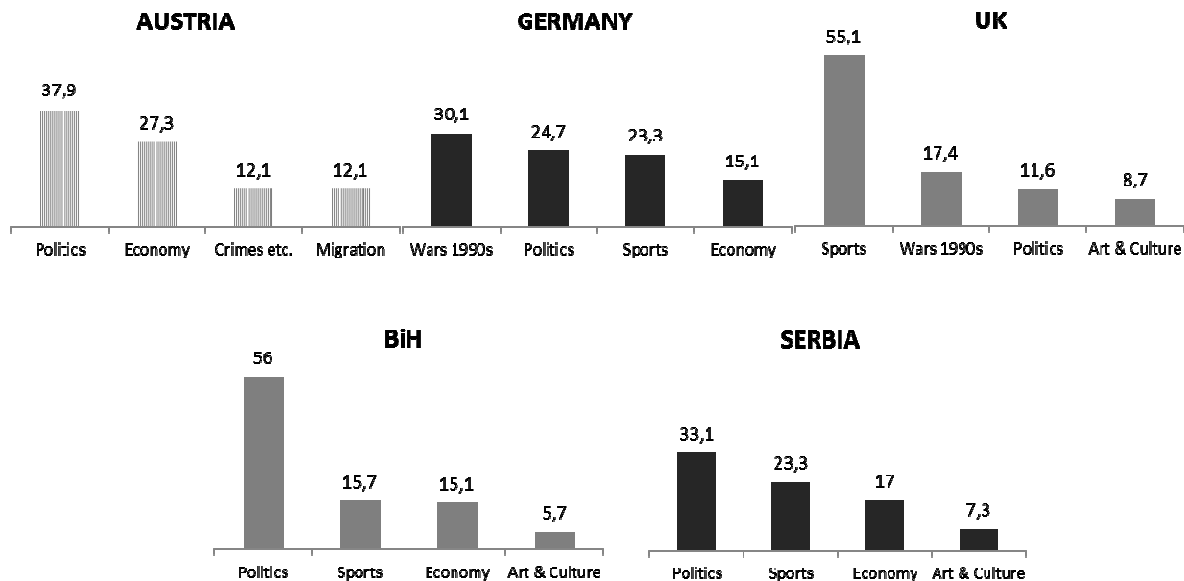
Note; Five most frequent numbers refer to % of all newspaper articles per country sample in which country was referred to.

Figure 3: Usage of Transnational Categories



Note: Numbers refer to % of all newspaper articles per country sample in which category was used.

Figure 4: Four Most Frequent Thematic Areas Referred



Note: Numbers refer to % of all newspaper articles per country sample in which thematic area was addressed.