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(Un)covering Poland between PR and presidency. A quantitative content analysis of print news coverage of the Polish EU presidency in Flanders

Introduction

Although international institutions and transnational governments have unmistakably played a prominent role in the global and local politics of recent years, European Union politics and governance have been and are still perceived by its citizens as remote and abstract (Blumler, 1983; Cini & Borragán, 2013). News coverage of EU-related events and topics in the media, suggested by recent studies as providing the most important link between politics and citizens (Entman & Bennett, 2001), could play a key role in the representation of the European Union and the further integration of its central government and its member states.

Acknowledging the importance of these dynamics, cross-national and longitudinal comparative research on the media coverage of EU-related news has gained increasing interest and momentum, but is still rare. The findings of these analyses indicate that news coverage of EU affairs is cyclical, peaking around key events (de Vreese et al., 2001; Norris, 2000). Trezn (2004), for one, argues that a European mediated public sphere has emerged while Leroy and Siune (1994) suggest a tendency to domesticate EU-related news, thus making it more relevant and appealing to local audiences. Peter, Semetko & de Vreese (2003) conclude that this is not the case. They argue that these different findings may be the result of the fact that the study by Leroy and Siune (1994) analyzed news during a key event, while they focused on news coverage during a routine period. As the visibility of EU news has increased overall (Boomgaarden et al. 2012), there is little consensus on the status of European integration. Peter and de Vreese (2004, p. 3) thus conclude that

“[...] the Europeanization of television news coverage is more an illusion than reality.”

Regardless of its outcome, the body of scholarly work on the news coverage of EU affairs is generally focused on the EU as an intergovernmental institution. While it does provide a clear view on the coverage of EU-related events in its respective member states, it largely remains ignorant of the particular flows of news in between the member states of the EU. The latter is the main concern of this article.

Media coverage of the Polish EU presidency in Flanders

The following analysis provides insight into the media coverage of the Polish EU presidency in the region of Flanders, the Dutch-speaking northern part of EU founding member – Belgium. For this quantitative content analysis, our scope is narrowed to three Flemish media sources: the broadsheet *De Standaard*, the popular newspaper *Het Laatste Nieuws* and the weekly magazine *Knack*. The denotation of ‘popular newspaper’ is not to be equated with the concept of a ‘tabloid’: while *Het Laatste Nieuws* does provide more coverage of topics related to sports and human interest, it still operates within the margins of ‘midmarket’ dailies by providing news reporting of political and socio-economic subjects and by appealing to a broad spectrum of the different social categories within the newspaper audience (De Bens & Raeymaeckers, 2007).

Before moving on to the methodology and the subsequent discussion of our analysis results, it is important to note that the outcome of our quantitative analysis was similar to the research findings of a study performed by Joye (2010), illustrating the Eurocentric focus of Flemish news media. This longitudinal quantitative content analysis of foreign and international news in three Flemish newspapers demonstrated that only 0.98% of all news media attention was devoted to Poland over the period 1986 till 2006. Due to the comparable scarcity of attention observed in our own quantitative analysis, we have subsequently performed a qualitative analysis – which will however not be the subject of this paper – to complement the quantitative analysis results.

We collected the data by using the *Mediargus* database, an online search tool for archived newspaper articles, enabling us to search for references relevant in the context of this study. We used the keywords *Polen*, *Pool*, *Pools* and *Poolse*. These are the Dutch translations of the search

terms *Poland*, *Pole*, *Polish* (male conjugation), and *Polish* (female conjugation). We restricted the scope of our search to three six-week periods: these three six-week periods covered data respectively from June 15, 2011 to July 31, 2011; from September 1, 2011 to October 15, 2011; and from December 1, 2011 to January 15, 2012. We gathered 735 news articles in total after inspection and deletion of duplicates. After the collection of the data, we followed up with a quantitative statistical analysis of the news articles by applying standard SPSS statistical tools. We have coded the news items based on an aggregated codebook, containing sixteen variables, which were distributed to the research teams that participated in the comparative study.

Results

News media

A first variable which has been analyzed, concerns the origin of the coded news articles ($n = 735$). Out of the 735 articles, 479 articles, or 65% of the data set, originated from the popular newspaper *Het Laatste Nieuws*, while 205 articles, or 27.9% of the items, were published in the broadsheet *De Standaard*. Only 51 news items, or 6.9%, were gathered from *Knack*. These numbers are easily explained by pointing out that, in contrast to *De Standaard* and *Het Laatste Nieuws*, *Knack* is a magazine published on a weekly basis which severely limits its ability to report news with the same frequency as the selected newspapers. Furthermore, we would like to draw attention to the anecdotal observation that only one of all 735 coded articles appeared on the front page of one of the selected sources (i.e. *De Standaard*).

Size of the item

Table 1

Descriptives for size of news articles

	N	Mean	Std. deviation	Std. error	95% confidence interval for mean		Minimum	Maximum
					lower bound	upper bound		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
<i>De Standaard</i>	205	618.5317	566.67349	39.57819	540.4969	696.5665	52.00	3006.00

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
<i>Het Laatste Nieuws</i>	479	304.7349	250.76391	11.45770	282.2212	327.2485	.00	2883.00
<i>Knack</i>	51	1049.4314	909.97176	127.42153	793.4977	1305.3651	35.00	3265.00
Total	735	443.9293	482.94778	17.81380	408.9572	478.9013	.00	3265.00

Table 2

One-way ANOVA for size of news articles

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between groups	34228569.440	2	17114284.720	91.464	.000
Within groups	136968528.881	732	187115.477		
Total	171197098.321	734			

Table 3

Posthoc Scheffe test for size of news articles

(I) media	(J) media	Mean difference (I-J)	Std. error	Sig.	95% confidence interval	
					lower bound	upper bound
<i>De Standaard</i>	<i>Het Laatste Nieuws</i>	313.79684*	36.10258	.000	225.2457	402.3480
	<i>Knack</i>	-430.89967*	67.68818	.000	-596.9228	-264.8765
<i>Het Laatste Nieuws</i>	<i>De Standaard</i>	-313.79684*	36.10258	.000	-402.3480	-225.2457
	<i>Knack</i>	-744.69651*	63.71474	.000	-900.9737	-588.4193
<i>Knack</i>	<i>De Standaard</i>	430.89967*	67.68818	.000	264.8765	596.9228
	<i>Het Laatste Nieuws</i>	744.69651*	63.71474	.000	588.4193	900.9737

* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Using the size of the news articles as an indicator for the extensiveness of the news reporting, we are able to discern whether or not *Knack* is able to compensate for its limited frequency of coverage by providing a more in-depth analysis. The means of news article size for *Het Laatste Nieuws* ($m = 305$), *De Standaard* ($m = 619$) and *Knack* ($m = 1049$) were analyzed using ANOVA ($p < .05$) and results of the analysis showed a significant difference between the groups ($F(2) = 91,464$ and $p = .00$). A posthoc Scheffe test ($p < .05$) was then performed to evaluate all possible pair-wise comparisons among means, showing significant results between all three news

sources' means ($p = .00$). In summary, the data suggests that *Knack* provides significantly more in-depth analysis, compensating for its limited coverage. However, due to the great difference in variance, the inaccuracy of the observed results has to be taken into consideration.

EU presidency relevance

Thirdly, we analyzed the relevance of the news coverage of the EU presidency of Poland. The results of our analysis showed a severely low frequency of news items related to the EU presidency of Poland: no less than twelve, or 1.6%, of all articles were coded as relevant. Of these twelve articles, only one item was published by *Het Laatste Nieuws*, while *Knack* and *De Standaard* respectively covered four and seven news items. Moreover, of these twelve articles, six were coded as published within the first seventeen days of the first six-week period (i.e. between June 15, 2011 and July 1, 2011). This timeframe coincides with the anticipation prior to the Polish EU presidency which came into effect on July 1, 2011. This observation could be interpreted as an illustration of the tendency of Western news media to focus on big news stories when covering foreign news (Hafez, 2007) and it illustrates the cyclical nature of news coverage of EU-related events (de Vreese et al., 2001; Norris, 2000). However, due to the very low frequency

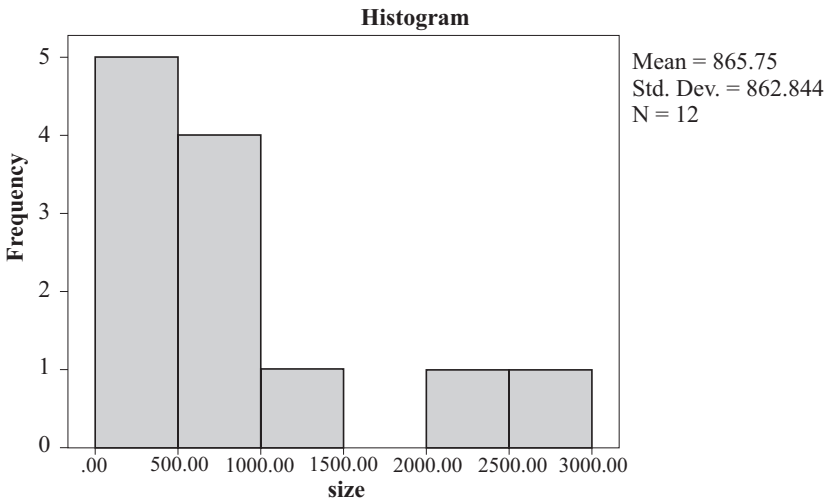


Figure 1. Distribution for size of relevant news articles

of relevant news items it should be taken into consideration that this measurement might as well be incidental. Furthermore, in those items coded as relevant to the EU presidency, Poland's main role was mentioned mostly as an EU member. The distribution for the size of the articles within the selected relevant news items was analyzed and showed that five out of twelve of these articles did not exceed the limit of 500 words per article.

Genre

After our scrutiny of the variable of relevance, we broaden our scope back to the entire corpus of 735 articles. Concerning genre, analysis of the data set showed that 492, or 66.9% of all items, were coded as news articles, while 20.8% and 5.4% were coded respectively as reports and interviews. These shares are similar for *Het Laatste Nieuws* and *De Standaard*, while a smaller amount of news articles in favor of a greater focus on interviews can be observed for *Knack*.

Table 4

Descriptives for genre of news articles

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	news	492	66.9	66.9	66.9
	reportage	153	20.8	20.8	87.8
	editorial	6	.8	.8	88.6
	column	10	1.4	1.4	89.9
	commentary	6	.8	.8	90.7
	guest contribution	13	1.8	1.8	92.5
	interview	40	5.4	5.4	98.0
	letter to editor	7	1.0	1.0	98.9
	other	8	1.1	1.1	100.0
	Total	735	100.0	100.0	

Visual elements and relevance of visual elements to Poland

Furthermore, all news articles were analyzed for the presence of visual elements in the coverage. Out of all articles, 378 (51.4%) contained a picture, while 321 articles (43.7%) did not carry any visual elements at all. Only 62 (8.4%) of all news items contained visual elements that are relevant to our object of inquiry, the Polish EU presidency.

Source of information

Coding the source of information for the selected news articles proved to be a problematic exercise, as 591 (80.4%) of the coded items did not mention its original source, preferring to cite the full name or initials of the news item contributor. Moreover, in 5% of cases no source at all was mentioned. Comparing our three news sources, we observed that *De Standaard* mentioned its articles' sources noticeably more so than *Het Laatste Nieuws* and *Knack*. While still low in frequency, *De Standaard* referred to the source of information in 12.2% of the coded items compared to 1.2% and 4% for *Het Laatste Nieuws* and *Knack*, respectively.

Author of news and author of opinion

The seventh variable for which the news articles were coded is the author of the item. For this variable, a distinction was made between an author of news and an author of opinion. News articles previously coded as news and reports for the genre variable were categorized as 'news material' and analyzed via the 'author of news' variable, whereas the items coded as all other genres – except for the genre 'other' – were categorized as 'not news material' and analyzed using the 'author of opinion' variable. The analysis of this latter category showed that different authors of opinion were somewhat equally distributed across the news items, the exception being national experts who accounted for 35.4% of the articles categorized as 'not news material'. For those articles classified as 'news material', the results were remarkably different: 95% of all news items had staff members identified as the authors of news, which is a logical consequence of the distribution across the variable for source of information (cf. supra).

Dominant topic area

All items were coded to discern exactly one dominant topic throughout the news article, the most recurring ones being sports (38.8%), justice and crime (15.5%), and culture (12.4%). When comparing the distribution of dominant topics across the selected news sources, results showed that *Het Laatste Nieuws* accounted for 82.5% of all sports articles and for 78.1% of all justice and crime articles. These results correspond with *Het Laatste Nieuws*' profile as a popular newspaper in particular and the increasing

tendency of tabloidization in general (De Bens & Raeymaeckers, 2007). For the dominant topic of culture, most articles were gathered from *De Standaard*: this broadsheet newspaper accounted for 40 or 44% of the articles, while *Knack* and *Het Laatste Nieuws* accounted for 25.3% and 30.8%, respectively. When narrowing our scope to the dominant topics recurring in the news articles related to the Polish EU presidency, we observe that six out of twelve articles refer to culture and four out of twelve items have to do with international politics. This is an interesting observation, as it demonstrates that even when news articles are considered relevant to the EU presidency of Poland, they are not necessarily political in nature but rather cultural (cf. *infra*).

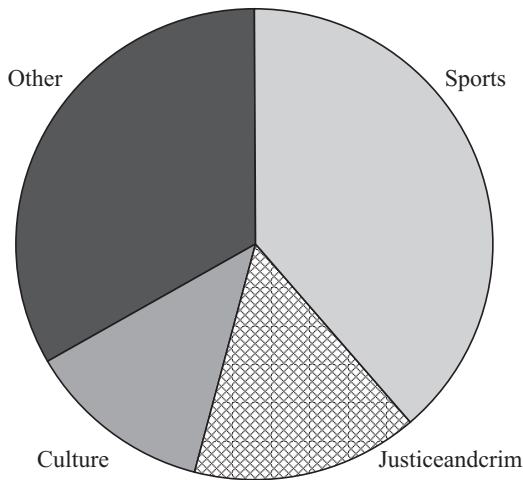


Figure 2. Distribution for dominant topic of news articles

Table 5

Cross tabulation of dominant topic and media source of news articles

			Media			Total
			<i>De Standaard</i>	<i>Het Laatste Nieuws</i>	<i>Knack</i>	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Dominant topic	internal politics	Count	7	2	2	11
		% within dominant topic	63.6%	18.2%	18.2%	100.0%
		% within media	3.4%	0.4%	3.9%	1.5%
		% of total	1.0%	0.3%	0.3%	1.5%

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
international politics	Count	12	3	6	21	
	% within dominant topic	57.1%	14.3%	28.6%	100.0%	
	% within media	5.9%	0.6%	11.8%	2.9%	
	% of total	1.6%	0.4%	0.8%	2.9%	
economy	Count	39	35	6	80	
	% within dominant topic	48.8%	43.8%	7.5%	100.0%	
	% within media	19.0%	7.3%	11.8%	10.9%	
	% of total	5.3%	4.8%	0.8%	10.9%	
military and defense	Count	1	1	1	3	
	% within dominant topic	33.3%	33.3%	33.3%	100.0%	
	% within media	0.5%	0.2%	2.0%	0.4%	
	% of total	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.4%	
justice and crime	Count	24	89	1	114	
	% within dominant topic	21.1%	78.1%	0.9%	100.0%	
	% within media	11.7%	18.6%	2.0%	15.5%	
	% of total	3.3%	12.1%	0.1%	15.5%	
culture	Count	40	28	23	91	
	% within dominant topic	44.0%	30.8%	25.3%	100.0%	
	% within media	19.5%	5.8%	45.1%	12.4%	
	% of total	5.4%	3.8%	3.1%	12.4%	
social relations	Count	9	18	4	31	
	% within dominant topic	29.0%	58.1%	12.9%	100.0%	
	% within media	4.4%	3.8%	7.8%	4.2%	
	% of total	1.2%	2.4%	0.5%	4.2%	
science and technology	Count	3	0	0	3	
	% within dominant topic	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	
	% within media	1.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.4%	
	% of total	0.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.4%	
sport	Count	48	235	2	285	
	% within dominant topic	16.8%	82.5%	0.7%	100.0%	
	% within media	23.4%	49.1%	3.9%	38.8%	
	% of total	6.5%	32.0%	0.3%	38.8%	
human interest	Count	11	25	4	40	
	% within dominant topic	27.5%	62.5%	10.0%	100.0%	
	% within media	5.4%	5.2%	7.8%	5.4%	
	% of total	1.5%	3.4%	0.5%	5.4%	
accidents and disasters	Count	5	34	0	39	
	% within dominant topic	12.8%	87.2%	0.0%	100.0%	
	% within media	2.4%	7.1%	0.0%	5.3%	
	% of total	0.7%	4.6%	0.0%	5.3%	

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	other	Count	6	9	2	17
		% within dominant topic	35.3%	52.9%	11.8%	100.0%
		% within media	2.9%	1.9%	3.9%	2.3%
		% of total	0.8%	1.2%	0.3%	2.3%
Total	Count	205	479	51	735	
		% within dominant topic	27,9%	65.2%	6.9%	100.0%
		% within media	100,0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of total	27,9%	65.2%	6.9%	100.0%

Domestication and dateline

Table 6

Descriptives for domestication of news articles

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	explicit reference to nationals	628	85.4	85.4	85.4
	explicit reference to impact	5	.7	.7	86.1
	reference to nationals and visual elements	3	.4	.4	86.5
	no	99	13.5	13.5	100.0
	Total	735	100.0	100.0	

We coded and analyzed the data set for dateline and domestication, two variables closely related to one another. The most frequently recurring dateline was Belgium, which was mentioned in 453 news articles or 61.6% of the data set. A noticeable gap was observed between this and the next dateline, namely Poland, which accounted for 14% of the news items. Focusing on the domestication variable, we are able to discern that 628 or 85.4% of all news articles made an explicit reference to national or domestic issues and persons. This finding is consistent with previous studies on international news reporting in Flemish media (cf. Joye 2010) which have all identified the broad concept of proximity as a key news value.

Main role of and attitude towards Poland

Finally, a short word on the role of and the attitude towards Poland in the analyzed news items. Only in eight out of 735 items, or 1.1%, was Po-

land mentioned as an EU member. Furthermore, Poland was only cited as the host of an EU-related meeting in two news articles. Nearly every news item, accounting for 98.4%, was coded as 'other' regarding its attitude toward Poland. This does not imply a neutral attitude, but rather a complete absence of any subjectivity in news reporting on Poland or its EU presidency.

Conclusion

Drawing on the aforementioned results enables us to get a clearer picture of the news flow on the Polish EU presidency from Poland to Belgium. Most importantly, we have observed that the analyzed news sample has devoted little attention to the Polish EU presidency. Moreover, the coverage of this topic is concentrated around the Polish EU presidency coming to effect. News items relevant to the EU presidency of Poland were limited in size and did not provide a focused analysis, favoring objective news reporting with absence of a discernible attitude towards Poland. Articles relevant to the presidency were not necessarily political of nature: in half of the cases the dominant topic of the news items was culture.

Taking into consideration the entire sample set of articles, the topics of sports, culture, and justice and crime dominate the news output. This may be explained by the origin of the sampled news articles: two thirds of all articles originate from the popular newspaper *Het Laatste Nieuws*, which has been shown to favor coverage of these news genres. Our analysis further serves as a contemporary illustration of the often cited dynamics of domestication of foreign news (Gurevitch et al., 1991).

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Abstract

Cross-national and longitudinal comparative research on the media coverage of EU-related news has gained increasing interest and momentum, but is still rare and generally focuses on the EU as an intergovernmental institution, hence remaining largely ignorant of the particular flows of news in between the member states of the EU. The following analysis provides insight into the media coverage of the Polish EU presidency in the region of Flanders. For this quantitative content analysis, our scope is narrowed to three Flemish media sources. Based on a predetermined set of keywords related to the Polish case and using the newspaper search engine Mediargus, we collected 735 articles for analysis. In conclusion, the analyzed news sample devoted little attention to the Polish EU presidency. News items relevant to Poland's presidency of the EU were concentrated around the presidential inauguration, limited in size, not necessarily political in nature, and favored objective news reporting with absence of a discernible attitude towards Poland.