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Article

Rhetorics of Hope and Outrage: Emotion and Cynicism in the Coverage of the Schengen Accession

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Abstract
Discourses on European integration and Euroscepticism have benefitted from increased interest after Brexit. Researchers point out that there is a great variance from one national context to another and that there is a gap in the literature concerning non-elite discourses and perspectives from Central and Eastern European countries such as Romania. The Eurobarometer findings of early 2023 indicate a shift in Romanian public opinion towards Euroscepticism. To better understand the potential causes for these shifts, we approach the politicisation of the issue in Romania through an analysis of online news headlines and related social media news sharing metadata. In the aftermath of the decision not to accept Romania and Bulgaria, this research investigates shifts in the media framing of the Schengen issue and EU over two months (from October 15 to December 15, 2022) in the 14 most accessed Romanian online news sites (with more than 10 million visits per month). Quantitative analysis of news headlines (*N* = 3,362) shows that the coverage focuses on Romanian politicians in power and emphasises conflict. Furthermore, the analysis of the interactions produced by news sharing of the analysed sample shows the impact of the political rhetoric encouraging the boycotting of Austrian companies in retaliation for the denial of Schengen Area accession: scapegoating and disenchantment with politics and politicians. The two-step approach used and results that use Facebook interactions as indicators of public resonance of politicisation and strategic framing may be replicated in future research.

1. Introduction

Romania's accession to the Schengen Area has long been a subject of interest for Romanian politics and media. Negotiations for Romania's accession have been going on for more than 20 years, having started in 2001. After joining the EU in 2007, expectations for joining the Schengen Area increased and throughout the following decade attempts to join were met with fragmentary support. The accession needs to be supported by the European Parliament and be accepted by unanimous vote by the Council of the European Union for Justice and Home Affairs (JHA)—ministers of justice and/or home affairs of the EU member states. There have been two enlargements since 2011, with Lichtenstein joining in 2011 and

Croatia in 2023. Neighbouring countries Romania and Bulgaria joined the EU in 2007 and have since then been legally bound to join the Schengen Area. Formal accession criteria are considered met by both countries and the European Parliament has shown support for the two countries' accession as early as 2011. In the JHA Council vote in September 2011, the Dutch and Finnish ministers voted against Romania and Bulgaria's accession, whereas in the JHA Council vote in December 2022, the Dutch and the Austrian ministers voted against the two countries' accession.

An early in-depth analysis of international and national coverage of Romania's accession to the Schengen Area (Bârgăoanu, 2011) shows that there is considerable coverage of the issue in Romanian media—

as compared to other European issues—and that internal actors and other European countries are represented as the protagonists of the news stories—while Europe is represented rather as an impersonal, anonymous actor. However, in the context of the coverage of the 2011 unsuccessful accession bid, the same research identifies two dominant framings of the European Union: (a) "Europe as a higher power punishing Romania (deservedly or undeservedly)" and (b) "Romania occupying a marginal position in Europe" (Bârgăoanu, 2011, pp. 129–130).

In a public statement made on October 12, 2022, following a meeting with Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte, Romanian President Klaus Iohannis expressed optimism about Romania's accession to the Schengen Area but also noted that "a failure in this national objective will probably lead to an increase of Euroscepticism in Romania" (Pîrv, 2022). Early 2023 Eurobarometer results show that since the summer of 2022, support for the EU's common trade policy has declined in Romania by 8% (from 63% to 55%) over six months—the steepest decline in the 27 member countries (European Commission, 2023). The Eurobarometer results also show that agreement about the European Union's priorities has also dropped by 8%—with 46% of Romanians agreeing that the interests of their country are taken into account in the EU and 48% disagreeing (European Commission, 2023). A significant drop in agreement (11%) was also registered concerning agreement about Romanians' voices being considered in the EU. The majority opinion on how democracy works in Romania has also shifted from satisfaction to dissatisfaction (European Commission, 2022, 2023). The Eurobarometer findings of early 2023 may indicate a significant shift in Romanian public opinion towards Euroscepticism.

Multiple voices in societies throughout Europe have noted a rise in Euroscepticism and that "in terms of Euroscepticism, the EU is divided in its diversity" (De Vries, 2018, p. 5). In her attempt to identify country-specific patterns and define a benchmark theory of EU public opinion, De Vries (2018) concludes that people tend to attribute responsibility for good or bad conditions primarily to national governments and not the EU, but that Euroscepticism is determined by national conditions as compared to the rest of the EU. De Vries also discusses types of "differentiated governance" such as the "multi-speed Europe"—eurozone membership—and "variable geometry"—Schengen Agreement—that allow for multiple levels of integration to exist at the same time or alongside, but that contribute to at least an image— if not an institutionalisation—of "two-class membership." Criticisms brought to future paths of "differentiated governance" include the facilitation of "centre-periphery" discourses and "us–them" rhetoric to which we will return.

Politicisation is an emerging niche of interest for research in European integration that includes the role of online news media and social media in the issue.

Following the introduction of the concept by Hooghe and Marks (2009) in their post-functionalist theory of European integration, De Wilde (2011) argues that the politicisation of European integration can be operationalised by looking at three interrelated components: (a) polarisation of opinion, (b) intensifying debate, and (c) public resonance. This exploratory research focuses on these components through an analysis of online news headlines by (a) identifying actors' roles, (b) analysing the intensification of news coverage and social media interactions, and (c) analysing the amplification of particular discourses and stances on social media.

In Leruth et al. (2017, pp. 15–16), Szczerbiak and Taggart state that there is "a major lacuna in the published academic literature on Euroscepticism in the Balkan states," noting that the phenomenon has been virtually non-existent in Bulgaria and Romania. Romania is regarded as one of the most Euro-optimistic countries, and anti-Europeanism has been mostly circumstantial in recent years (Toma & Damian, 2021), with various politicians—such as former president of the Social Democratic Party, Liviu Dragnea—using anti-EU rhetoric in the context of defending personal or group interests and politicising anti-corruption judicial investigations. The 2020 Romanian national elections saw the surprising emergence of a significant new political player in Romanian politics in the right-wing populist and nationalist party Alliance for the Unity of Romanians. However, although some "RO-exit" mentions have been made by members and affiliates, the party defines itself as "Eurorealist" and is part of the soft Eurosceptic anti-federalist European Conservatives and Reformists Group, its political programme explicitly positioning it as pro-Schengen accession. Szczerbiak and Taggart (2017) pinpoint the biggest knowledge gap in contemporary research on Euroscepticism as being the lack of research on its impact on European politics and policy, noting however, considering the Brexit vote, that European issues are now more significant in domestic party politics, that research is needed into "non-elite Euroscepticism" and research on the topic in Central and Eastern Europe is limited and focused mostly on the Visegrad states.

Romania's 2022 bid for Schengen Area accession ended in intense and emotional public debate and public calls from politicians to boycott Austrian companies, which were amplified by the online news media and found resonance in social media, despite appeals to calm by both Romanian and Austrian politicians. This case of public dissatisfaction with an EU integration decision amplified by politicians, the online news media, and social media may provide insight into emerging Euroceptical positionings and narratives emerging in the national context of one of the most Euro-optimistic EU countries.

To fill a gap in existing research into the politicisation of European integration in the online news media and social media in Romania—a less studied, mostly Euro-optimistic Eastern European country—

this research explores the discursive patterns in the Romanian online news media's coverage of the Schengen Area 2022 enlargement focusing on framing, actor roles, and emotionality.

2. Euroscepticism and Euro-Optimism

2.1. The Media Coverage of European Issues

From early, foundational research into public opinion (Lippmann, 1922) and the formulation of agenda-setting theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) to the third level of media effects proposed in the network agenda-setting framework (Guo & McCombs, 2011), agenda-setting theory suggests that patterns of news media coverage of issues transfer the salience of objects, attributes, and relationships between the two from the media agenda to the public. The converging agenda-setting and framing models (McCombs & Ghanem, 2001) emerged as the dominant approach in the past decades in communication research, based on a conceptualisation of news media frames as being "manifested by the presence or absence of certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information, and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments" (Entman, 1993, p. 52) that allows for established methodologies such as content analysis and discourse analysis, but also network analysis of message content (Danowski, 1993).

It is important to distinguish between the framing of Schengen Area policy in substantial debates in the context of the (a) elite discourses produced by European institutional actors such as the European Commission or European Parliament and (b) media coverage of European integration or specific Schengen Area related issues in national or transnational news. Coman (2019) identifies four frames emerging in the legitimation discourses over Schengen reform debates in elite discourses: (a) values/impact for people, (b) conflict/sovereignty, (c) market/integration, and (d) securitisation. However, media coverage of European politics often differs from the substantial debates that take place in European institutions.

The news media coverage of European politics is a widely researched topic, with some results consecrating conceptual frameworks and methodological approaches for several decades, such as the influential analysis of framing by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000), which identified five generic frames in the coverage of European politics: (a) attribution of responsibility, (b) conflict, (c) economic consequences, (d) human interest, and (e) morality. Cross-national comparative studies (de Vreese, 2001) show that news coverage of European affairs is cyclical, registering peaks during certain high-interest events and low visibility before or after such events. The practice of political marketing is associated with growing public cynicism about politics, political leaders, and institutions (Norris, 2000) according to a sequential pro-

cess that begins with (a) the development of political messages, progresses through (b) news-media coverage and ends with (c) effects at the level of the public. In earlier research, de Vreese (2001) pointed out that, concerning European politics, the "agenda-setting" role of news media has shifted from "respectful and cautious" coverage to a more proactive approach, exercising increased discretion. Later research by the same author (de Vreese, 2007) attributes the cause of Euroscepticism to media coverage—referencing the spiral of cynicism effect coined by Cappella and Jamieson (1997)—particularly through strategic news framing of European politics such as (a) evaluation of politicians' handling of an issue, (b) politicians' actions concerning public opinion, (c) politicians' gain/loss, and (d) war or game metaphors. de Vreese (2007) finds that emphasising consensus among the political elite is likely to generate strategically framed news coverage, which in turn is likely to fuel Euroscepticism.

With the overarching goal of exploring the news coverage on a salient European integration issue that—through politicisation and strategic news framing—is likely to fuel Euroscepticism effects, we then formulate the first research question:

RQ1: What were the overall patterns of coverage for the case of Romania's 2022 bid for Schengen Area accession?

Beyond general patterns of coverage, De Wilde's (2011) framework for analysing the politicisation of European integration includes a component of polarisation of opinion related to actors' positioning. In this case, the relevant actors are primarily politicians at the national and European levels whose public statements or actions on the issue are covered by the news media.

Caiani and Guerra (2017) review a complex conceptualisation of Euroscepticism from initial definitions to later subdivisions of two to six distinct positionings on various spectra of Euroscepticism and Euro-enthusiasm to the newest two emerging stances of Euroscepticism as outright opposition to the EU and Euroalternativism or prosystemic opposition that supports European integration but contests or criticises current decisions or policies.

Bijsmans (2017) distinguishes between *polity* (core elements and institutional design) and *policy* (choices over specific issues) and further outlines four possible positions on European integration and EU policies: (a) support, (b) Euroalternativism, (c) soft Euroscepticism, and (d) hard Euroscepticism.

In the same collection of texts, Galpin and Trenz (2017) also use the spiral of cynicism model to discuss Euroscepticism concerning media negativity and specific framing of European issues in news stories—(a) conflict-centred negativity, (b) emotional fear stories, (c) identity frames (out-groups), and (d) cynicism/self-interested politicians:

Attention to distant events outside the familiar national context is more easily drawn when they convey drama and conflict when serious repercussions can be emphasised, when the integrity of particular actors and institutions can be undermined or when the news can be related to feelings of fear and scepticism. (Galpin & Trenz, 2017, p. 52)

Although, as stated previously, there are no hard Eurosceptic Romanian political groups, the aftermath of Romania's failed Schengen accession bid provided context for some politicians to take somewhat aggressive stances—towards the EU in general or Austria specifically—that may gain support from the dissatisfied.

Wodak (2007) focuses on "us and them" as a framework in her discourse-historical approach to discourses in the European Union, defining "inclusion" and "exclusion" as the fundamental construction of "in-groups" and "out-groups'' in various public spaces, structurally and discursively. The "us and them" discourses are identified as key features of populism, mobilising the public against out-groups who are constructed as privileged or threatening.

Recent research that links Eurosceptic discourses with populist discourses (Pirro & Taggart, 2018; Pirro et al., 2018) shows that left-wing populist discourses tend to frame criticism of Europe in socio-economic terms whereas right-wing populist discourses tend to frame the issue in cultural terms, although the context of the recession also allowed for right-wing socio-economic framing. Even though, there are no hard Eurosceptical parties in Romania and the government is supported by a coalition of the two largest parties—the Social Democratic Party and the National Liberal Party—recent years have seen a proliferation of populist discourses from various political groups. Furthermore, this research also aims to explore how the issue is used strategically by politicians and political groups. We then formulate the second question to identify the most prominent actor types—power/opposition and national/European—in the Romanian news coverage of the 2022 Schengen accession:

RQ2: What type of actors are the most prominent in the coverage?

2.2. Indicators of News Values, Frames, and Emotionality

As our approach relies on lexicon-based automated coding of a relatively large sample of headlines, research into linguistic indicators of news value indicators, frames, and emotionality provides the grounding for our approach.

According to Statham (2016, p. 133), journalists struggle to fit European issues into news formats, "European politics appears to be inherently unsuited for 'making news' and the information received difficult to make relevant to readers." Caiani and Guerra (2017)

stress that newsworthiness seems to be promoted by factors such as (a) clear attribution of responsibility, (b) strong conflict, or (c) opportunities for personalisation/dramatisation, all aspects that are mostly absent in reporting on European politics.

Contributions made by Bednarek and Caple (Bednarek & Caple, 2014; Caple & Bednarek, 2016) show how—going beyond news values/"news factors" as selection criteria employed in newsroom practice (Galtung & Ruge, 1965)—linguistic devices used to construct or emphasise the specific newsworthiness of journalistic news values can be used in discourse analysis in both text-only and multimodal approaches: negativity, timeliness, proximity, superlativeness, eliteness, impact, novelty, personalisation, and consonance. Updated news values scholarship (Harcup & O'Neill, 2017) include exclusivity, bad news, conflict, surprise, audiovisiuals, shareability, entertainment, drama, follow-up, the power elite, relevance, magnitude, celebrity, good news, and the news organisations' agenda. As news values research involves looking at decision-making in professional practices of news selection, which is not within the scope of this research, we rely on the reasoning put forward by Bednarek and Caple to analyse linguistic indicators in news headlines that may point towards an emphasis on conflict, negativity/bad news, or good news/positivity. We focus on indicators of conflict as this is integral to the first component of the analytical framework proposed for politicisation by De Wilde (2011).

Our investigation of discursive tropes is also rooted in the framework of framing research (Entman, 1993). Hence, we employ the literature on generic news frames (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000) as well as literature-specific frames of European integration and Euroscepticism and frames identified in previous research on the news coverage of the 2011 Romanian bid to access the Schengen Area (Bârgăoanu, 2011).

In an analysis of party-based Euroscepticism across member states, Taggart and Szczerbiak (2018) identify four main post-Brexit "frames" of contestation: (a) economic factors, (b) immigration, (c) democracy/sovereignty, and (d) national factors, but warned that "some very different frames were being deployed in the service of Euroscepticism and that it was important to pay attention to the importance of different national contexts" (Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2018, p. 1025).

The issue of Euroscepticism and analyses of the mediatisation of European politics are, however, mostly focused on discourses emerging in the context of Western members of the EU. Pirro et al. (2018) warn that the discursive patterns of European integration and Euroscepticism are very different in Central and Eastern Europe. Boukala and Dimitrakopoulou (2018) analyse Greek political and media discourses on the refugee crisis in the context of emerging debates around Greece's expulsion from the Schengen Area and find that the European refugee crisis was transformed into a national issue that reveals ambivalence and polarisation with the

topos of "threat" at the core, but articulated in two distinct blaming strategies: the threat of isolation (from Europe) due to governmental inefficacy/irresponsibility, and the threat of European cruelty/punishment, against which political actors emerge as "defenders of the nation." These two frames are also at least partially in line with the findings of Bârgăoanu (2011) in the case of Romania's 2011 failed accession to the Schengen Area. While the polarisation of opinion and intensification of debate may be observed through the frequency and prominence of the issue and actors respectively, the conflict metaphors and frames used are also relevant. The third research question is then:

RQ3: What linguistic indicators of metaphors and frames are most frequently identified in the headlines?

Within the framework provided by De Wilde (2011), we connect the intensification of debate with public resonance—understood as the participation of the public in contexts such as social media by sharing, commenting, and reacting.

Wahl-Jorgensen (2020) signals "an emotional turn" in journalism studies, referring to the emergence of a growing body of scholarly work engaging with the concept of emotion in the context of (a) news production, (b) content, or (c) consumption, from immersive journalism to emotional appeals, fuelling fear or sharing behaviours and incivility in online comments. The context afforded by new digital platforms has generated what Papacharissi (2015) called "affective publics"—social movements and mobilisation collaboratively constructed around the use of hashtags or other digital means of aggregation and characterised by a combination of shared subjective experiences, opinions, and emotional expression. These new dynamics disrupt traditional media treatment of politics, constructing "the personal as political."

From the Twitter social movements and mobilisation to populist discourses, there is a growing body of research using social media engagement mechanisms as indicators—from retweets to reactions. Research finds that the emotional valence of political messages fits with the dominant indicators of audience engagement—at least for the binary constituted by negative and positive content ("angry" reactions and "love" reactions, respectively, in the case of Facebook posts; Jost et al., 2020). Similar research (Eberl et al., 2020) also shows that there is an effect of issue salience of "angry" reactions.

Research on emotion in news content shows that news coverage is shaped by engagement with emotion and "audiences are more likely to be emotionally engaged, recall information and take action when news stories are relatable" (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2020, p. 189). Wahl-Jorgensen (2020, p. 188) also points out that the digital media landscape allows for data-driven sentiment analysis and emotion detection methods, the

use of which relied on the assumption that "emotions are inseparable from opinion, evaluation and decision-making." As stated previously, the fourth research question attempts to connect indicators of news values, frames, and framing metaphors employed in headlines with resonance in social media engagement:

RQ4: What are the discursive characteristics of the headlines that generated the most engagement on social media?

3. Method

3.1. Data Collection and Sampling

To construct the dataset, the websites of the most visited Romanian online news outlets—presented in Table 1—were scraped using the keyword "Schengen." National online news outlets appearing in the Internet Traffic and Audience Study (Romanian Transmedia Audit Bureau, 2022) with over 10 million visits per month in November 2022 were included. Web scraping was done using the Web Scraper Chrome extension (https://webscraper.io) on each of the 14 distinct websites. From each of the 14 publications, the scrapers collected only the headline, the publishing date, and the URL for each article. The data collection timeframe was from October 15, 2022, to December 15, 2022, with the final vote on the issue having taken place on December 8. This resulted in the main headline sample (N = 3,362).

In the second stage of data collection, the URLs from the dataset were searched through the CrowdTangle API (CrowdTangle, 2021) to obtain Facebook interaction data resulting from the link sharing on Facebook pages and groups. The API interrogation was limited to 10 maximum posts for each link shared—top 10 according to total interactions: reactions, comments, and shares. Not all the links were shared on Facebook and most likely some of the links that were widely shared probably generated more than 10 Facebook posts. Having selected only the most popular posts sharing news articles, we focus mostly on news sharing in the public Facebook contexts created by the public pages of news media institutions, politicians and political parties as well as the larger online communities in public Facebook groups that support political groups or aggregate around particular topics. Public sharing in personal contexts is not within the scope of the research.

3.2. Data Analysis

Data were analysed using a lexicon-based approach after a preliminary analysis using Pinpoint, a named entity recognition tool offered by Google. The lexicons were defined over two main categories: actors and linguistic indicators of frames. The actors' lexicon was constructed using the preliminary named entity recognition provided by Google Pinpoint and official

Table 1. Romanian news outlets sampled with traffic data for November 2022.

News outlet	Page views	Visits	Unique clients
digi24.ro	75,459,085	39,849,212	9,833,666
stirileprotv.ro	45,045,675	29,152,642	8,552,721
playtech.ro	53,918,172	27,982,040	8,524,889
libertatea.ro	43,131,513	24,160,042	9,277,470
observatornews.ro	26,369,688	18,889,957	7,400,975
romaniatv.net	26,042,664	18,411,271	7,061,589
evz.ro	26,417,865	17,050,099	5,032,637
cancan.ro	40,611,404	15,615,421	5,130,680
fanatik.ro	18,378,630	14,176,837	5,924,785
antena3.ro	20,085,617	13,975,562	5,763,680
hotnews.ro	29,651,404	13,888,171	3,985,664
stiripesurse.ro	41,609,153	13,510,655	4,344,379
adevarul.ro	23,888,701	13,025,650	5,186,392
g4media.ro	20,116,450	11,856,951	2,936,694

information from the Romanian government website and the European Parliament website. The actors' lexicon contains two categories: persons and countries. The linguistic indicators lexicon contains two categories: news values and frames, and metaphors. The news values and frames indicators partially overlap—for example in the case of the indicators for "conflict." Linguistic indi- cators for four of the generic news frames are defined in Semetko and Valkenburg (2000), news values empha- sis is described in Bednarek and Caple (2014), and fram- ing metaphors stemming from previous research on Romanian Schengen accession are defined by Bârgăoanu (2011). The code categories are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. An overview of the lexicons and details on linguistic indicators used for automated coding.

Code	Linguistic indicators (implemented in Tableau)
	Actors
Countries	Romanian language word/stem for country name and demonym
RO_Power	Names of all members of the Romanian government and leaders of the political party groups in power: Social Democratic Party, National Liberal Party, and Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania
RO_Opposition	Names of leaders of the Romanian opposition parties in the Romanian parliament: Save Romania Union, Alliance for the Unity of Romanians, etc.
RO_Europolitician	Names of Romanian MEPs and EU commissioner
Foreign Politician	Names of non-Romanian politicians who are neither MEPs nor EU commissioners
Foreign Europolitician	Names of non-Romanian MEPs and EU commissioners
RO_Other	Various Romanians (celebrities, pundits, journalists, media personalities), not politicians
	Tropes, news values, and frames
conflict	Generic frame (8–10 distinct words, including various antagonisms) and news value
consequences	Generic frame (8–10 distinct words, including "boycott")
morality	Generic frame (5–6 distinct words, including "bad/evil" and "hate")
responsibility	Generic frame (5–6 distinct words, including "responsible," "guilty," and "blaming")
shame	Victimisation frame (8–10 distinct words, including "victim," "humiliation," "shame," and "slave")
hope	Anticipation frame (10–12 distinct words, including "good news") and positivity news value
negativity	Negativity news value (10–12 distinct words, including "disaster," "failure," and "scandal")
military_metaphor	Framing metaphor (8–10 distinct words in the semantic family of "military operations")
game_metaphor	Framing metaphor (8–10 distinct words in the semantic family of "game")
family_metaphor	Framing metaphor (5–6 distinct words in the semantic family of "family")

4. Findings

The overview of the data collected reveals that 26% of the articles come from a single publication which intensely covered the issue (Figure 1). Furthermore, 15% of the articles were published on December 8, 2022 (Figure 2). And there is a significant increase in the number of articles published in the week leading up to the

decisive JHA vote and in the week following the rejection of Romania's accession bid.

When looking at the individual actors mentioned, we notice that in 47.5% of the articles there is at least a mention of one of the individual persons coded, Romanian politicians and Europoliticians, foreign politicians and Europoliticians, as well as others, such as journalists, experts, pundits, or various colourful characters
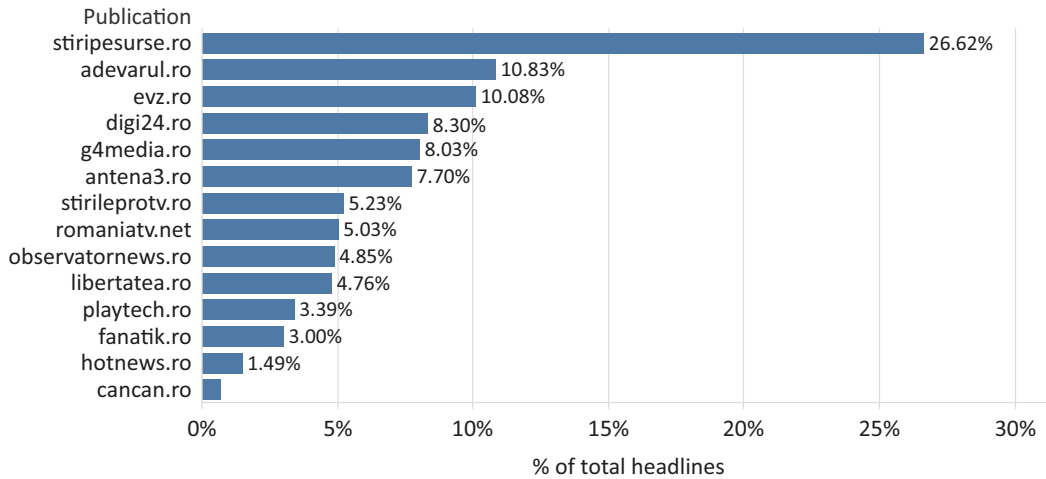

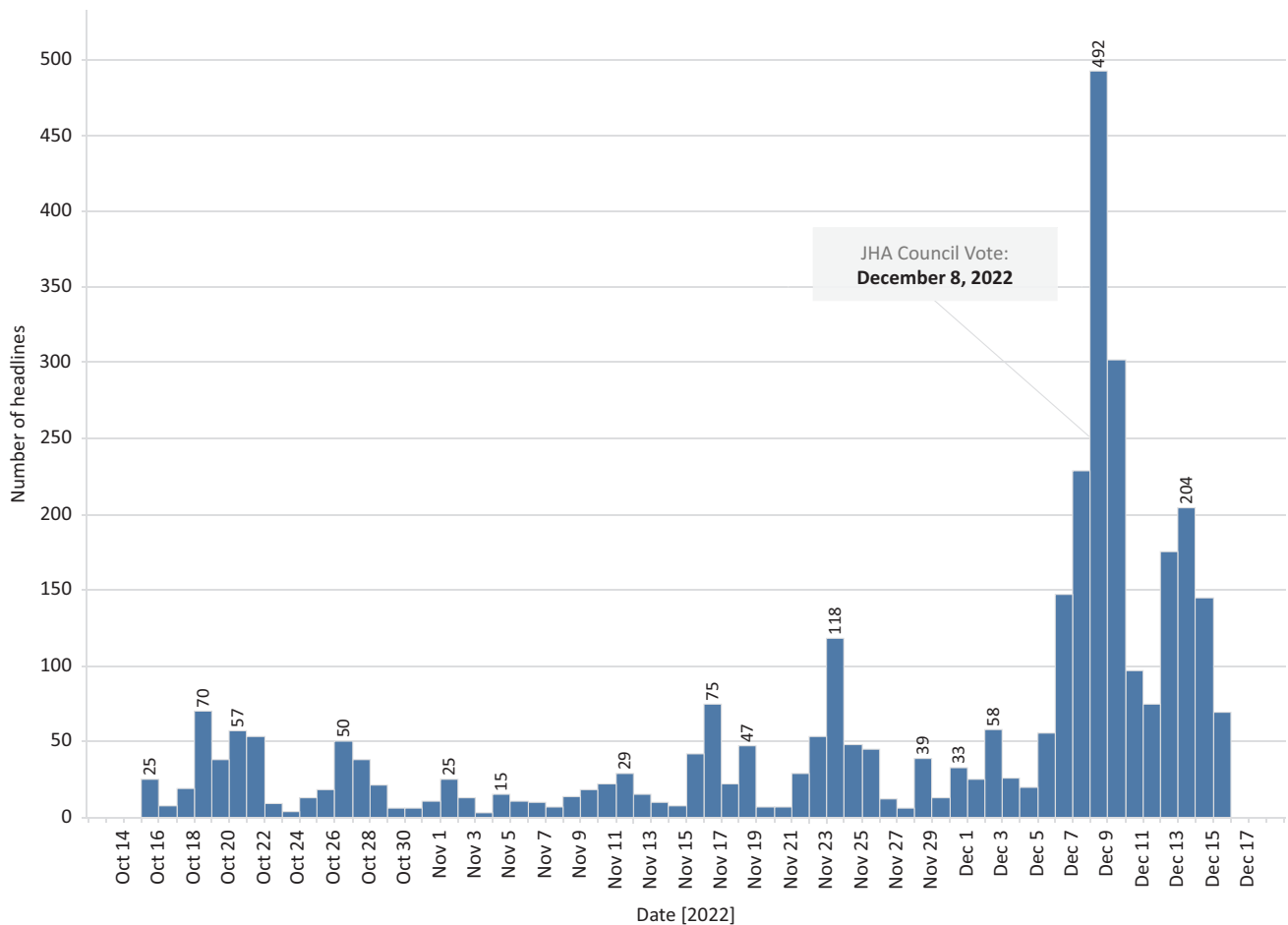**Figure 1.** Percentage of articles by source (*N* = 3,362).

**Figure 2.** Number of articles by date (*N* = 3,362).

whose reactions to current events make headlines. Figure 3 shows that the most frequently mentioned are Romanian politicians belonging to the governmental coalition—It must be mentioned that the coalition is made up of the two largest political parties: the Social Democratic Party (centre-left) and the National Liberal Party (centre-right). The second most prominent category is that of Romanian Europoliticians, mostly MEPs who are represented lobbying for the accession of offering up more reliable opinions based on proximity. This is somewhat exceptional since Romanian MEPs are regularly less visible in Romanian news. Foreign politicians are frequently represented expressing positions of support and in news headlines about meetings with Romanian politicians in power. The Romanian opposition is less visible, except for the last week of the time frame when the media coverage becomes very emotional and opposition representatives, as well as various Romanian experts,

journalists, pundits, celebrities, and various colourful characters, are represented producing opinions or emotional reactions to the outcome of the situation, especially in the context of widespread calls for boycotting Austrian companies in retaliation of the Austrian ministry's vote in the JHA Council.

Although a high emphasis on individual actors is expected, as theory on news values suggests there is a preference towards personalisation, the use of references to the more abstract collective actors—countries and nations—is also very prominent. More than half (53.18%) of headlines mention a country or nationality as can be seen in Figure 4.

While in the first part of the timeframe, there is a high representation of the Netherlands—in the context of Prime Minister Rutte's visit to Romania and the Dutch parliament's vote on the issue—the weeks around the final JHA vote are dominated by mentions of Austria
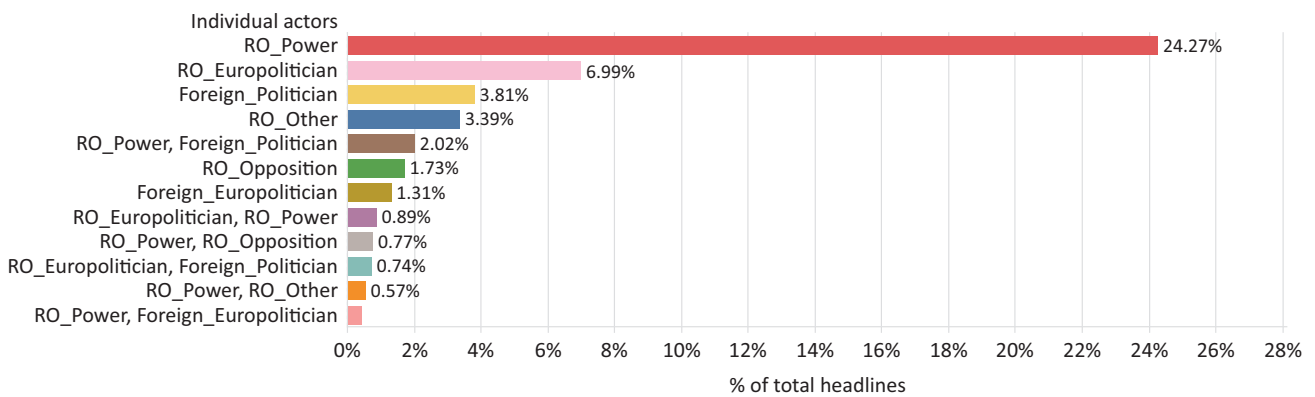
Figure 3. The mentions of types of individual actors in headlines (*N* = 3,362). Note: Headlines with no mentions and smaller categories were excluded from the visualisation.
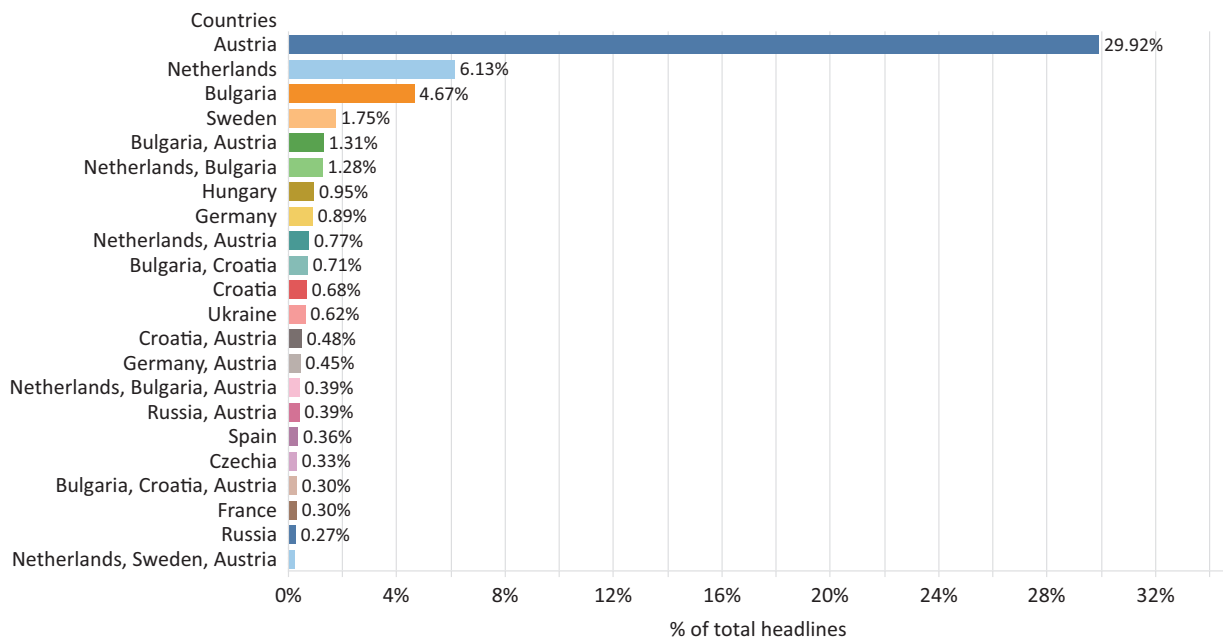
Figure 4. The most mentioned collective actors: Countries/nationalities (*N* = 3,362). Note: Headlines with no mentions and smaller categories were excluded from the visualisation.

and the Austrians. This is due to negativity bias and a tendency to vilify these collective actors who are represented as responsible for the negative outcome.

The lexicon of linguistic indicators used to detect discursive tropes, news values, and frames yielded results in 32.27% of the headlines analysed. The results are presented in Figure 5.

Conflict was the most salient trope, which is in line with the literature on generic frames and news values. Consequences, negativity, shame, and morality become significantly more salient after the final vote on December 8. Hope (the anticipation frame with an emphasis on positivity) is also present, apparently in episodes, throughout the entire timeframe, but is most salient in the days leading up to December 8. The "military metaphor" is more salient than the "game metaphor" whereas the "family metaphor" is barely observable, in a similar result with research on the coverage of the previous bid for accession (Bârgăoanu, 2011).

When analysing the Facebook interaction data, we noticed higher-than-average engagement with some of the news headlines in the sample shared online. The following list summarises the coverage that generated more interactions on Facebook in the analysis timeframe:

- October 20: Social media reactions to the Dutch parliament voting against Romania's accession to the Schengen Area.
- October 29: Social Democrat Party leader accuses opposition of potentially sabotaging Romania's bid for Schengen. When sharing on Facebook, one of the news outlets packages this news with two others, more sensationalist news—one about the highly debated pension reform and another about a potential Russian nuclear strike on Germany.
- November 5: The Schengen Area accession-related news is a reserved but optimistic statement of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. However, the same news outlet packages this news in the same post with a human-interest story about a child's death and a story about potential territorial disputes between Romania and Ukraine.
- November 13: News about new opposition to Romania's accession to the Schengen Area (Sweden).
- November 30: The agenda of the December 8 vote is announced. News is packaged with several other topics.
- December 3: News about Austria's predicted opposition to Romania's accession.
- December 8: The JHA Council vote. Some Romanian politicians and public figures call for boycotts and protests against Austria.
- December 14: The Romanian president makes a statement about a possible accession in 2023.

Overall, the last week of the analysis timeframe is characterised by higher engagement and high values for "angry" type reactions, comments, and shares in the context of several calls for boycotting Austrian businesses having been made. "Haha" type reactions are also

A. Generic frames indicators
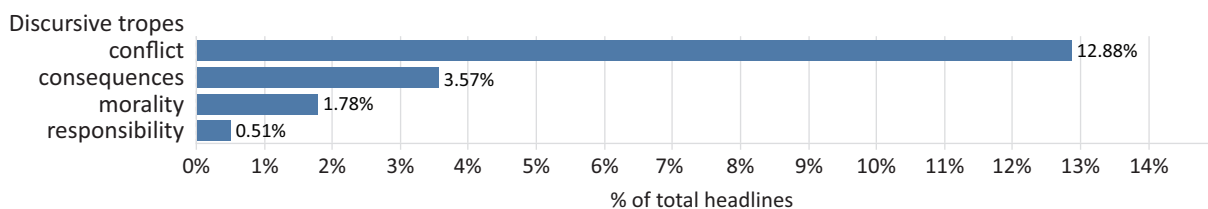
B. News value emphasis indicators
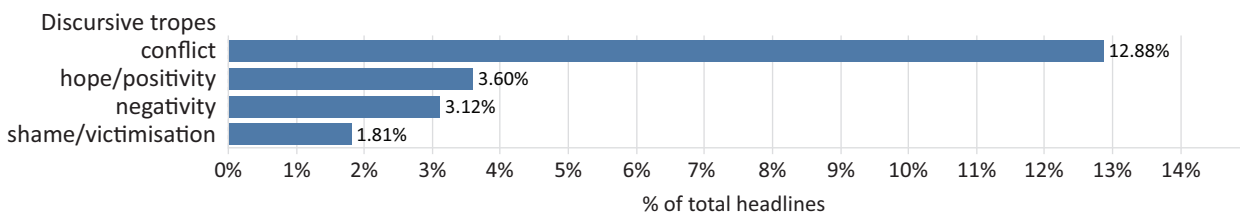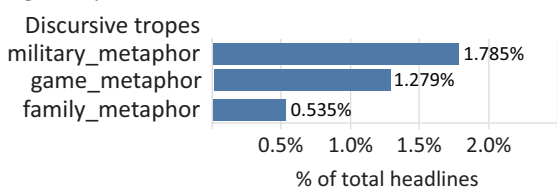

C. Framing metaphor indicators

Figure 5. The most salient discursive tropes based on linguistic indicators identified (*N* = 3,362).

significantly higher, suggesting some Romanians adopting a more relaxed attitude towards the issue and the pathos invested in it by some politicians and media institutions. The coverage of one source in particular (digi24.ro) generates high numbers of "haha" reactions.

The analysis of interactions generated by news sharing on Facebook concerning the representation of individual actors reveals that Romanian social media audiences have a preference for sharing news about Romanian individual actors. A relatively high number of "haha" reactions suggests the kind of disenchantment with politics that is based on the spiral of cynicism effect with the strategic communication of politicians being perceived as entirely self-serving. It is interesting to notice that it is only in the case of foreign individual politicians (Figure 6A) that "angry" type reactions are produced more than other reactions such as "haha." In this case, it is probably news vilifying either Austrian or Dutch politicians as the scapegoats for the failed accession to the Schengen Area. A similar analysis concerning reactions but based on indicators of discursive tropes reveals that discourses that contain linguistic indicators of consequences and military metaphors are eliciting the highest rates of "angry" type reactions.

It seems that Romanian audiences that engage with news sharing on Facebook manifest amusement as a form of detachment from the issue, which is sometimes represented emotionally by the media and politicians. We see, however, significant indicators of engaging with the issue's negative and emotional reporting in the relatively high percentage of "angry" reactions. It is perhaps due to different reception and negotiated meanings at the level of individual audience members who seem to fall into two categories: (a) the cynical, detached, amused onlookers and (b) the involved, emotional engagers.

Figure 7 provides an interesting result: In terms of total interactions generated, the indicators of the consequences frame which included coding for "boycott" surpass the interactions generated by headlines containing indicators of the conflict frame. Similarly, there seems to be another reversal in the number of interactions generated by the sharing of headlines that feature indicators of the "game metaphor" rather than the "military metaphor." Both results are likely generated in the context of the public resonance aspect of politicisation (De Wilde, 2011), with social media amplification of discourses and actors' positioning.

The most reacted-to headlines—translated below—illustrate how news sharing on Facebook may contribute to amplification through positive interactions with boycott supporters and Eurosceptics, negative reactions to anti-boycott stances, and stereotype-driven amusement that suggests disenchantment with politics:

- "The rejection of Romania's accession to Schengen makes the Russians happy. The mocking image posted by a person close to the Kremlin leader" (romaniatv.net): 17,469 likes, 5,418 shares, 5,280 comments, 1,291 "love" reactions, 209 "angry" reactions, 283 "haha" reactions, 143 "sad" reactions—most shares, comments, likes and "love" reactions (see Figure 8);
- "VIDEO—Klaus Iohannis thunders: There will be no boycott towards Austria. It is excluded!" (stiripesurse.ro): 106 likes, 45 shares, 1,648 comments, 1,967 "love" reactions, 3.820 "angry" reactions; 42 "haha" reactions, 634 "sad" reactions—most "angry" reactions;
- "Viorica Dăncilă says that she intuited the vote in the Dutch parliament against Romania: 'Intuition? Possible. Experience? Certainly'" (digi24.ro):

A. Reactions to news shared including mention of individual actors
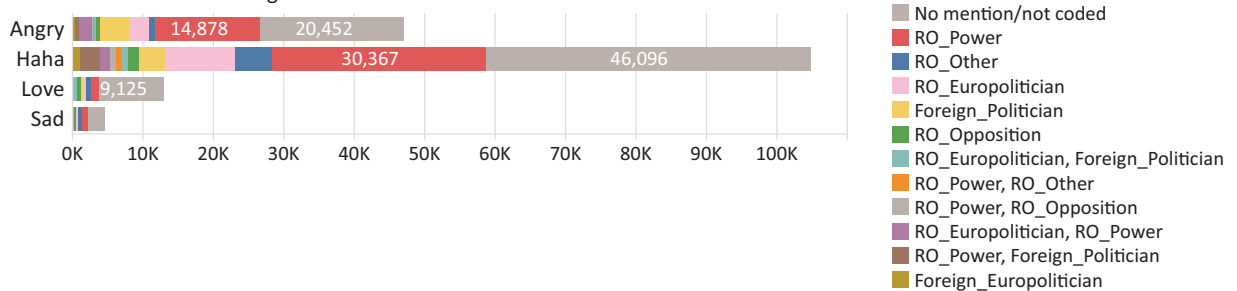
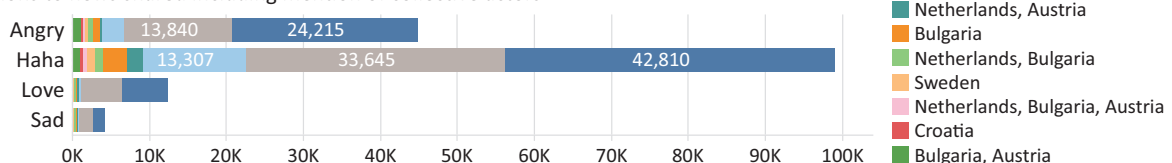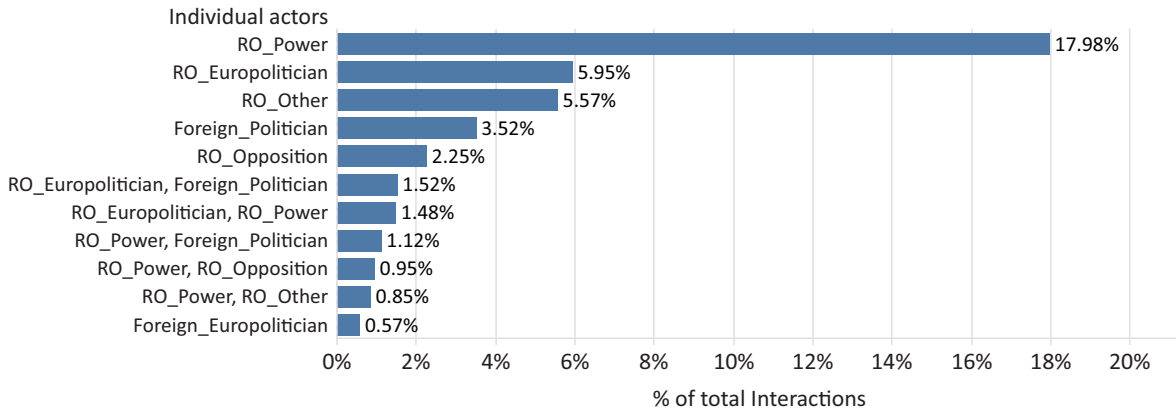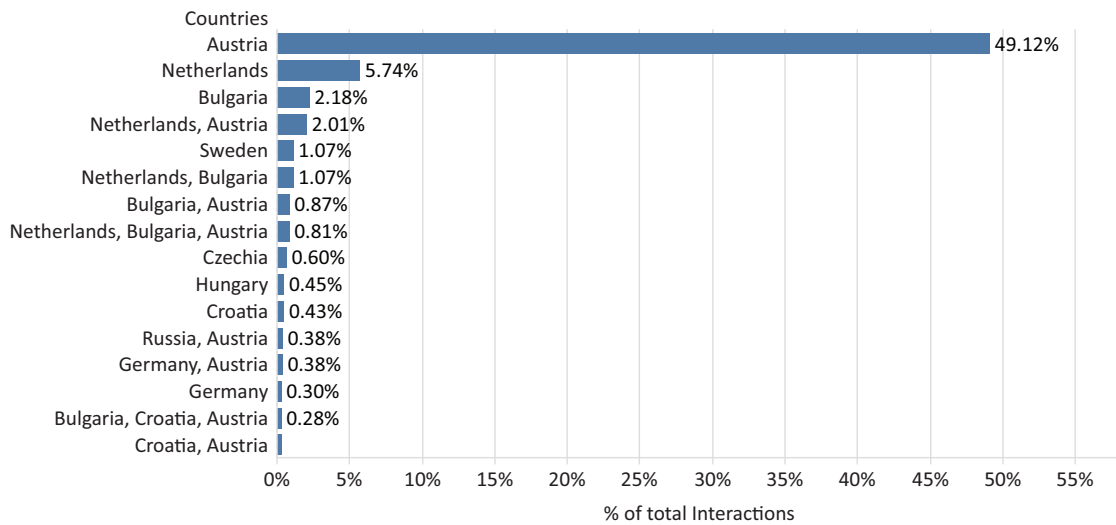B. Reactions to news shared including mention of collective actors

Figure 6. The distribution of total significant reactions other than "like" with respect to actors.

A. Total interactions generated by headlines mentioning individual actors
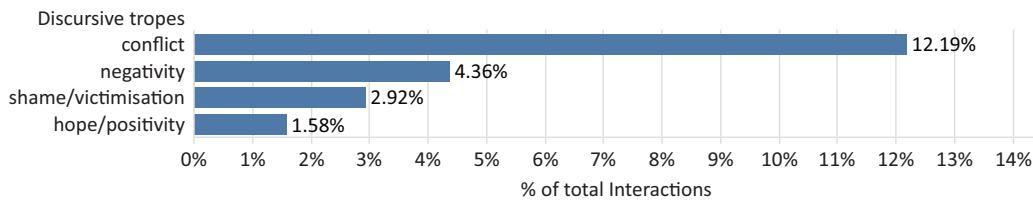
Individual actors

Actor	% of total Interactions
RO_Power	17.98%
RO_Europolitician	5.95%
RO_Other	5.57%
Foreign_Politician	3.52%
RO_Opposition	2.25%
RO_Europolitician, Foreign_Politician	1.52%
RO_Europolitician, RO_Power	1.48%
RO_Power, Foreign_Politician	1.12%
RO_Power, RO_Opposition	0.95%
RO_Power, RO_Other	0.85%
Foreign_Europolitician	0.57%

% of total Interactions

B. Total interactions generated by headlines mentioning collective actors

Countries

Country	% of total Interactions
Austria	49.12%
Netherlands	5.74%
Bulgaria	2.18%
Netherlands, Austria	2.01%
Sweden	1.07%
Netherlands, Bulgaria	1.07%
Bulgaria, Austria	0.87%
Netherlands, Bulgaria, Austria	0.81%
Czechia	0.60%
Hungary	0.45%
Croatia	0.43%
Russia, Austria	0.38%
Germany, Austria	0.38%
Germany	0.30%
Bulgaria, Croatia, Austria	0.28%
Croatia, Austria	

% of total Interactions

C. Total interactions generated by headlines containing framing indicators

Discursive tropes

Trope	% of total Interactions
consequences	12.24%
conflict	12.19%
morality	1.54%
responsibility	0.40%

% of total Interactions
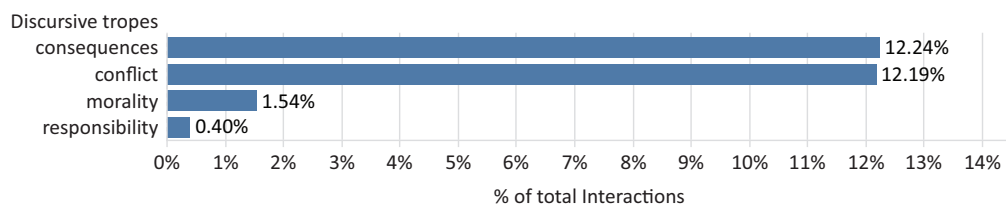
D. Total interactions generated by headlines containing indicators of news value emphasis

Discursive tropes

Trope	% of total Interactions
conflict	12.19%
negativity	4.36%
shame/victimisation	2.92%
hope/positivity	1.58%

% of total Interactions

E. Total interactions generated by headlines containing indicators of framing metaphors

Discursive tropes

Trope	% of total Interactions
game_metaphor	3.556%
military_metaphor	2.140%
family_metaphor	0.118%

% of total Interactions
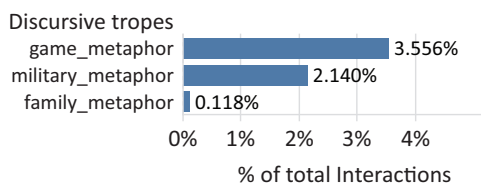
Figure 7. The impact of news sharing on Facebook (*N* = 1,158,841 interactions). Note: Interactions are calculated as a sum of shares, comments, likes, and every other type of reaction.

1,348 likes, 64 shares, 1,604 comments, 24 "love" reactions, 78 "angry" reactions, 2,891 "haha" reactions, 10 "sad" reactions—most "haha" reactions.

The headline that generated the highest number of interactions is shared along with two other links to news stories and a live video broadcast of România TV's pundit television format featuring some key figures of emergent Romanian Euroscepticism. Hence, the post also references the following headlines: "Putin Is Convinced the War in Ukraine Will End. An Agreement Has to Be Reached in the End" and "Scandal at the Protest Organised by George Simion at the Austrian Embassy." George Simion is the leader of the Alliance for the Unity of Romanians Party, a soft Eurosceptic, populist, antifederalist emergent political group in Romania.

Figure 8 shows somewhat polarised responses on social media—a combination of likes, "love," and "haha'' reactions.

The headline that generated the highest number of "angry" reactions features the Romanian president's reaction to calls for boycotting against Austria. The headline that generated the highest number of "haha" reactions seems to be ironic of former Prime Minister Viorica Dăncilă—the first and only female Romanian prime minister, negatively stereotyped as a puppet figure for former Social Democratic leader Liviu Dragnea.

An analysis of the headlines—available in the additional tables—that triggered the highest engagement on Facebook (see the Supplementary Material) reveals the following. First, the news headlines which have generated the highest scores, number of shares, comments, likes, and "love" reactions are stories about individuals' and companies' attempted boycotting of Austrian companies after the outcome of the JHA accession vote that seem to have romantic narratives personalising revenge/justice against "the villain." Second, the headlines that generated the most "angry" reactions are mostly news headlines that feature statements against the boycott, calling for calm by the Romanian president and Austrian chancellor and an additional, earlier headline about the Szekler National Council being against Romania's accession—the tragic narrative of "betrayal" and "siding with the enemy." Third, the headlines that generated the highest number of "haha" reactions reveal alternate readings of the reporting on boycotts but more importantly, they reveal the media's instrumention of negative stereotyping (and expected misogyny and bigotry), in this case headlines based on statements by former Prime Minister Dăncilă and informal Roma leader Cioabă—the satirical spectacle of helpless, pitiful actors observed from the outside. Fourth, although there is not a substantial number of "sad" reactions, they reveal an emerging narrative of victimisation that paints the Romanians as "second-class citizens," "beggars" who are the victims of "hidden agreements," providing grounding for Eurosceptical populist discourses and conspiracy theories.

Figure 8. A screen capture of the Facebook context where the headline resulting in the highest number of interactions was shared. Note: The link is shared on Facebook by România TV news television in the context of a live stream of a political talk show which included live coverage of a protest at the Austrian Embassy in Bucharest on December 9, 2022. Source: România TV (2022).

5. Discussion and Conclusions

The patterns of news media coverage for Romania's 2022 failed bid for Schengen Area accession fit the elements of politicisation of European integration. The issue's coverage is greatly intensified in the context of polarisation of opinion in the context of the final JHA Council vote. Indicators of conflict (frame and news value emphasis) emerge as the most prominent in the analysis. The dominant metaphors are the military metaphor and the game metaphor, suggesting the use of strategic framing by politicians—Romanian politicians affiliated with the Coalition Government of Social Democrats (centre-left) and National Liberals (centre-right) are the most visible individual actors, while Austrians are the most covered collective actors, mostly in the aftermath of the Austrian representatives' veto, which led to the negative outcome for the accession bid. The analysis of Facebook interactions generated by news sharing allows us to also assess public resonance, the third element of De Wilde's analytical framework. The boycott against Austria as a reaction to the outcome of the vote generates the most interactions and both "love" and "angry" reactions.

The research results show that the coverage of the Schengen Area accession has the potential to drive Euroscepticism in three distinct ways: (a) by fuelling negativity and outrage at international actors, either as collective actors such as the Netherlands and Austria or as individual scapegoats such as Mark Rutte or Gerhad Karner; (b) by stimulating detachment from politics in a cynical state of amusement as a reaction to politicians' strategic communication and news media's over-emotionalisation; and (c) by engaging in self-victimisation and hinting at a conspiracy. The research results fit with previous research on the media representation of 2011's Romanian bid for Schengen Area accession (Bârgăoanu, 2011) and add the supplemental investigation into news sharing and reactions in an attempt to explain how the coverage of the issue can become a catalyst for cynicism and Euroscepticism. News that triggers high emotional responses is preferred in the social media ecosystem and there is already significant literature on the topic (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2020). This seems to lead to a tendency of newsmakers to prefer emotional issues—such as boycotting Austrian companies—or over-dramatisation and "news inflation"—with some news outlets creating an unnecessary number of articles in the coverage of a story by collecting emotional reactions from as many public figures as possible.

Although further in-depth research using qualitative methods is needed to elaborate on narrative myths identified in the coverage of the Schengen Area accession, it seems the scapegoat emerges as a structure applied even to the more abstract collective country actors even beyond the context of the initial reporting that bears more personalisation. Even if in the construction of the news discourse politicians strategically position themselves as crafty, comedic heroes, or even self-sacrificing romantic ones, the reading accepted by a significant part of the audience is that of satire—a reaction to strategic news framing and news inflation but also a reaction to the media's instrumentalisation of negative stereotypes.

This research has limitations derived from the methodological approach of lexicon-based automated coding. A very small subsample of the headlines that got the most interactions on Facebook was also analysed in order to formulate the conclusions, but further qualitative or mixed methods research is needed to investigate discourses on European integration in the context of the Schengen Area accession in Romania. The approach and results of this research are relevant for future work into the politicisation of European integration and analyses of the coverage of the future national and European-level debates on "differentiated governance." Our use of the conceptualisation of politicisation proposed by De Wilde (2011), the two-step approach used in data collection, and results that use Facebook interactions as indicators of public resonance of politicisation and strategic framing may be replicated in future research.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

Supplementary Material

Additional tables show the headlines that generated the highest number of total Facebook interactions. Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the author (unedited).

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