



# Interested but not Engaged: How Europe's Media Cover Brexit

Alexandra Borchardt, Felix M. Simon, Diego Bironzo

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*Alexandra Borchardt, Felix Simon, and Diego Bironzo – Oxford, May 2018*

# Executive Summary

## Focus and Goals of the Research

When UK Prime Minister Theresa May triggered Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty on 29 March 2017, the United Kingdom officially initiated its exit from the European Union. After being a member of the EU for 44 years, it was the first country ever to make use of this formal mechanism created less than a decade ago. Much has been written about how the UK media has covered the road to Brexit, but not much light has been shed on the outside perspective in a systematic fashion. This study intends to do that. What do the media of other EU member countries consider to be important? How much passion is involved in reporting something as bureaucratic as the exit procedure – a process which rarely makes for exciting headlines but whose outcome will affect millions of lives, some of them dramatically? And do national media differ in the level of reporting and the issues they focus on? The main research questions that drove this report were:

- How much do European media care about Brexit?
- What do European media think about Brexit as such and the UK's way of dealing with it?
- Which topics are European media most concerned about in the Brexit process?
- How much and what kind of national self-interest does the Brexit decision trigger?
- To what extent do the volume of coverage, focus, and views differ among the eight countries examined?
- Who are the major actors involved and who are the most prominent voices?

We expected to learn something not only about the views and interests displayed in the various countries but also about the reporting as such. So this study is not only about views and opinion but also about the journalism.

## Method

- The report is based on a content analysis of news items from relevant media outlets in eight European countries outside of the UK. Our analysis included two newspapers, a political magazine, a TV news show, and an online outlet in each of the countries.
- Researchers from PRIME Research coded the complete Brexit coverage between 1 September 2017 and 31 March 2018, in total 4,553 media items in 39 media outlets.

## Major Findings

- European media follow the Brexit debate closely, but they appear unconcerned about the United Kingdom leaving the European Union.
- European Brexit reporting was predominantly fact-based. Most (82%) of the analysed news items took no position in relation to Brexit; only 18% conveyed a clear opinion.
- French media reported Brexit as more of a challenge for the UK than for the French or the EU; interest in the future of the EU was highest in Sweden and Greece. Spanish, Greek, and Irish media in particular expressed strong views against Brexit, while Italian, Polish, and French media were slightly closer to presenting a mixture of arguments.
- Coverage in Ireland, by far the most extensive, indicated the country's close involvement in the Brexit process. Reporting appeared divided equally between the Irish and the UK perspectives.
- Apart from Ireland, coverage reflected a lack of anxiety about the future of the EU and the impact of Brexit on Europe. If Irish media are excluded, 69% of the European news items

reflected on the UK situation, while slightly less than one in five articles discussed the implications for the EU.

- Freedom of movement and the rights of EU citizens living in the UK occupied little space in the coverage (10% of all issue-related coverage). This figure decreased to 5% when news articles about the impact of Brexit on Ireland were left out.
- Excluding any generic references to Brexit, more than a third (35%) of reporting across all studied countries covered progress and setbacks in the Brexit negotiations. The remaining coverage (65%) focused on more specific issues. Of these, about half concerned the economy, business, and trade. Coverage of EU bureaucracy, standards, and regulations played a role in only a small proportion (3%) of the content studied.
- Politicians from other EU countries were rarely quoted on Brexit issues. This contrasts with the impression sometimes given in UK media coverage that European politicians 'meddle' in UK affairs. Instead it fits the image of a 'united front' promoted by the EU during the negotiations.
- When protagonists were quoted, the tone of the debate was set mainly by UK Conservative politicians (23.1%) and EU institutions (19.8%). UK Labour politicians played a negligible role: they were quoted in only 5.4% of news items, while vocal Leave campaigners, such as Nigel Farage and UKIP, were even less present.
- French, German, or other EU national politicians were barely quoted (in fewer than 3% of reports). The most quoted person of all protagonists was UK Prime Minister Theresa May, with EU chief negotiator Michel Barnier following some way behind.



# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Why this Study – and how did we go about it?

That the majority of UK voters opted in June 2016 for the UK to leave the European Union came as a surprise not only for the UK itself but also for many Europeans. With such a major member leaving, it was feared that this could be the beginning of the end of the EU. With nationalist tendencies increasing in quite a few countries, it was feared the UK move could set an example for others. On the other hand, the UK has always been quite sceptical towards the Union and never joined the Eurozone. This exceptionalism could come in helpful in this new situation; it could make it easier to regard Brexit as an isolated case not to be initiated elsewhere.

The media coverage of the process has been intensive. This study was set up to find out what bothers citizens outside of the UK the most about the Brexit vote. It assumes that media coverage at least partially reflects citizen interest. So where do European media side? Do they emphasise or downplay the risks? And is there a general trend of reporting on Brexit across European media, or do views and approaches differ sharply from country to country?

To get an accurate idea about coverage from a wide range of perspectives throughout the EU, we selected eight countries with different backgrounds and stakes in the EU. Germany, Italy, and France were among the six founding members. Ireland has the highest stakes in the Brexit process. Greece, which joined in 1981, could be expected to be EU-critical because of the recent economic crisis and the anti-EU sentiment. Poland, which joined in 2004, has many citizens working in the UK. We included Spain, member since 1986, not only for its size but also because we found in a preliminary screening that, judging by the volume of coverage, there was a vast interest in the subject. We picked Sweden, member since 1995, as a representative of the Nordic countries.

We wanted to cover a wide range of media while keeping the sample to a manageable size. That is why in each country we chose two quality print newspapers, one political magazine, one online outlet, and one major TV news show. The examination period covered seven months and included major events that spurred intensified coverage as could be expected. Unsurprisingly, newspaper coverage was by far the most extensive in volume, and TV items were rather short.

In summary, our main research questions and assumptions were as follows:

**How much do European media care about Brexit?** Our working assumption was that they do so very much, and that there would be strong opinions about Brexit.

**What do European media think about the future of the EU?** Do the media think that Brexit will drive Europe apart or do they regard it as a UK phenomenon that can be dealt with without affecting the Union?

**We assumed that there would be much criticism of the UK's Brexit move.** But was there also support for the UK's view?

**Which topics and issues are European media most concerned about as regards Brexit?** Is it citizen rights and the future of expats on both sides? Or are they more worried about business relations or maybe even political stability?

**Who is quoted most?** While we expected UK sources to play a predominant role, our assumption was that political leaders everywhere would voice opinions about Brexit and have suggestions.

**Last but not least, are there significant national differences in judgement?** One could easily foresee that for Ireland, but what about the other seven countries examined?

We assumed that most media would generally argue from a perspective of national self-interest, maybe also referring to the broader European idea. But the results surprised us. The analysis revealed a picture of largely self-confident European countries that did not feel threatened by Brexit in the least. Media were critical of the EU but much more critical of the UK's decision and in particular of its execution.

This overall finding is generally consistent with public opinion surveys. It reflects the rather pro-European mood that was sparked elsewhere in the EU by the Brexit vote. Pew Research, for example, noted a significant upswing in attitudes towards the EU, with even the most critical countries being overwhelmingly supportive of the institution as such, even though they would like to have more national decision-making power (Stokes et al. 2017).

## 1.2 Methodology in Summary

Data were provided by PRIME Research, who collected them from 39 media outlets from eight European countries (Germany, Greece, France, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Spain, and Sweden). PRIME Research identified relevant news stories by looking for several keywords.<sup>1</sup> Once an automated search gathered all media items with at least one relevant mention of such keywords,<sup>2</sup> a researcher assessed whether the articles were relevant before submitting them to a team of 12 analysts, who performed the detailed coding in PRIME's proprietary content analysis system.<sup>3</sup> Researchers constructed a total sample of 4,553 media items (articles or TV news items) discussing Brexit. Our articles included news items, opinion pieces, and editorials. (See Appendix B for further information.)

<sup>1</sup> These were basically country-specific variations of the term 'Brexit': Brexit, 'Brexitu', 'Brexitowi', 'Brexitem', 'Brexicie', 'Μπρέξιτ', 'Μπρεξίτ', 'μπρέξιτ', 'μπρεξιτ', 'ΜΠΡΕΞΙΤ', 'Βρεχιτ', 'βρεχιτ', 'ΒΡΕΧΙΤ'.

<sup>2</sup> We refer to them as media items rather than articles as we studied TV, newspaper, and online news items.

<sup>3</sup> The selection criteria utilised by PRIME's researchers are detailed in Appendix B.

## 2. What is and Who has What at Stake? Key Issues in the Brexit Negotiations

### 2.1 Summary

The UK's decision to leave the EU is widely acknowledged as one of the country's most important and wide-ranging political decisions in recent decades. However, due to the UK's long-standing membership and involvement in all EU affairs, exiting the EU is a complicated undertaking with far-reaching implications for the economy, citizens, and other areas. European media are well aware of this and have discussed these issues in depth in their coverage of Brexit. In order to provide context for the findings of this report, we briefly list the key issues in the Brexit negotiations in the following sections. We also provide an overview of how key events in the negotiations so far have affected the volume of coverage in European media.

### 2.2 Citizens

Without a deal ('hard Brexit') or other *residency rights*, the entitlement of EU nationals to reside in the UK, and of UK nationals to reside elsewhere in the EU, could technically cease to exist overnight. As third-country nationals they would then be subjected to domestic immigration rules. This would affect more than three million EU citizens in the UK and nearly a million UK citizens in the EU (Morris 2017).

Key groups in this context are, for instance, the large UK expat community (many of them retirees) in Spain, who currently get free access to Spanish GPs and healthcare, and in turn the EU citizens living and working in the UK. What happens to the rights of UK citizens in the EU and vice versa in terms of access to healthcare still needs to be determined as part of a future deal between the UK and the EU. The same applies to the question of whether the European Court of Justice<sup>4</sup> will retain power over matters relating to EU citizens in the UK once the UK has left the EU.

Brexit will also likely affect *migration into and out of the UK*. As it stands, the UK government is committed to getting net migration – the difference between the numbers entering and leaving the country – down to a 'sustainable' level, which Prime Minister Theresa May has defined as being below 100,000 a year (Hunt & Wheeler 2018). This is a thorny issue for Eastern European countries such as Poland. The number of Eastern Europeans registering to work in the UK has already fallen since the Brexit referendum, most likely due to the weaker pound, highly publicised xenophobic attacks, and the uncertainty of Brexit (Warrell 2017). Migrants from Eastern Europe are particularly prevalent in sectors such as construction, administration, business and management, hospitality and catering, agriculture, and manufacturing (Migration Observatory 2018).

### 2.3 Economy and Trade

**The single market:** The single market is seen as one of the EU's biggest achievements. Completed in 1992, the single market allows the free movement of goods, services, money, and people within the EU, just as if it was a single country. The main idea was to boost trade, create jobs, and lower prices. To work, the single market requires common law-making to ensure products are made to the same technical standards and to ensure a level playing field (Hunt & Wheeler 2018). Access to the single market requires acceptance of all four EU freedoms – movement of goods, capital, services, and people. It should also be noted that the EU is a customs union. Its members impose common tariffs on imports from non-EU countries and can trade freely with each other. Without

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<sup>4</sup> Not to be confused with the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), which is not an EU institution.

full membership of the single market and mutual recognition of standards, companies will face border inspections (Cadman & Tetlow 2016). Protecting the integrity of the single market is a key issue for the EU – a principle that has often been ignored by Brexit supporters in the UK. The movement of people is seen as a major issue between the EU and the UK government, which is seeking to curb immigration in the wake of the vote (Khan 2016).

**The customs union:** The EU is a customs union. The customs union ensures EU member states all charge the same import duties to countries outside the EU. It allows member states to trade freely with each other without border checks, but it limits their freedom to strike their own trade deals (as opposed to a free trade area where the latter is possible). One major issue in the Brexit negotiations is an agreement on trade.

The UK will leave the existing EU customs union as a legal consequence of Brexit (Roberts 2018). Without a new customs union deal, which would replicate many of the old advantages, the UK would trade with the EU under World Trade Organization rules, which would likely mean customs checks, tariffs on goods, and longer border checks for travellers (Hunt & Wheeler 2018). However, even a new customs deal after Brexit would limit the freedom the UK would have to negotiate other trade deals independently of the EU.

While the UK government has, so far, outlined two alternatives to the existing state of affairs (UK Government 2017a), both are currently deemed unworkable by experts and EU officials (Roberts 2018), whereas striking a limited customs union deal faces protest from Brexiteers. At the time of writing, a solution for this conundrum has not been found.

## 2.4 Regulations and Laws

With no deal, the *UK would cease to be a member of dozens of regulatory agencies*, such as the European Medicines Agency (EMA) and the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA), that govern many aspects of daily life in the UK. In theory, under a worst-case scenario, a hard Brexit could mean that planes would be grounded temporarily and drugs could not be imported (if the UK has not come up with sufficient contingency plans).

Another issue is the jurisdiction of the Court of Justice of the European Union, the EU's highest legal authority (also referred to as the European Court of Justice or ECJ). The ECJ interprets and enforces the rules of the single market, settling disputes between member countries over issues like free movement and trade. It is a key EU institution, and a key issue for those arguing for the UK to leave the EU has been to regain full sovereignty free of the ECJ's jurisdiction. Whether, and for how long, the UK will be bound to the ECJ's rulings continues to be one of the big questions in the negotiations.

## 2.5 The Question of the Irish Border

An important issue in the Brexit negotiations is the land border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. There is currently a common travel area between the UK and the Republic. Northern Ireland voted Remain (56%) in the 2016 referendum and both the EU and the UK would like to avoid a return to a 'hard border', given the historical and social 'sensitivities' that permeate Ireland north and south. The treaty that has secured the peace between Ireland and Northern Ireland, the Good Friday Agreement, was established in 1998 and was negotiated under the assumption of EU membership, hence no extra agreements on how to navigate the border were needed at that time. Northern Ireland has no say in the Brexit negotiations though and is completely dependent on what the UK and the EU will come up with (Tonge 2017).

A particular question raised by Brexit is healthcare. At the moment, some cooperation exists between both sides of the border on health issues, including the mutual recognition of qualifications and the provision of special treatments. In the wake of the Brexit vote, several organisations, including the Northern Ireland branch of the British Medical Association, warned that a hard border could risk patient care and pose a major threat to the provision of healthcare in the region. Another significant issue is agriculture (Smyth 2017). But it is not only the hard issues that cause worries. Deirdre Heenan, professor of social policy at Ulster University, was quoted in *The Guardian* on the social implications (Savage 2018):

*I was in London last week and there was a discussion about the trade and the economy and the customs union and the single market, but absolutely no discussion of the psychological and social impact of a border – whatever it may look like.*

At present, it remains unclear how the Irish border question will be resolved in detail as the EU and the UK disagree on the best way forward (McDonald 2018). Further complicating the matter is the fact that Theresa May's government majority is depending on a coalition with the Northern Irish Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), after the Conservative Party failed to win a majority in the 2017 general election. The DUP's stated position is against any deal that treats Northern Ireland differently from the rest of the UK (Gudgin 2017), thus effectively preventing any solution that would allow Northern Ireland to remain fully aligned with the EU and the Republic of Ireland in the event that there is no overall deal to keep the Irish border invisible (O'Carroll 2018).<sup>5</sup>

## 2.6 Finance and Banking Industry

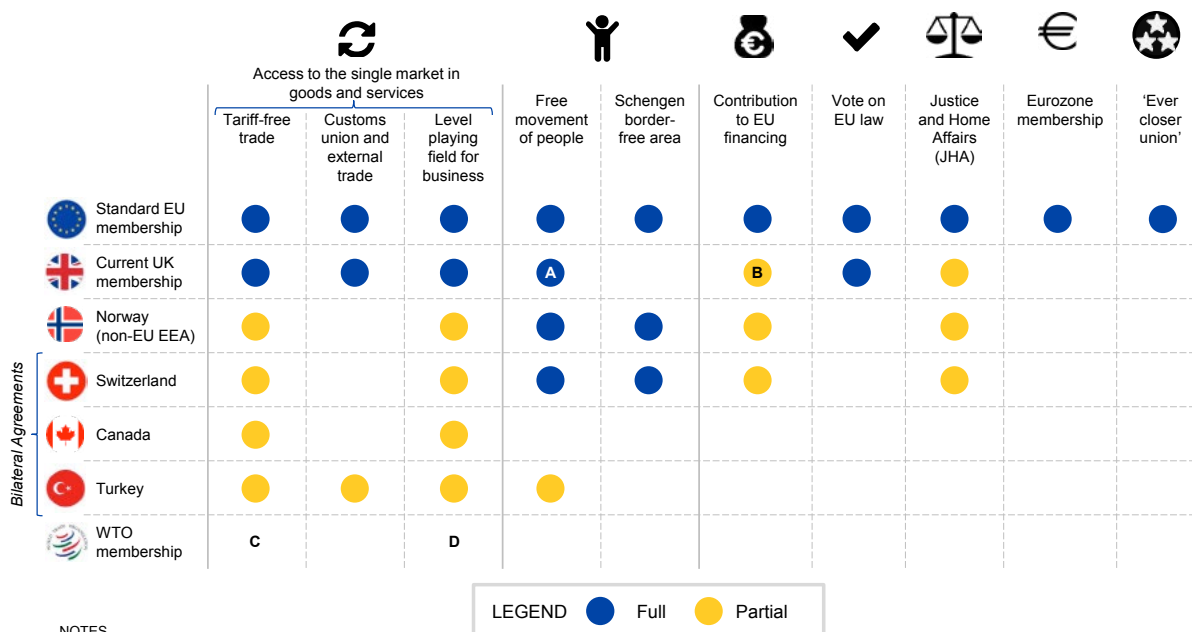
Brexit creates significant uncertainty for the banking and financial services industry. The financial services sector employs more than one million people (Office for National Statistics 2018b) in the UK and accounted for over 7% of the value (Office for National Statistics 2018a) created in the UK economy in the second quarter of 2017 (Institute for Government 2017). Consistently ranked at the top of the Global Financial Centres Index (Financial Centre Futures 2018), London is one of the leading finance hubs, hosting the European headquarters of half of the world's financial firms (Magnus et al. 2016), as well as the corporate and investment banking headquarters of many banks from Continental Europe. According to some estimates (Sants et al. 2016), a quarter of the UK's financial services sector's annual revenue comes from business related to the EU. The Institute for Fiscal Studies calculates (Emmerson et al. 2016) that EU business is particularly important in banking and investment, with over 40% of UK exports in these areas heading to the Continent. Many overseas banks have made the UK their European headquarters because of its access to the EU market.

## 2.7 Soft Brexit versus Hard Brexit

At the time of writing this study, the conditions under which the UK will exit the EU and which relationship the UK will have to the EU are unclear. The situation is unprecedented as no full member has ever left the EU (Greenland, a territory of Denmark, left in 1982). In addition to the UK needing to determine numerous transitional procedures for disentangling itself from EU regulations, settling the status of the millions of UK citizens residing in the EU and non-UK EU citizens in the UK, and deciding the future of UK–EU security cooperation (McBride 2017), the UK will need to negotiate the terms of its future association with the EU. A range of potential options exist (UK Government 2016), as evidenced by the simplified overview in Figure 1. Each comes with different rights and benefits and all of them have been the subject of debates in both the UK and the remaining EU countries.

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<sup>5</sup> The DUP was the only political party that opposed the Good Friday Agreement in 1998.

**Figure 1. Models of relationship to the European Union**

## NOTES

- A. Free movement of people: at the 2016 February European Council the UK Prime Minister secured a new settlement that will enable the UK to have a new emergency brake to limit full access to in-work benefits by newly arrived EU workers for up to four years when they enter the UK labour market. This will be in force for seven years.
- B. The UK receives a rebate on its contributions to the EU budget.
- C. Except where the EU has bound tariffs at zero percent in WTO commitments.
- D. Except where the EU has made commitments under General Agreement on Trade and Services.

*Adapted from* Alternatives to Membership: Possible Models for the United Kingdom Outside the European Union, UK Government, 2016

Norway, for instance, is a part of the European Economic Area (EEA). This gives the country partial access to the single market in goods and services but no say in making EU law. However, it has to contribute to the EU budget and abide by EU regulations. Switzerland has partial access to the single market through several bilateral agreements that cover goods but not services, but it is not part of the EEA. Both Norway and Switzerland must accept the free movement of people from anywhere in the EU. Finally, Turkey only has a customs union, allowing the free movement of goods but not services.

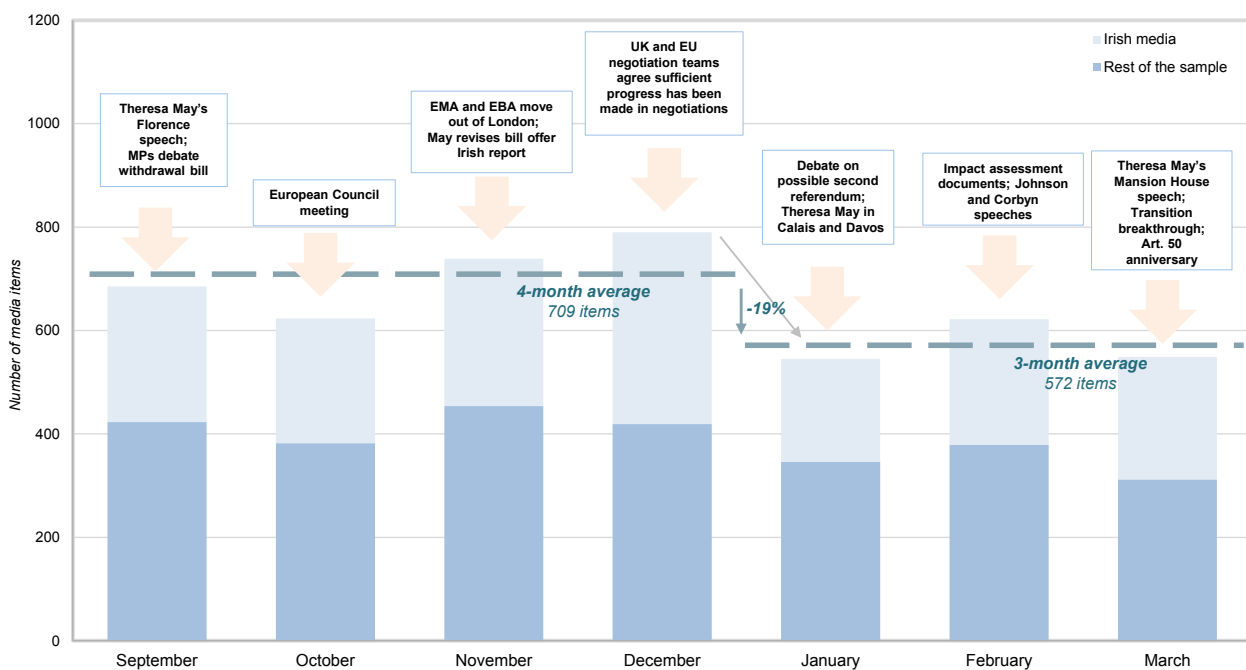
## 2.8 Key Events and Volume of Coverage over Time

The topics and themes discussed in the previous sections were centre stage during several summits and events that took place throughout the sampling period of our research. A key event in the first half of the period we covered was Theresa May's speech in Florence, where she set out her plans for a two-year post-Brexit transition period (UK Government 2017b). Equally relevant was the decision in late November 2017 to relocate both the EMA (European Medicines Agency) and the EBA (European Banking Authority) from London to Amsterdam and Paris, respectively (Price 2017).

Yet we found that the volume of coverage over time remained largely stable and showed little fluctuation during the sample period. While certain key events – for example, the mutual agreement in December 2017 that sufficient progress had been made in the negotiations – coincided with a slightly more intensive coverage by European (and especially Irish) news media, the volume pattern exhibited little volatility and remained largely steady, even in the quieter news periods between Christmas and the middle of January (see Figure 2). At best, a slightly declining trend can be detected, which might be explained by a loss of interest as time wears on and other events on the world stage take precedence.

Ultimately, neither Theresa May's appearance at the World Economic Forum in Davos nor the publication of the UK government's Brexit impact assessments in February 2018, which came after a leak to BuzzFeed, and political pressure to release them, attracted particularly strong coverage. In the case of the impact assessments this might be explained by the fact that the erstwhile secret estimations by government officials – that the UK economy would suffer after Brexit, with the parts of the UK that backed a Leave vote likely facing the heaviest hits as a result (Kuenssberg 2018) – did not come as a big surprise to the EU or EU media. Even Theresa May's Mansion House speech in March could not rattle European media. There she spelt out her aims for UK-EU trade after Brexit, declaring she hopes to agree on a bespoke trade deal and an 'ambitious economic partnership' with the EU (UK Government 2018). Nor did the 'anniversary' of Article 50 spark much interest. Instead, media coverage reached its lowest point throughout the period covered in our study.

**Figure 2. Volume of coverage over time**



### 3. Volume, Visibility, and Prominence of Brexit News

#### 3.1 Summary

- Across the 39 media outlets analysed, 4,553 items focused on Brexit or the Brexit negotiations over the sample period. On average, 21.5 articles were published per day on the topic.
- The volume of Brexit news was greatest in the Irish media, followed by Germany, Greece, Spain, Italy, France, Poland, and Sweden.

#### 3.2 Overall Volume of Brexit News

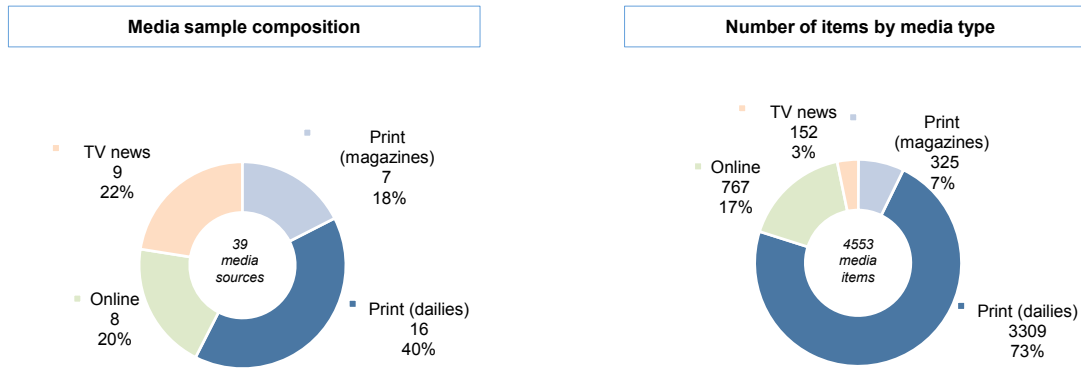
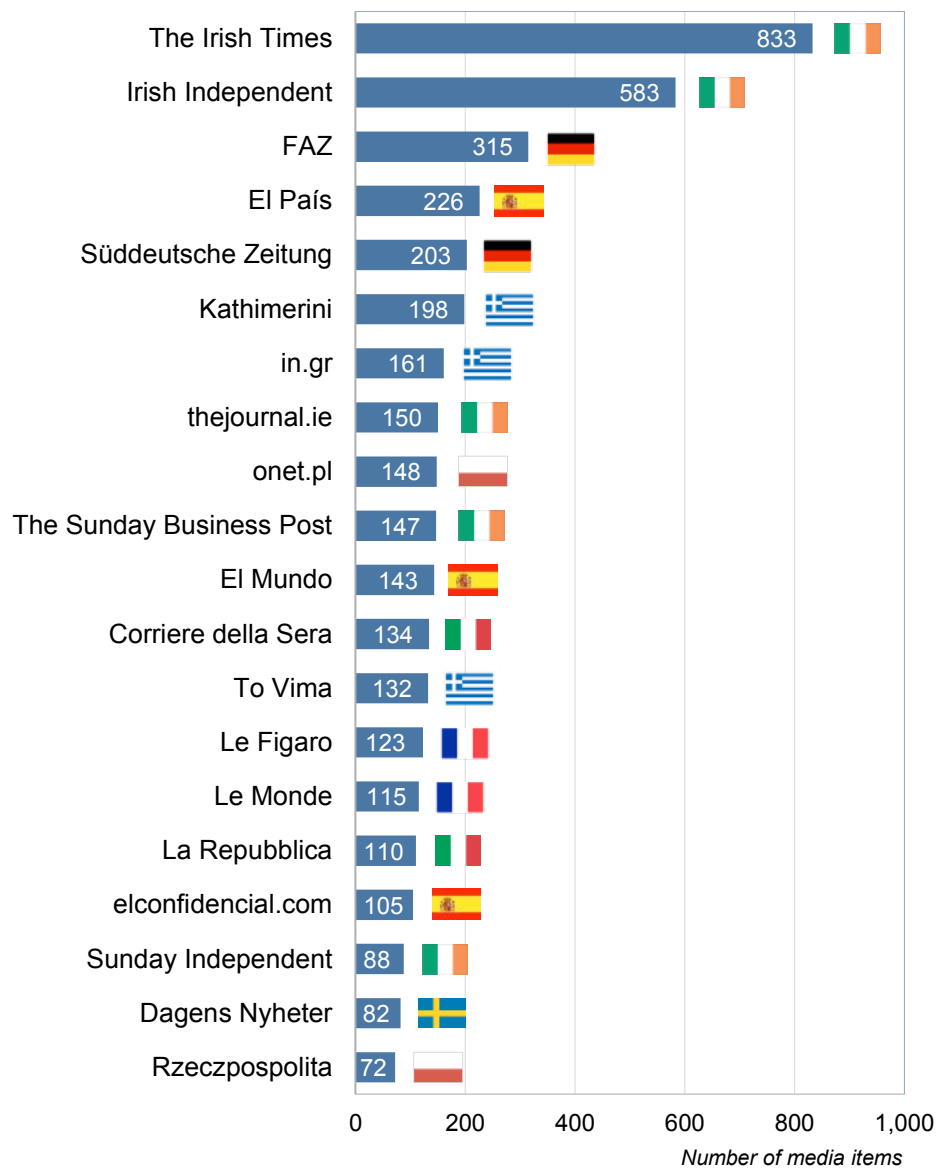
We started our analysis by assessing the visibility and amount of attention devoted to Brexit and the Brexit negotiations by the media. On an average day in the period from 1 September 2017 to 31 March 2018 there were 21.5 media items focused on Brexit or the negotiations across the 39 media outlets, or 4,553 in total over the sample period.

The volume of Brexit news was greatest in the Irish media. All Irish outlets combined published 1,838 media items focused on Brexit in the sample period, followed by a wide distance by German outlets (627), Greece (495), Spain (486), Italy (326), France (319), Poland (280), and Sweden (182) (see Figure 3). The major share of the coverage could be found in print news (see Figure 4). That Irish outlets have devoted so much of their coverage to Brexit should come as no surprise as Ireland is the only EU country that shares a land border with the UK – a topic of continuing debate, as is the future relationship between both countries post-Brexit. Germany, in turn, is one of the UK's closest trading partners with German businesses paying close attention to developments in the UK.

**Figure 3. Volume of coverage**





**Figure 4. Media sample****Figure 5. Number of items by media source**

## 4. European Media Views on Brexit

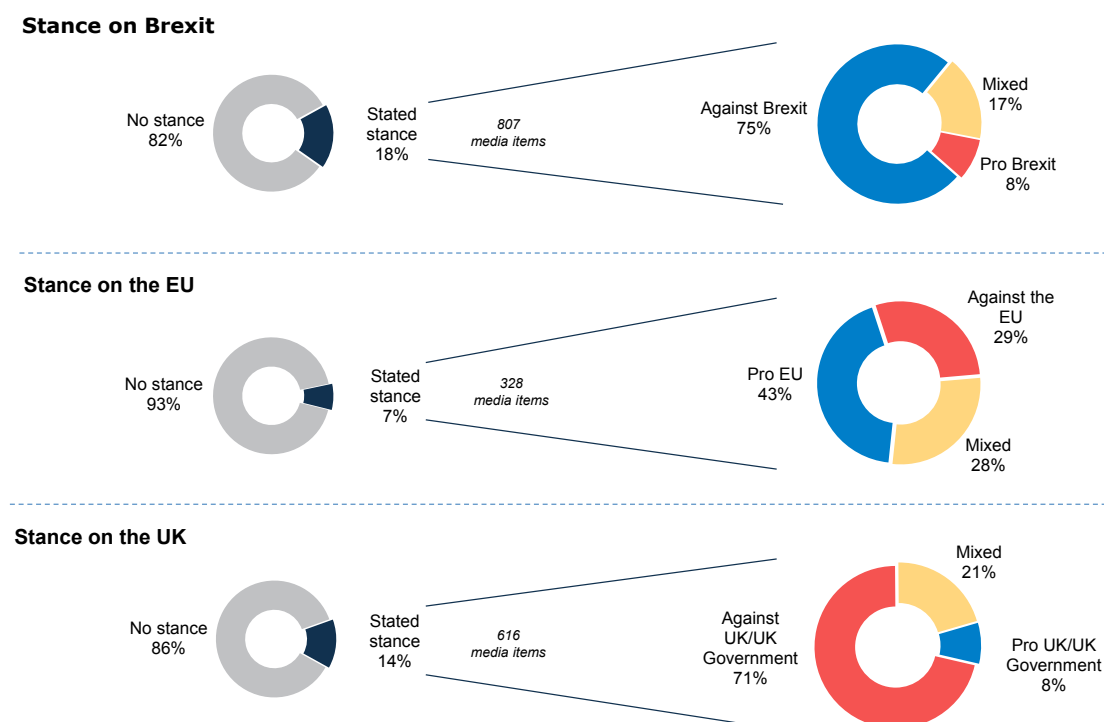
### 4.1 Summary

- European media remained largely factual and non-judgemental in their Brexit coverage of specific topics (61% of the time). However, when the media took a position, their overall outlook was most often negative (62% of all evaluations).
- An opinion on the EU was only expressed in less than one in ten items (7%). In those, not even half had a positive view on the EU.
- Most media items refrained from taking a stance on the UK and the UK government. However, when European media commented on either, their view was largely negative and critical.

### 4.2 European Media's Position

First of all, what European media think about Brexit turned out to be of minor importance. Surprisingly, most of the coverage did not state an opinion. While this varied across countries, the vast majority of the 4,553 news items attempted to just report facts about the negotiations and their consequences. Opinions on Brexit, the EU, or the UK and its government were found in less than one-fifth of the items (see Figure 6). Additionally, within the media items that did not express overall views about Brexit, the EU, or the UK, less than a half (46%) of the topics discussed presented any kind of evaluation.

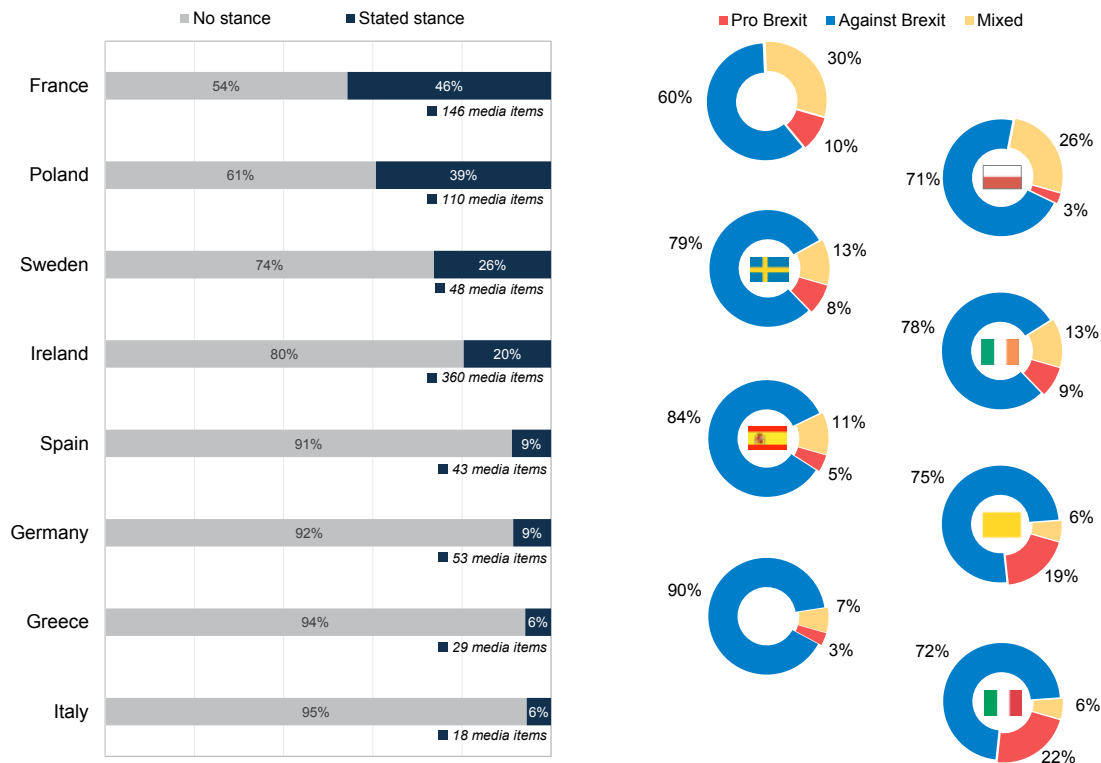
**Figure 6. Stance on Brexit, the EU, and the UK**



The EU as such did not draw much commentary, at least not in the context of the Brexit discussion. Of the pieces that contained a view on the UK decision, 74% remained neutral on the EU. This is surprising, not only because in the UK the dominant assumption is that everybody else is working hard to influence the negotiations to serve their own national interest, but also because journalists are often accused of being too opinionated as opposed to sticking to the facts and leaving audiences free to make up their own minds. We found that this was precisely what most media did with Brexit reporting in most countries. National differences were pronounced though.

The most opinionated media were those in France, Poland, and Sweden, where up to 46% (France) of items reflected a clear position, either explicitly or implicitly. This probably reflects the different national traditions in political reporting.

**Figure 7. Stance on Brexit by country**



Of those items that took a stance (about one-fifth), the trend was clear: about three quarters sided against Brexit. The general mood is expressed in this quote by the CEO of Swedish ferry company Stena in *Göteborgs-Posten* (2018):

*Nobody knows, but it can only be negative. I usually say that cancer does not hurt at first, but I think Brexit may be perceived as a cancer. Both the EU and the UK are losing.*

Within the fifth (18%) of media items that took a stance just 8% were pro-Brexit as opposed to 75% against. Interestingly, the strongest anti-Brexit sentiments came from Greece and Spain, whereas Italian, Polish, and French media included higher shares of mixed or pro-Brexit views. But, considering that the overwhelming majority of news coverage on the matter was neutral, it is clear that we are talking about nuances.

Spain was one of the countries with a particularly strong Brexit coverage; 11% of the media items in our sample came from Spanish outlets and the country ranked fourth in our sample, behind Ireland, Germany, and Greece. The above-average Spanish interest in Brexit and a strong anti-Brexit sentiment could be explained, at least in part, by national concerns about the movement for Catalan independence, which could be inspired further by the success of Brexiteers. For example, *El País* described the decision to relocate the EMA from London to Amsterdam as 'the chronicle of a failure foretold' for Barcelona, as political tension took its toll on the candidacy of the Catalan capital (Pérez 2017). Additionally, several articles sought to draw lessons from Brexit, warning Catalonia of the negative economic impact of uncertainty.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Jorrín (2017) and Manuel Valls' interview in *El Mundo* in Segovia (2017).

As far as Greece is concerned, the media sample analysed (and indeed many mainstream media outlets in the country) have been following a pro-EU line, as already exemplified during the Greek bailout referendum campaign in 2015 (Chu 2015), which translated into more sceptical views about Brexit. For instance, *in.gr* described Brexit as ‘catastrophic for Britain’ (*in.gr* 2018) and UK universities (Petropoulou 2017) and *Kathimerini* drew comparisons between the ‘populist politics’ of Greece in 2015 and the UK hard Brexit campaigners (Featherstone 2018). Also, the Greek media were the ones that relied the most on commentary from various spokespeople, including representatives from EU institutions and organisations such as the IMF and the Bank of England – all more likely to highlight the negative aspects of Brexit.

The critical position of most European media towards Brexit and against the UK government does not mean there is unconditional support for the EU though. Of those items that took a stance against Brexit – granted, a mere 13% of the total – only a small portion endorsed the EU, while 82% retained neutral views about it. Among the media items more supportive of the UK’s decision to leave the EU, views about the European project were more polarised. However, even in this sample, more than half of the media items were neutral about the EU.

Finally, our analysis has revealed a strong alignment between the sceptical views of European media on Brexit and their views on the UK – or rather the UK government’s handling of the Brexit process. While 86% of the overall coverage remained, again, neutral, 14% took a stance on the UK and the UK government. Coinciding with their negative view on Brexit, 71% of the items where European media took a stance on the UK expressed a negative view of the UK and the UK government (see Figure 6).<sup>7</sup> Only 21% of the articles that took a stance on the UK and the UK government had a mixed opinion on both, and only 8% felt able to make positive comments.

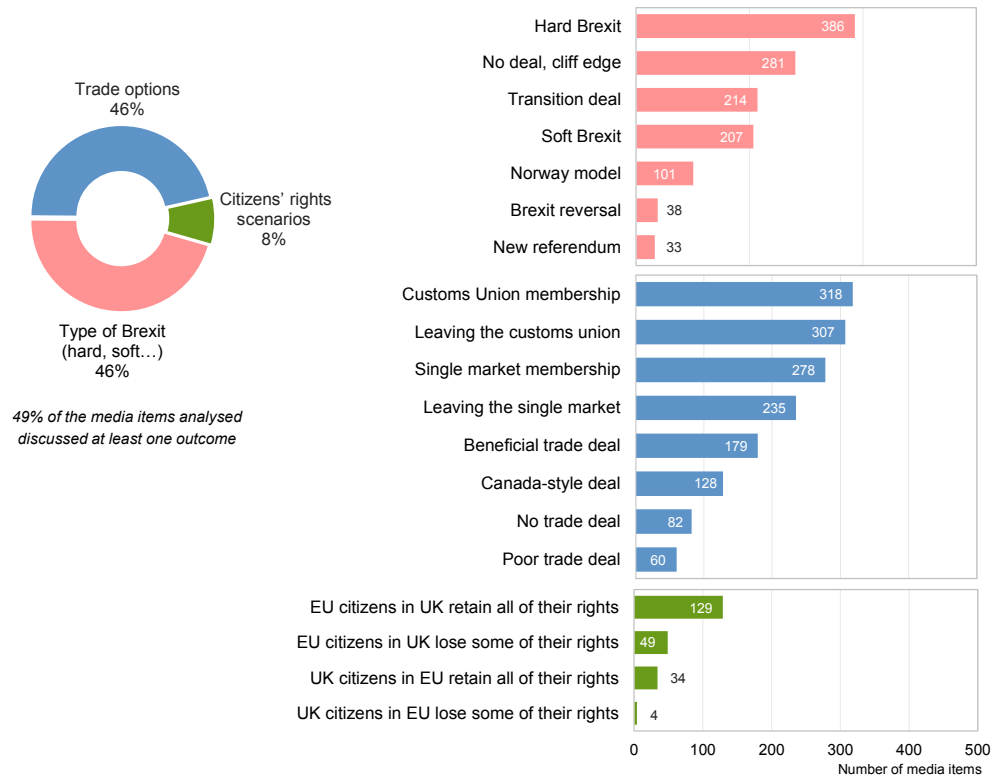
### 4.3 Which Brexit do we Want? Outcomes Discussed

When looking at the media discussion around expected outcomes of Brexit, the focus was on the possible types of Brexit, with particular attention given to the hard Brexit and ‘cliff edge’ scenarios. A reversal of Brexit or even a new referendum were hardly discussed at all, probably owing to the realisation that both are unlikely outcomes given the current UK political climate (see Figure 8).

The options specifically relating to trade were the other main talking point in terms of outcomes of the negotiations, with an even balance of coverage discussing the possibility of the UK leaving the customs union and the prospect of retaining membership of it. Membership of the single market was another visible outcome, while an exit from it was slightly less covered.

Finally, in terms of scenarios relating to citizens’ rights, the European media we analysed predictably focused on the rights and the future of EU citizens in the UK (rather than those of UK citizens residing in other EU countries). In this respect, the coverage was slightly more likely to discuss a scenario in which all rights would be preserved.

<sup>7</sup> In this respect, we found the main questions that the European media coverage raised were about the level of competence of the UK government and its negotiators (mentioned in 671 media items, while the competence of their counterparts on the EU side was only discussed in 127 items), as well as the weakened position of the UK government after the 2017 snap elections and how it could affect the negotiations (a point that appeared in 228 media items). Interestingly, blame for lacking flexibility was attributed to both sides in almost equal measure (EU: 92 items; UK: 70 items).

**Figure 8. Outcomes discussed**

## 5. What bothers European Media Most about Brexit?

### 5.1 Summary

- Looking at the topics covered in the media, we found that 35% of the coverage was negotiation-specific, while 65% dealt with other topics in the context of Brexit.
- The negotiation-specific coverage focused on the state of the negotiations, the negotiation meetings, and negotiation items such as Northern Ireland, the so-called Brexit bill, or the transition period. The rest of the coverage mostly focused on the economy, politics in general, migration, and the free movement of citizens in the EU.

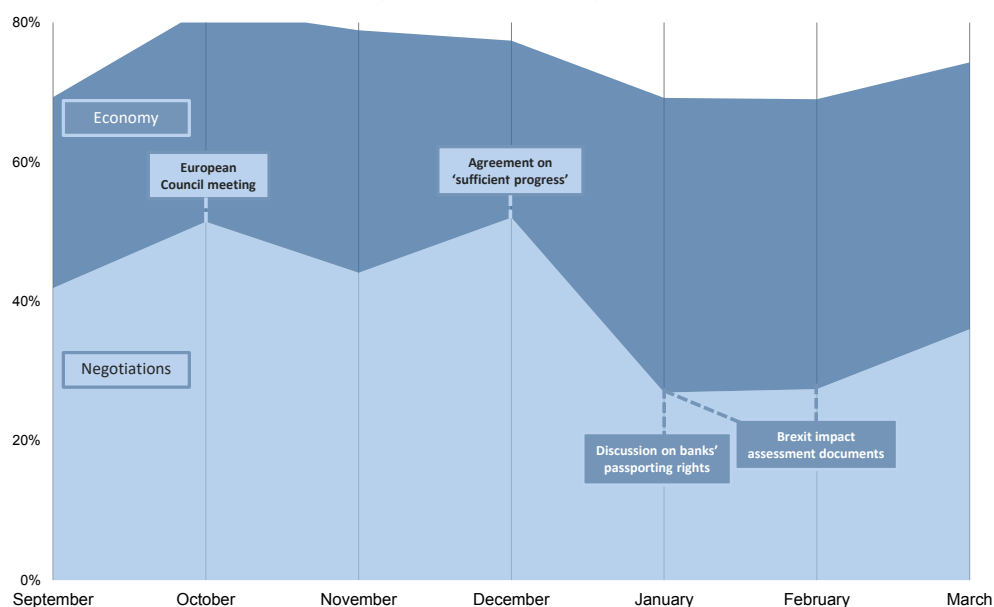
### 5.2 Topic Analysis and Sentiment on Specific Issues

The EU was founded on shared economic interest, but its vision has always been political. After the end of World War II, political leaders, determined to not let Europeans wage war against each other ever again, started to build a network that was more than just diplomacy. The Coal and Steel Community was the first association knitting together European countries in 1951. Six years later, the Treaty of Rome marked the birth of the European Economic Union; the founding members were France, Italy, Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, and Germany.

The expansion of the EU was also often driven by economic considerations: battling the oil crisis, supporting financially weaker regions at the periphery, integrating Eastern European members after the fall of the Iron Curtain. The creation of the Eurozone in 1999 and the introduction of the euro as common currency in 2002 marked other stepping stones where shared economic interests were supposed to foster political convergence.

So it comes as no surprise that issues around the economy, business, and trade are at the core of media coverage of Brexit. Almost every second piece that dealt with specific issues had something to do with business, trade, and the economy (44%). From January to April, economy, business, and trade were mentioned even more often than negotiation-specific topics (which include coverage of the state of the negotiations, the negotiations meetings, and negotiation issues such as Northern Ireland, the so-called Brexit bill, and the transition period; see Figure 9). About two-thirds of the complete coverage focused on issues.

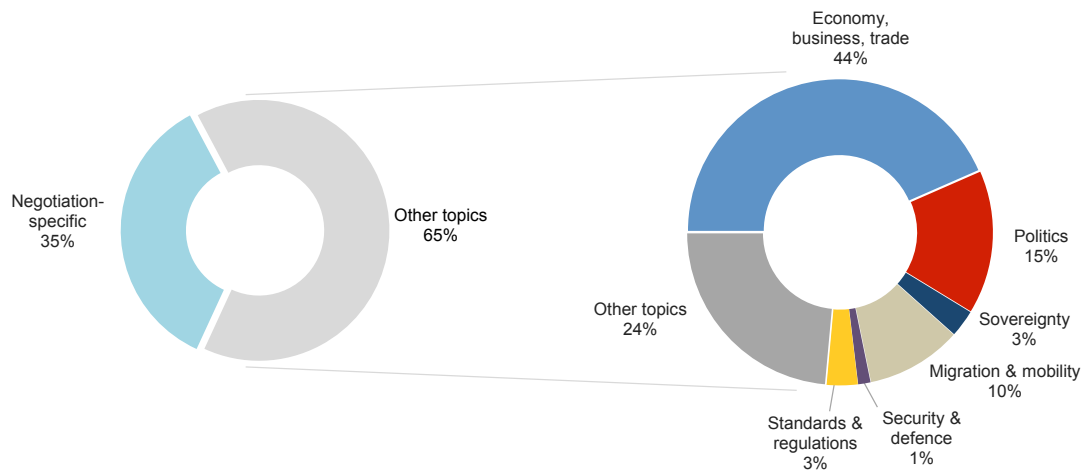
**Figure 9. Trend analysis | Economy vs negotiations coverage**



However, a major part of the coverage did not deal with specific topics: 35% of the coverage was explicitly focused on the Brexit negotiations between the EU and the UK. The negotiation-specific coverage predominantly dealt with the state and progress of the actual negotiations (26.2%), followed by meetings in Brussels (14.7%), Northern Ireland (13.9%), and the transition period (10.5%).

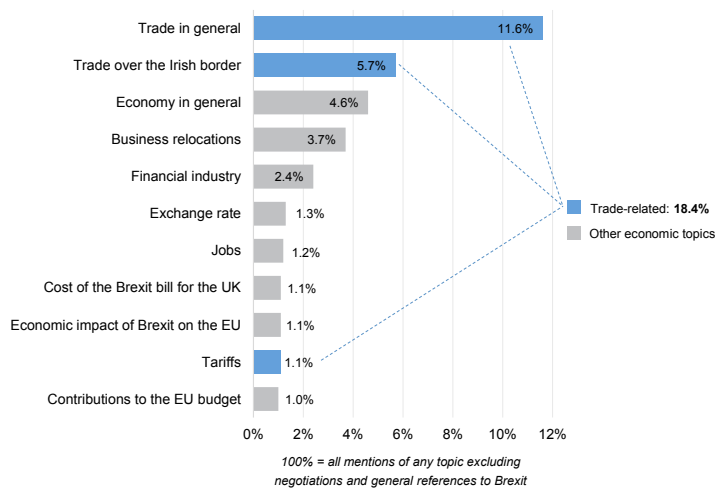
What is a little bit more surprising is that reporting about migration from non-EU countries into the EU, as well as the right of Europeans to move to other EU countries, took up very little room, a mere 10% of all issue-related coverage. Security and defence played a role in just 1% of the issue-related coverage. Interestingly, sovereignty (that is, an EU country's ability to make its own laws and decisions independent of the EU, a key issue for many Brexit supporters) was barely discussed at all (3%) (see Figure 10).<sup>8</sup>

**Figure 10. Topic analysis**



Our content analysis also allowed us to look at these topics at a more granular level, ranking the most relevant issues within each topic area. Looking at the more specific issues that drove the coverage, and excluding mentions about the progress of the negotiations or general references to Brexit, trade was by far the most discussed sub-topic (see Figure 11).

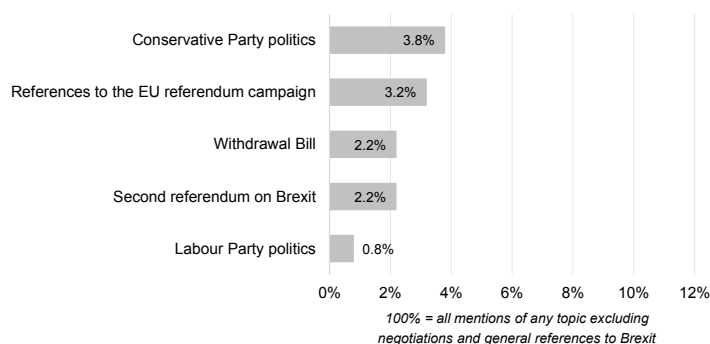
**Figure 11. Sub-topics analysis | Economy**



<sup>8</sup> With Irish media accounting for 40% of all media coverage we analysed, we felt it was important to assess whether the topic mix described above was influenced by Ireland's weight within the sample. We found that, by excluding Ireland, the results were broadly in line with the overall figures: the rest of the European countries appeared slightly more focused on the negotiations (+2%, to 37%), on politics (+4%, to 19%), and a little less interested in the economy (-4%, to 40%).

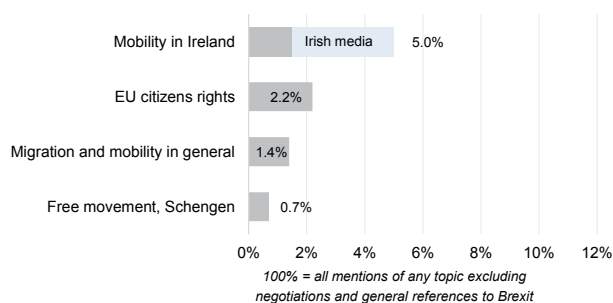
Taking the same approach, and examining the European media perspective on political topics relating to Brexit, we also identified an interesting mix of sub-topics. Developments within the Conservative Party were the most discussed, but the EU referendum campaign also kept being referenced by the media, often to compare and contrast some of the claims made during the campaign with the reality of the negotiations and the updates provided by the likes of Theresa May, Boris Johnson, and Jeremy Corbyn through their Brexit addresses. The Withdrawal Bill and its implications were also covered extensively, as was the possibility of a second referendum on Brexit. The Labour party, instead, was seen as a rather minor issue in relation to Brexit, even if the June 2017 snap elections created some unexpected momentum for the party (see Figure 12).

**Figure 12. Sub-topics analysis | Politics**



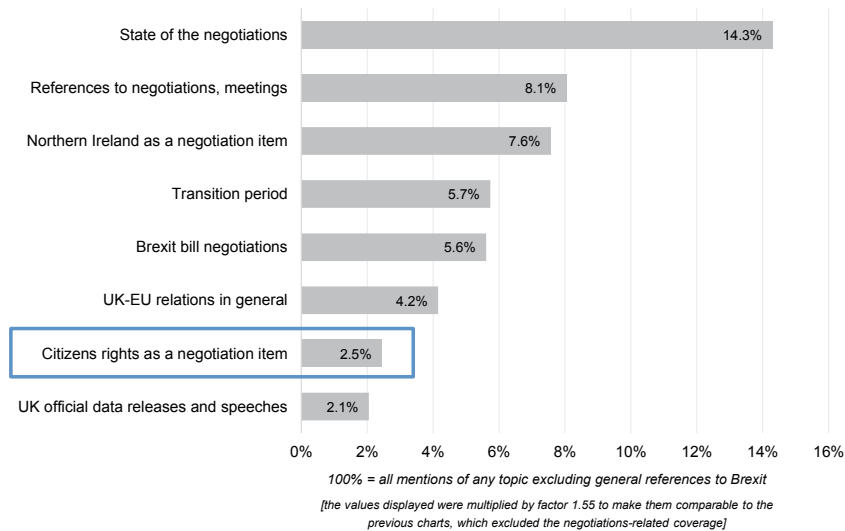
The discussion around migration and mobility, which took up 10% of all issue-related coverage, was instead dominated by the impact that Brexit will have on people's freedom to move between Ireland and Northern Ireland (5% of all the issue-specific coverage). This was clearly an important topic for the Irish media, which drove more than two-thirds of it. The right of EU citizens to stay in the UK ranked second, receiving only 2.2% of all sub-topic mentions within the broad category of migration and mobility (see Figure 13), which is less than the 3% of the overall coverage about the impact of EU standards and regulations on the EU 27 (see Figure 12).

**Figure 13. Sub-topics analysis | Migration and mobility**

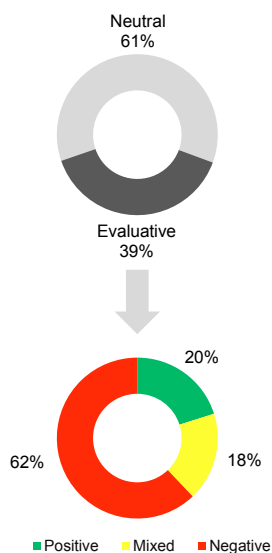


When we further examined this topic from the perspective of the negotiations, its relatively minor importance in the media debate was confirmed, as it received only a further 2.4% of the coverage – far less than, for instance, Northern Ireland, the discussions on a transition period, the Brexit bill, and of course more general matters such as the progress of the negotiations and references to the meetings (see Figure 14).



**Figure 14. Sub-topics analysis | Negotiations**

Our analysts also attributed a sentiment code<sup>9</sup> to each topic analysed, allowing us to understand how the various issues were being discussed by the media and what the media's general mood was in their Brexit coverage. In line with our findings in Section 4, we found that the media remained largely factual in discussing specific topics, such as the economy, in relation to Brexit (61% of the time). However, when the media evaluated them, their overall outlook was most often negative (62% of the time, versus only 20% positive and 18% mixed, see Figure 15).

**Figure 15. Sentiment analysis**

Negotiation-specific stories drove the highest ratio of positive coverage (just over 50% of the total), and drove particularly favourable evaluations in December, as the UK and the EU agreed that sufficient progress had been made in the negotiations. Although overall less visible than the negotiations, the economy drove the highest amount of negative assessments (39% of all negative evaluations).

In particular, the risk of inflation, mostly from the perspective of the UK and UK households, topped the list of sub-topics with the highest share of negative evaluations. Other economy-related topics with a strong

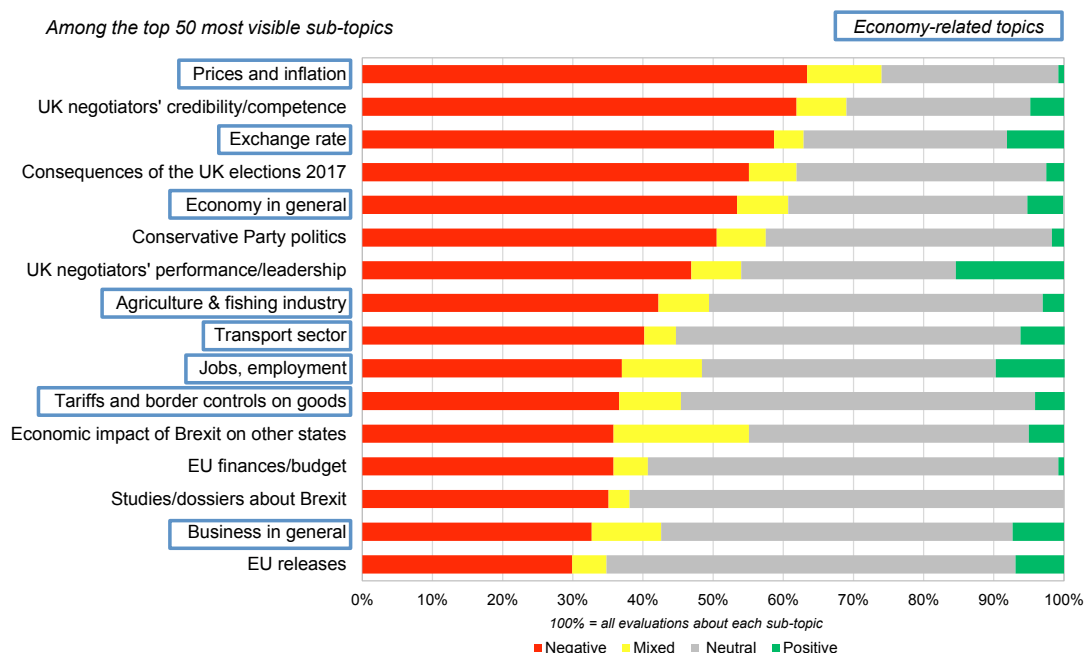
negative connotation were the exchange rate, the situation of the economy in general, specific concerns about the agricultural, fishing, and transportation industries, tariffs, and the job market (see Figure 16). A commentary from Spanish *El País* sums it up nicely (Vidal-Folch 2017):

*Almost all the prophecies formulated before the vote to leave the EU on June 23, 2016 have been fulfilled. Worse than thought. Since then, the pound has depreciated around 14%, without the corresponding export stimulus having improved growth. Salaries have dropped by 0.4% between*

<sup>9</sup> According to PRIME's standard seven-point scale (see Appendix B for further details).

August of last year and this one. The contribution of net foreign trade to growth, of three tenths, has fallen compared to the forecast, and the increase in investment has been less than expected. Worse still: inflation has grown around two points, and will end the year up 2.7%, much more than the recommended 2%.

**Figure 16. Most negative sub-topics**



More than half of the reporting on trade issues unsurprisingly came from Irish media, and Germany, with a vested interest particularly in the automotive sector, came in second. The coverage on business relocation was expectedly dominated by German, Irish, Italian, and French media. One big issue in this context was the relocation of the European Banking Authority (EBA) (Paris won over Frankfurt) and the European Medicines Agency (EMA) (Amsterdam won over Milan and Dublin), a decision made in late November 2017. In Sweden, medical giant AstraZeneca's refocusing of its activities from the UK to Sweden drew quite a bit of interest.

## 6. Different Perspectives – Who is Interested in What?

### 6.1 Summary

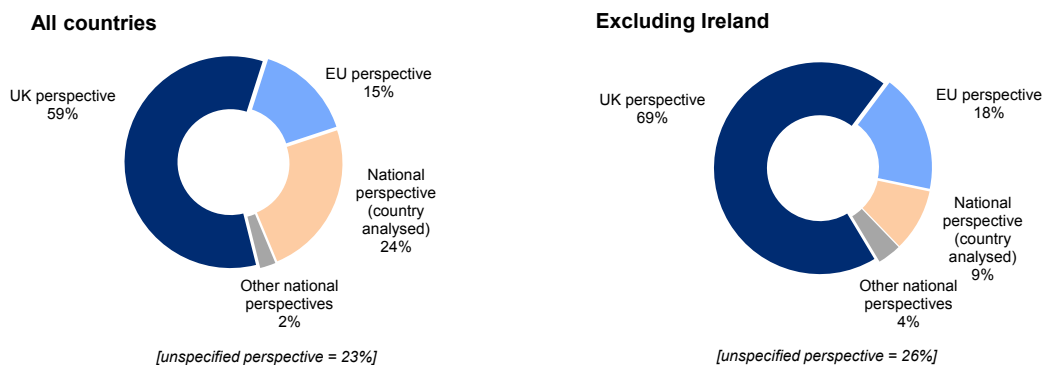
'How does it affect us as a country?' One could imagine this to be among the first questions asked when it comes to a major political shake-up like Brexit, both inside and outside of the UK. Europeans are closely intertwined, not only through trade relations but also through shared regulation and the free movement of citizens. Consequently, our analysis looked at the Brexit coverage in each individual country in our sample. In general, we found that:

- Apart from Ireland, the impact of Brexit on one's own country did not dominate the coverage. Most of the coverage dealt with the challenges the UK itself will be facing, rather than what Brexit means for each respective country.
- Most countries range between the extremes of the very self-confident France, which hardly feels affected by Brexit and even sees it as an opportunity, and the extremely concerned Ireland, which worries about its own future as an island divided by an EU border.
- Worries about the future of the EU are limited, but interestingly the EU perspective was most pronounced in Greece and Sweden.
- The ratio between fact-based reporting and commentary in the different countries is most likely much more determined by reporting tradition than by different stakes in the subject.

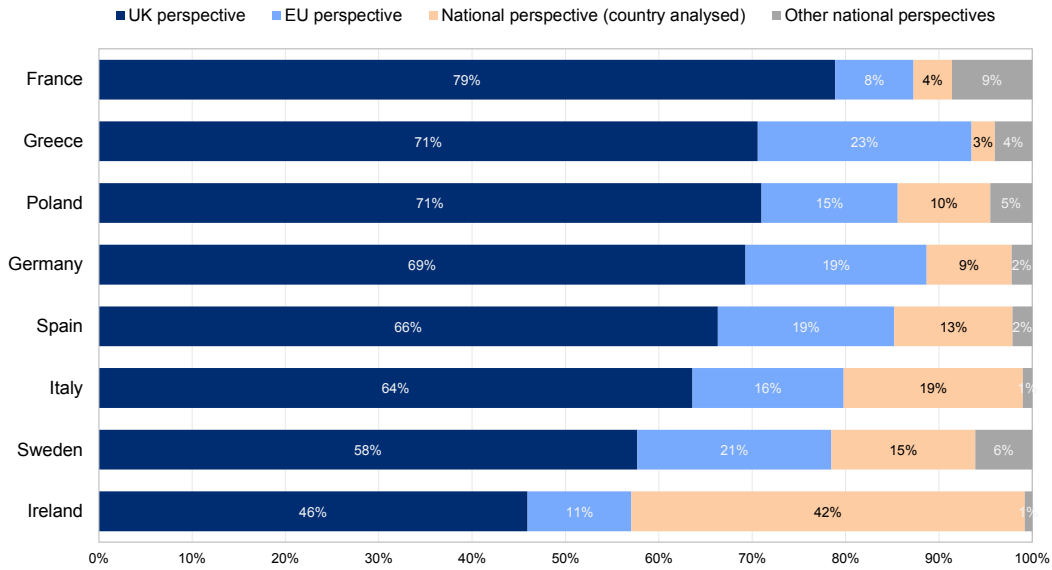
In general, 59% of the coverage where a distinctive perspective could be detected focused on the UK perspective and how Brexit would affect the UK. Only 15% of the overall coverage across countries was focused on the EU, and 24% saw Brexit through a national prism. Understandably, however, the impact of the Irish media on these figures is noteworthy: by excluding those, the other European countries even more often focus on the perspective of the UK in discussing Brexit (+10%, to 69%). The EU-wide viewpoint is also more common (+3%, to 18%), while expectedly the share of coverage concerned with the impact of Brexit on the respective country analysed is much more limited (–15%, to 9%), a finding that yet again points to the very central role of the Irish issue in the Brexit negotiations and the Irish media's awareness of the deep implications of Brexit for their country (see Figure 17).

In the following sections, we will take a closer look at the coverage in sample countries, commenting on the overall coverage perspective and individual topics of concern.

**Figure 17. Coverage perspectives**

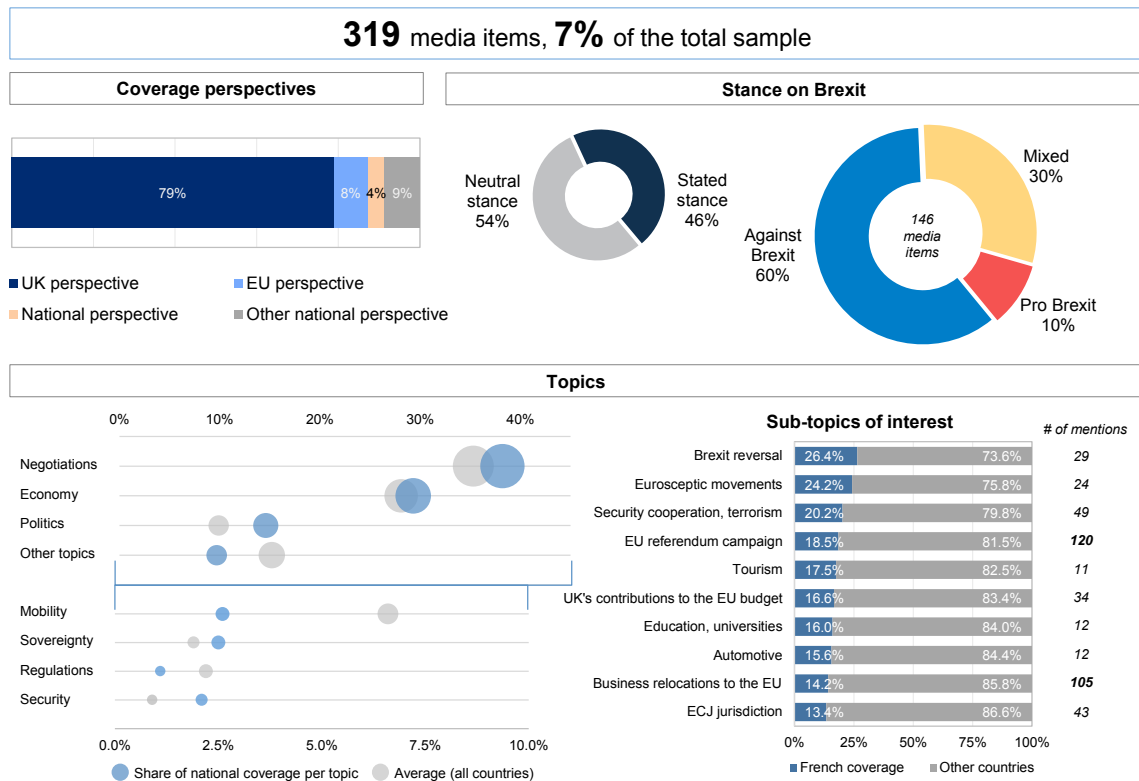


**Figure 18. Coverage perspectives by country**



## 6.2 France

**Figure 19. Country overview: France**



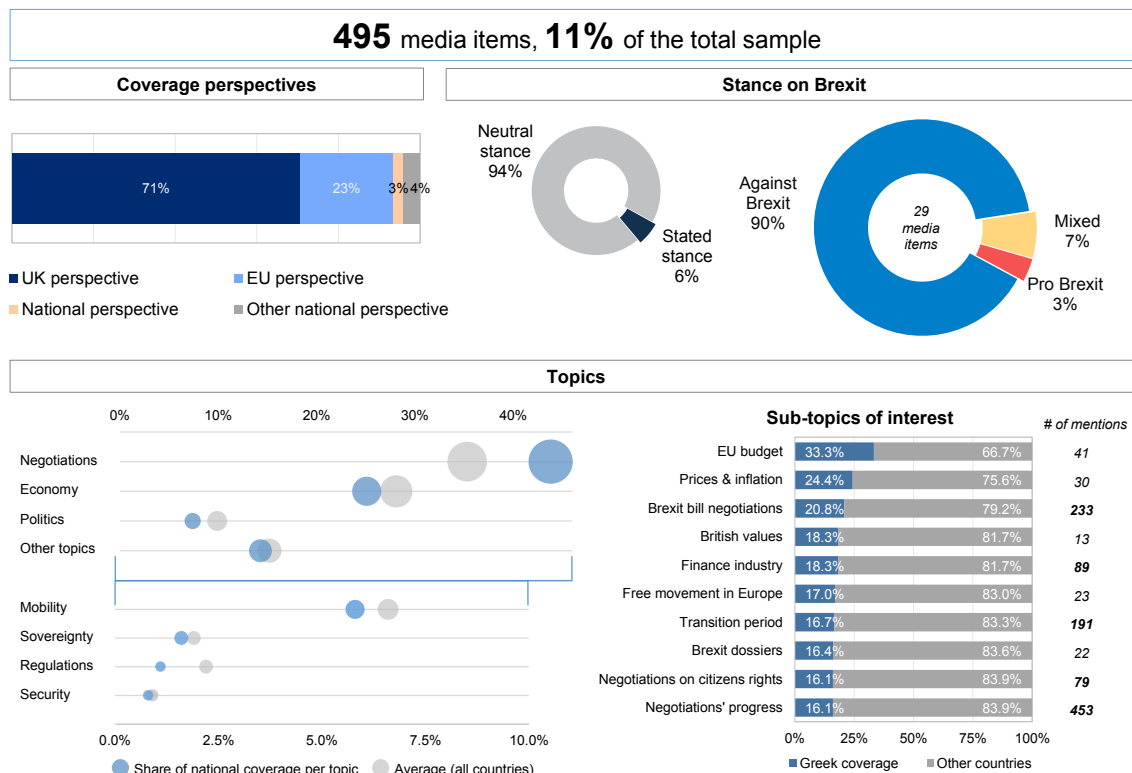
Almost 80% of all items published on Brexit in French outlets focused on the UK perspective. The French newspaper *Le Figaro* called Brexit a 'Westminster psychodrama', with the UK primarily debating Brexit among themselves instead of negotiating it with the EU. It is a finding that fits with observations that the French have always been rather indifferent about the UK as a member of the EU and have doubted its contributions (Lequesne 2017). Losing the UK as an EU partner is not an issue that has much concerned French society. Brexit appears a manageable issue as long as it does not affect the principles of European integration, which means the integrity of the single market and the budgetary burden sharing.

Looking at how French media reported about Brexit in general, 46% of the articles took a stance on the topic, with 60% of these arguing against Brexit (see Figure 19). Despite eurosceptic parties on the left and the right, most voters do not necessarily support a 'Frexit'. Exiting the EU is considered a UK idiosyncrasy rather than an example that France should follow. French President Emmanuel Macron even views Brexit as an opportunity for France to relaunch the EU together with Germany. It has often been said that the most vocal opponents of Brexit in France are fishermen. In 2017, vessels in northern France, Normandy, and Brittany made 50 percent of their catches in UK waters, representing a revenue of €110 million per year. French fishermen, therefore, want to keep their fishing rights in UK waters. However, we could only find limited evidence for this in our study, with only a handful of articles discussing the issue.

The most visible topic in France's coverage was the economy and trade relationships. While the volume of trade with the UK is less important than with Germany, the French business community wants the free movement of goods and services between the two countries to remain easy. Senior bankers also regularly stress that Paris must attract financial firms based in London that do not want to lose passporting rights. Interestingly, the fate of the nearly 300,000 French citizens living and working in the UK did not seem to trouble the French media, with their future not making it into the most visible topics. This, however, might be explained by the view of some in France that London-based expats largely decided to cross the Channel in order to avoid paying French taxes (Lequesne 2017).

### 6.3 Greece

**Figure 20. Country overview: Greece**



Greece has had a difficult but intense relationship with the EU, particularly because of the deep economic restructuring that became necessary as a consequence of the financial crisis. This might explain why the Brexit coverage is comparatively extensive. References were found in 495 items. This is 11% of total coverage and thus almost as intense as in Germany (14% and second after

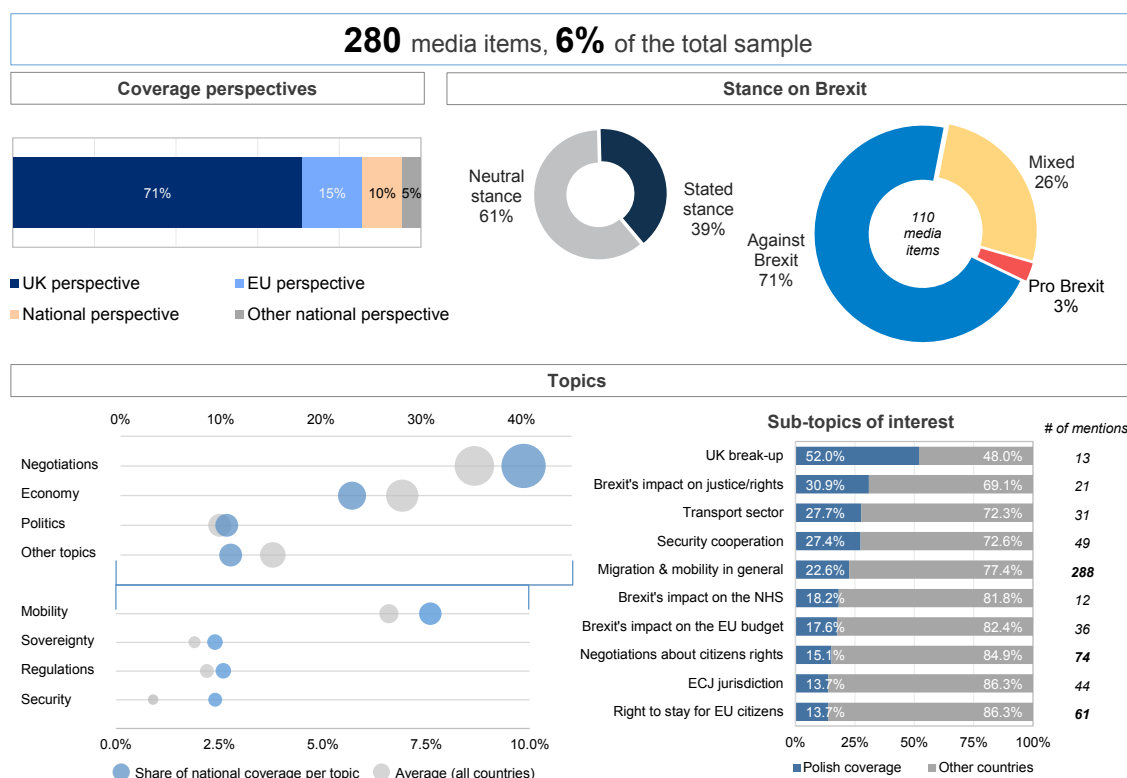
Ireland) and of similar intensity to the Spanish media. It still focuses on the UK perspective (71% of all articles, see Figure 20), at times with a certain glee: 'The financial cost of Brexit will hit Britain much harder than the rest of the EU', *Kathimerini* commented (2017).

Media, in general, tried to emphasise the dire consequences the UK will face from Brexit. One can only suspect that the intention is to deter EU-critical Greeks from pursuing a similar route. *Kathimerini*, for example, on 19 October 2017 came in with the sub-headline 'Some express fears that there could be shortages even in supermarkets' and emphasised quotes that Brexit would cost the UK economy 'tens of billions' (*Kathimerini* & Bloomberg 2017). In.gr called Brexit 'a disaster' for UK universities (Petropoulou 2017), and *To Vima* quoted the OECD saying 'Should Brexit stop, the UK economy would do amazing' (*To Vima* 2017).

In spite of some opinionated articles such as these, Greek media remained overwhelmingly factual, with only 6% or 29 of all articles taking a stance on Brexit. However, out of these 6%, 90% of the articles advocated against Brexit or viewed Brexit negatively; there was just one item with an endorsement (see Figure 20). Apart from the progress of the negotiations, trade is an important issue for the Greek media. This might be explained by the UK being its second most important export market for pharmaceuticals and the third largest for agricultural products. Citizen rights played a lesser role in the coverage, as did migration.

## 6.4 Poland

**Figure 21. Country overview: Poland**



For Poland, membership of the EU, as well as membership of NATO, is of strategic importance. The country also benefits financially from the EU (it is the largest net recipient of EU funds), which it joined in 2004 after a ten-year process (Szczerbiak 2017). Consequently, the Polish press could be expected to voice a lot of concern about Brexit from a national perspective. First of all, an estimated 900,000 Polish citizens live and work in the UK and their fate currently remains unclear.

Second, with the UK leaving the EU, resources will have to be redistributed, and Poland might have to share some of the burden – a red rag for the country's governing Law and Justice Party PiS for which, according to EU President Donald Tusk, 'the benefit of being in the EU boils down to the balance of payments, with a complete disregard for other benefits like the common market, legal order, guaranteed security, etc.' (Agence France-Presse 2018). Third, Brexit is a concern for Poland as the PiS will find itself without its main partner in the European parliament when the UK's Conservative MEPs leave (Szczerbiak 2017) – at a time 'when its standing in Brussels is not at its peak, weakened by an unprecedented standoff with the European Commission over the rule of law' as the *Guardian* writes (Rankin et al. 2018).

Yet the assumption that the Polish press would voice a lot of concern about Brexit from a national perspective held only partly true. Just about one in ten items in the Polish media emphasised the national perspective (10%), compared with 71% focusing on the implications of Brexit for the UK and 15% dealing with the EU perspective (see Figure 21). When it came to expressing an opinion on Brexit, however, Polish media were very outspoken. Only 61% of the articles remained neutral, whereas 39% took a stance that was predominantly anti-Brexit (71% of the time) (see Figure 21). It is a finding that puts Poland's media at odds with a more eurosceptic government and a population that largely wants to remain in the EU but where 51% would support a referendum on the country's membership (Stokes et al. 2017).

Looking at the most visible topics in the Polish media, only 3% of the Polish coverage dealt with citizen rights and the rights of Poles to stay in the UK following the country's departure from the block – a surprising finding, given the at times hostile atmosphere towards Poles living in the UK before and after the referendum. 'It is not the first time in history that the blame for the state's failures and flaws has been placed on foreigners', *Rzeczpospolita* commented on 13 October, clearly referring to the immigration issue in the UK. Nevertheless, instead of showing a strong concern for the future of their compatriots in the UK, the Polish press was more interested in the state of the negotiations and the impact of Brexit on trade and the economy – an understandable focus, given that Poland would like to keep the UK close to the EU and sees the country as an important trading partner (see Figure 21) (Ahmed 2018).

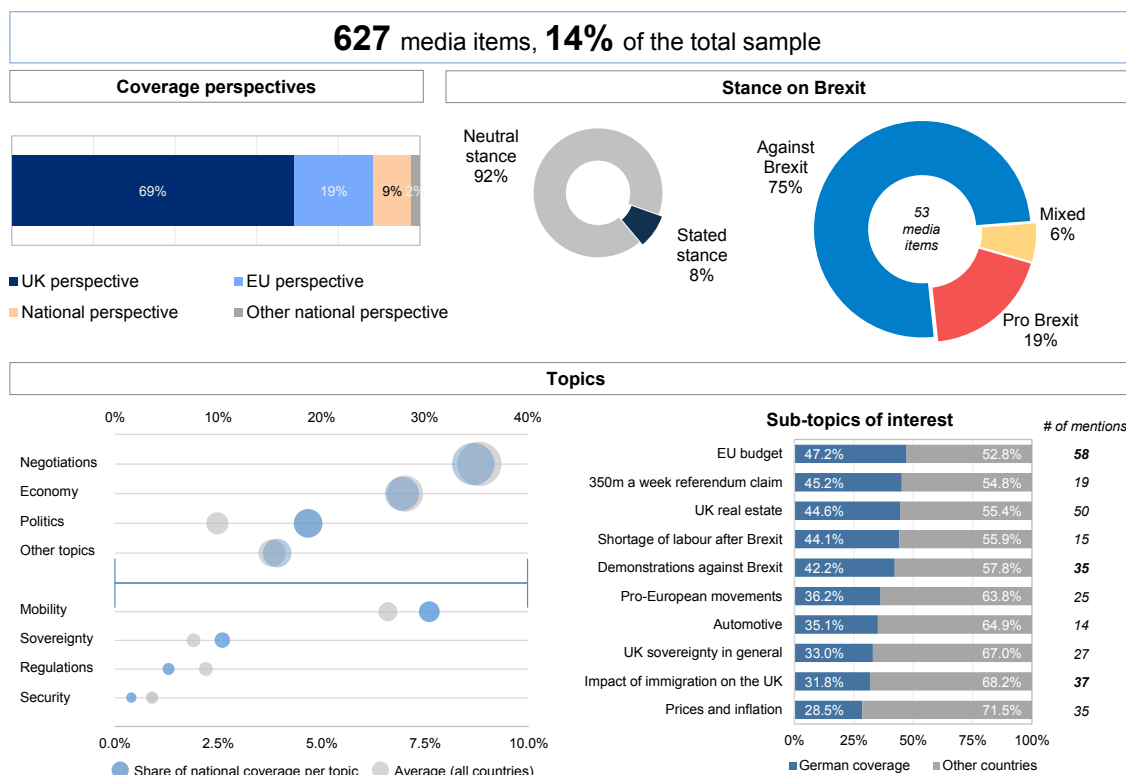
## 6.5 Germany

Germany, coming in second after Ireland in sheer volume of Brexit coverage, devoted almost 70% of all articles on Brexit and the negotiations to the UK perspective. Traditionally, German media have strong foreign policy desks and correspondents in the UK, which helps to explain the strong coverage of political developments in the UK. The EU perspective consumed about one-fifth of the coverage (19%), while the national context played a minor role (9%) (see Figure 22). The strong focus on the EU can be explained by Germany's general attitude towards the UK following the Brexit referendum. Contrary to what some politicians in the UK have argued, Germany has advocated against a bespoke arrangement between the EU and the UK. While the UK is an important trading partner and Germany sees the departure of the UK as a loss, 'Germany's top priority is to ensure that Brexit does not weaken the EU, and that means the UK must not be allowed any kind of special arrangements that could undermine the European institutions' (Grant 2017).

Looking at how German media reported on Brexit in general, 92% of the articles did not take a pronounced stance on the topic, but of the 8% that did, 75% argued against Brexit (see Figure 22). In line with Germany's interest in a strong EU and the integrity of the single market, the state of the negotiations and sufficient progress in the negotiations took centre stage in the coverage (13.3%) of German media. As outlined above, Germany has a strong interest in preventing what German politicians see as 'cherry picking', that is the UK achieving a bespoke deal according to

its wishes. In this context, both Germany's politicians and the German media have frequently expressed puzzlement that UK policymakers hope Germany will go the extra mile to help the UK achieve good deals on withdrawal and the future UK–EU relationship (Barber 2018). Another topic that has frequently cropped up in the coverage of the negotiations is amazement at, as the FT's Tony Barber describes it succinctly, 'how ill-prepared British politicians were for the talks, how ignorant they were of basic facts about how the EU works and, consequently, how unrealistic their negotiating positions have been' (Barber 2018).

**Figure 22. Country overview: Germany**



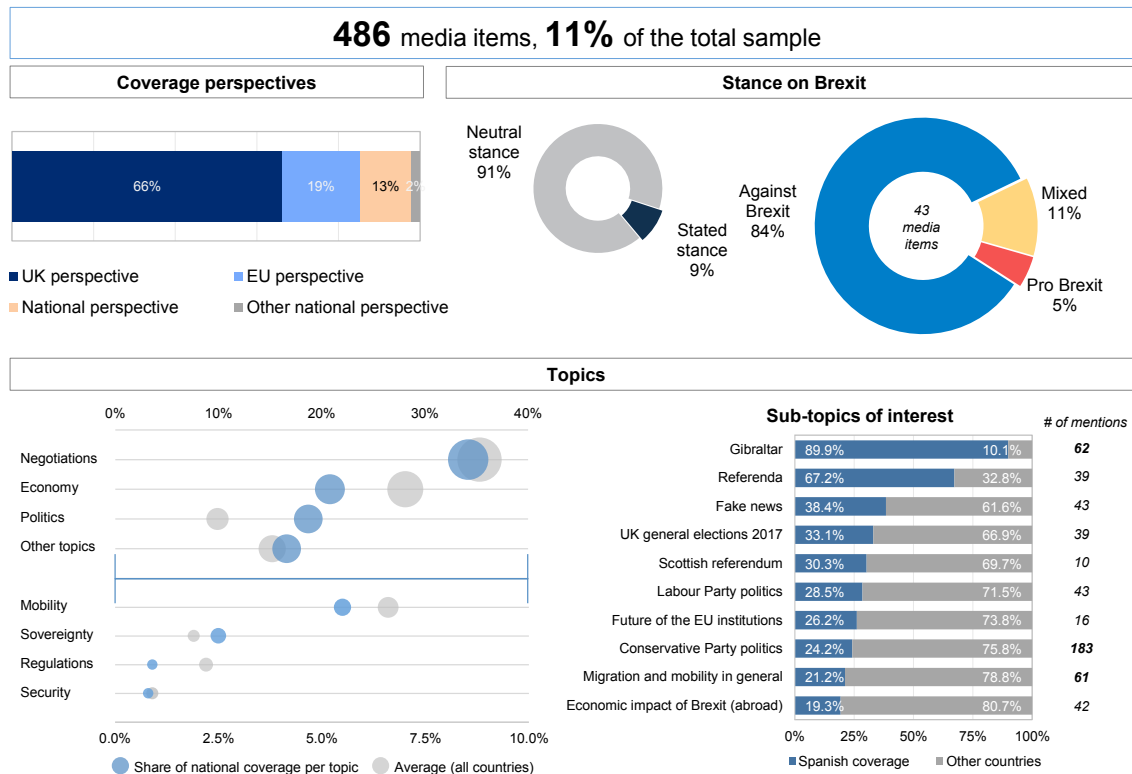
The second and third most prominent topics in the German media were trade (9.2%), followed by the future after Brexit in general (6.5%) (see Figure 22). Trade is a particularly important issue for Germany in the Brexit negotiations. The value of trade between Germany and the UK amounted to 121 billion euros in 2017, and Germany has the largest trade surplus with the UK of any country in the EU (roughly 47 billion euros in 2017). Consequently, Germany stands to lose the most from a chaotic UK exit from the EU (Riedel & Wallace 2018). While large German companies have contingency plans in place, smaller businesses in particular, which never had to deal with a border between the UK and the EU, would likely suffer as a result.

As for interest in the future after Brexit in general, a possible explanation is the changing nature of Germany's role within the EU. Germany and German politicians are wary of the changing power dynamics within the EU post-Brexit and are anxious to prevent further upheaval. Germany, together with France, will be one of the two main heavyweights in the EU – a prospect that is seen as both a chance and a challenge. Germany is all too aware of the consequences of being seen as too powerful. At the same time, the country is unwilling to concede too much of its present say, especially in light of demands by French President Emmanuel Macron to rejuvenate the EU.



## 6.6 Spain

**Figure 23. Country overview: Spain**



In Spain's media coverage of Brexit and the negotiations, 66% was focused on the UK, with 19% devoted to the EU and 13% to their own country (see Figure 23). The last percentage can, among other things, be seen in the context of Spain's relationship with the UK when it comes to Gibraltar, which poses a unique issue in the Brexit negotiations. While more than 90% of the citizens of Gibraltar would like to stay attached to the UK, nowhere else did Remainers have such a strong majority (also over 90%) (O'Grady 2018). After the Brexit referendum, some Spanish politicians argued for Gibraltar to be jointly governed by Spain and the UK (BBC 2016). Spain is currently fighting for further concessions over Gibraltar (Barigazzi 2018).

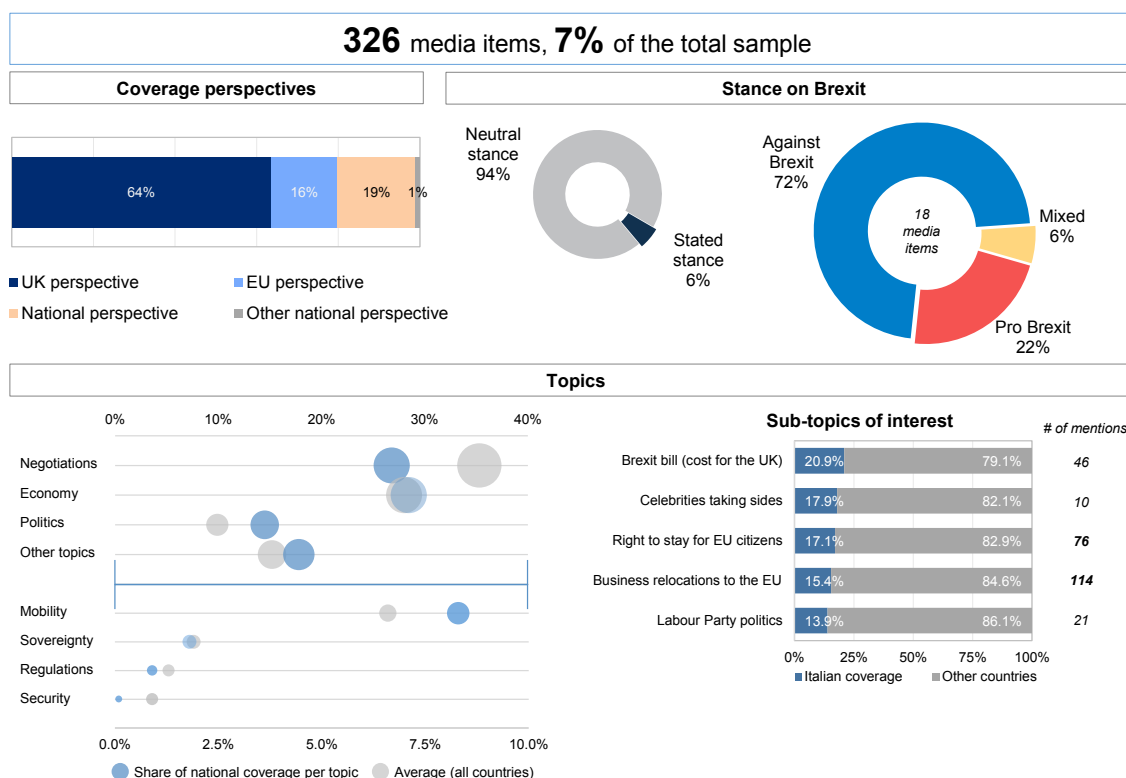
Looking at how Spanish media reported on Brexit in general, 91% of the articles did not take a pronounced stance on the topic, but of the 9% that did, 84% argued against Brexit (see Figure 23). Brexit is seen as a disaster for the UK by Spanish commentators. But the negative stance on Brexit is not only due to its effects on the UK: Spain, too, will experience the results of the Brexit referendum. For one, Brexit poses possible negative consequences for the Spanish economy. In recent times, Spain has been one of the biggest investors in the UK economy and is one of the UK's most important trading partners. Spain's autonomous regions fear stalling investment, fewer tourists, and a drop in food industry exports to the UK. As *El País* notes, Spanish regions would also be negatively affected by an EU budget reduced through the UK's departure (Abellán 2018).

Other issues at stake are, for instance, the situation of more than 100,000 Spaniards living in the UK whose future, like those of other Europeans in the UK, remains unclear. Tourism plays a major role in the relationship between both countries, with millions of Britons visiting Spain every year. On the Balearic Islands, 80% of the region's GDP is dependent on tourism and 'any change in the freedom of movement [of European citizens] will be felt, given that 25% of tourists are from the UK' (Abellán 2018).

Finally, Spain has the largest community of UK expats in Europe – roughly 300,000 as of 2014 (Wikipedia 2018) – many of them pensioners who have decided to retire in the country (LSE 2018). Not only is their future at stake, as it is unclear whether they will receive access to Spanish healthcare or other benefits post-Brexit, but many are reportedly considering returning to the UK, something that would potentially hit local communities (Zafra 2018). It is unclear how the Catalan independence movement has influenced the Brexit debate in Spain's media. Yet it is conceivable that the strong stance against Brexit is partly due to a national interest in painting Brexit scenarios in the darkest colours, to discourage the separatists. In this context, it should be noted that Spanish media also had an above-average interest in the referendum on Scotland's independence.

## 6.7 Italy

**Figure 24. Country overview: Italy**



Italian media were moderately interested in Brexit, less so than their counterparts in Spain and Greece but more than the French. Italy was one of the countries that discussed Brexit and the negotiations with a comparatively strong focus on the national and EU perspectives. While 64% of the coverage focused on the UK, 19% of the articles dealt with Brexit in the context of the implications for Italy (see Figure 24). This is not too surprising, given that the country was facing a national election during the study period and there had been plenty of concerns about anti-EU sentiment in the run-up to the election. But even though the eurosceptical parties gained at the ballot box, there was ultimately no indication that Italy could make a move towards leaving the EU (Behr 2018).

The political developments of recent years help to put the Italian Brexit coverage in context. Italy is a founding member of the EU and could be considered to be particularly attached to it, yet public opinion towards the EU is mixed. The European Council of Foreign Relations recently ranked Italy 23rd out of 28 when it came to individual support for the EU (Delcker 2018), down from tenth a decade ago, whereas a 2017 Pew survey showed that 34% of Italians would like to

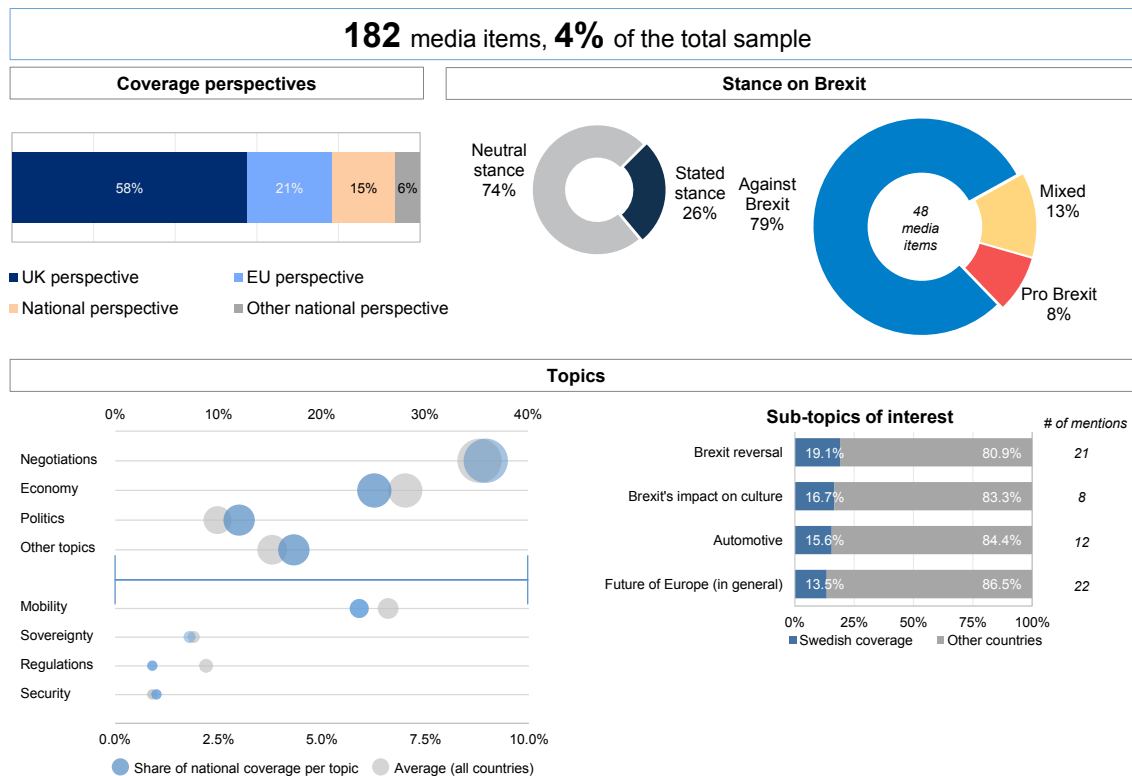
leave the EU, a percentage second only to Greece (Stokes et al. 2017; Pastorella 2018). It is no wonder then that Italian media should put an emphasis on the EU and the national perspective in their Brexit coverage. However, our analysis also reveals a possible discrepancy between public opinion and the stance taken by Italian media. While the media overwhelmingly remained neutral in their Brexit coverage (94% of the time), when they took a stance it was predominantly against Brexit (72% of the time, see Figure 24).

Looking at the topics of particular interest to Italian media, the focus on business and trade was not as pronounced in Italy as it was elsewhere, even though the UK ranks fourth as Italy's most important export destination. In comparison, there was more coverage of citizens' rights than trade and other economic issues (see Figure 24). Quite a bit of attention with respect to employment gains was focused on the relocation of the European Medicines Agency. Milan was a strong contender but in the end, lost out to Amsterdam.

Finally, an interesting detail revealed by our analysis was how Italian media reported on Brexit in the context of migration and mobility. A key driver of the coverage in this area was Theresa May's Florence speech on 22 September 2017, during which she sought to reassure European citizens that they are welcome to remain in the EU. The Italian media, however, seemed concerned by a reported rise in EU nationals being expelled from the UK. A commentator in *Il Corriere della Sera*, for example, wrote, 'London's authorities adopted a discriminatory behaviour towards EU citizens' (Ippolito 2017), and a headline in *Panorama* even described a phenomenon of 'Brexodus: escape from London' (Degl'Innocenti 2017), with coverage hinting at a possible brain drain for the UK.<sup>10</sup>

## 6.8 Sweden

**Figure 25. Country overview: Sweden**



After Ireland and Italy, Sweden was the country that put most emphasis on the national perspective in the context of Brexit and the negotiations (15% of all articles). One reason might be

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, the letter in Concita De Gregorio's *La Repubblica* column (De Gregorio 2017).

domestic fears that Brexit could encourage many Swedes to demand a referendum as well, a vote on a 'Swexit' (see Figure 25) (Savage 2016). Another reason for the strong national focus might be the UK and Sweden's close relationship in the past. Both countries often sided together on crucial policy issues in the EU and have refused to enter the Eurozone, instead retaining their national currencies. For Sweden, Brexit means the loss of a close ally within the EU; there is some fear that post-Brexit EU could be even more dominated by the core countries that are also members of the Eurozone. While public support for the EU in Sweden has risen after the Brexit referendum (only 22% of Swedish voters want to leave the EU) (Stokes et al. 2017), a successful UK exit could encourage anti-EU forces in the country to demand alternatives to full membership, namely 'a British model' that might include a few benefits for lower costs. Ultimately, much will depend on the outcome of the current negotiations (Hix & Sitter 2018).

The most telling fact from the Swedish analysis is the comparatively low interest in the topic as such. In the seven-month period studied a mere 182 Swedish news items addressed Brexit; that amounted to only 4% of the complete Brexit coverage, the lowest share of all countries analysed (but some of this is due to a lack of a political magazine, which meant we looked at only four sources in Sweden). Looking at how Swedish media reported on Brexit in general, 26% of the articles took a stance on the topic, with 79% of these arguing against Brexit, a finding that emphasises the above-mentioned concerns. A mere four news items were in favour of the UK leaving the EU (see Figure 25). The topics of most interest to Swedish media were the individual meetings in Brussels, the state of the negotiations, and the question of sufficient progress. Sweden is particularly interested in a soft Brexit, and it has been argued that Sweden should aim to keep the UK in the common market and to maintain as close political links with the UK as possible (Andersson & Jonung 2016).

Other important topics were jobs and employment and trade. The former might be explained by Anglo-Swedish medical giant AstraZeneca's plans to refocus its activities from the UK to Sweden as soon as the UK leaves the EU. AstraZeneca has confirmed that it will have to invest £21.2m to build new facilities in Sweden to ensure it can still sell drugs across Europe after Brexit (*The Local* 2017). The company fears that drugs developed in the UK will also have to be tested in the EU if a hard Brexit means the European Medicines Agency no longer covers the UK. AstraZeneca has also bemoaned the lack of clarity on the UK's future relationship with the EU, with its CEO calling the investment 'wasted money' better spent developing drugs (Meddings 2018). This is easier to explain, as the UK is one of Sweden's most important trading partners, both for imports and exports in goods as well as services. For a country strongly interested in free trade, the loss of the UK comes as a considerable disadvantage (Stellinger 2018).

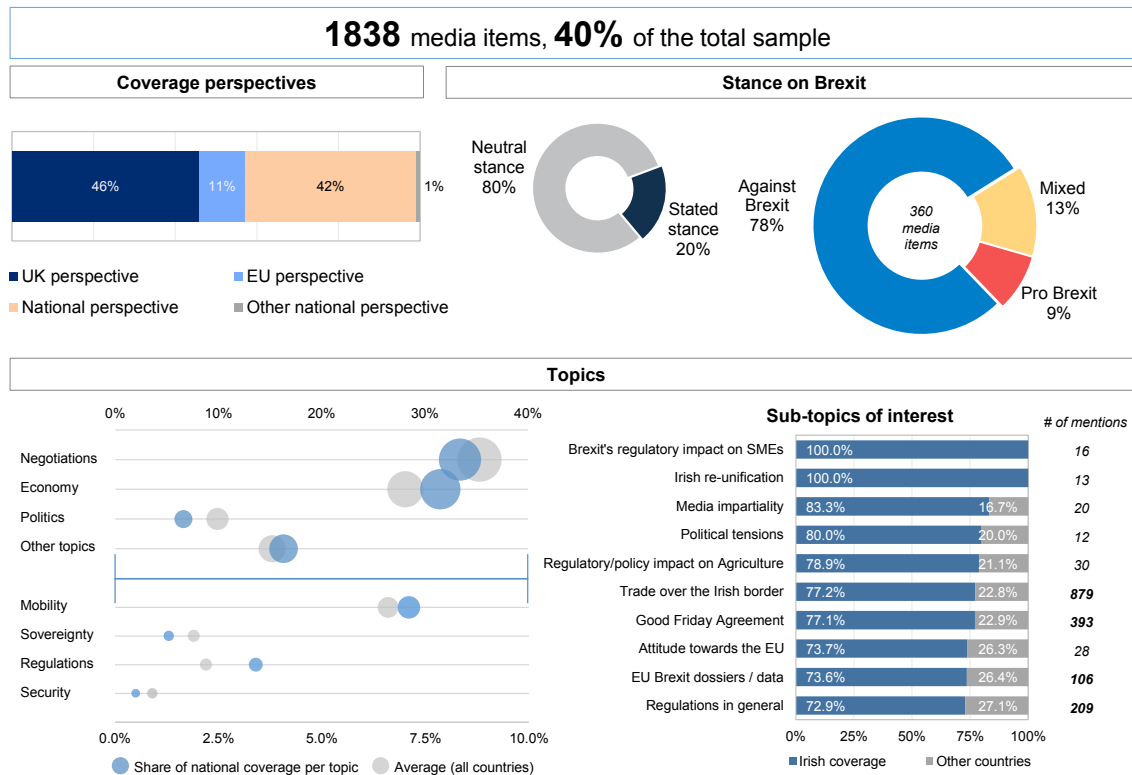
## 6.9 Ireland

The Irish perspective on Brexit and the negotiations is shaped by the special situation around the border to Northern Ireland. There are about 275 land border crossings between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. In comparison, there are just 137 crossings along the whole eastern EU border from Finland to Greece. The agricultural sector, in particular, will be affected by the outcome of the negotiations. It is enough to look at milk and chicken production to illustrate how deeply any new rules and regulations would interfere with daily life. Roughly one-third of the milk produced in Northern Ireland is processed in the Republic of Ireland, while 40% of the chickens raised in the south are processed north of the border. Concern is widespread, as shown by the *Irish Times* on 5 September quoting Lord Peter Hain, former NI Secretary under Tony Blair:

*The government invites us to believe that this long, winding and porous external EU customs frontier can be safely left unpoliced. Smugglers, customs fraudsters, people traffickers and*

terrorists will behave impeccably out of respect for Irish solidarity. Small companies accounting for 80 percent of cross-Border business don't matter. Large ones will nobly abide by all the rules and standards required of the single market, and voluntarily pay all their tariff duties.

**Figure 26. Country overview: Ireland**



The UK leaving the customs union would be 'reckless and dangerous', the *Irish Independent* commented. 'We could face a crash into chaos and confusion.' Media coverage assumed that a hard Brexit would mean a hard border, and the relationship with the UK would inevitably deteriorate, with a return of violence being the worst-case scenario. So there is much more at stake than just business relations and daily irritations. Addressing members of the Irish parliament in Dublin on 21 September 2017, the European parliament's Brexit coordinator, Guy Verhofstadt, said:

*We will never allow Ireland to suffer from the British decision to leave the EU.*

All people born in Northern Ireland are entitled to Irish, and thus EU, citizenship. In a resolution adopted on 3 October 2017, MEPs stressed that 'no obstacles or impediments' should prevent people in Northern Ireland from fully exercising their rights to EU citizenship (European Parliament 2017).

Consequently, it is unsurprising that the Irish media put the greatest emphasis on the national perspective (42% of all articles) out of all sampled countries (see Figure 26). Given the vital interest Ireland has in the topic, it can be regarded as a particular act of journalistic restraint that 80% of the coverage remained neutral and attempted to merely inform the public about the facts, in particular, the progress of the negotiations (see Figure 26).

## 6.10 Conclusion

There are two extreme cases of Brexit coverage in the eight countries examined. On the one hand, we have Ireland with a vested national interest in the Brexit process, outlined at several points in this report. Ireland can be seen as somewhat of an outlier; but on the other hand, it was interesting to include the country in this study because it set an example of high-intensity coverage the other cases can be compared against. The opposite end of the spectrum is inhabited by France, a self-confident nation that feels the EU has more to gain from Brexit than to lose. All other countries can be grouped somewhere between those two extremes. Germany, as one of the core EU members, predictably displays a high level of interest in all aspects and perspectives of Brexit, but so do other member states like Greece or Spain, albeit for different reasons.

However, it would be a mistake to conclude from the findings that an emphasis on the UK perspective means that there are no national worries. Quite the opposite. Media that paint the UK picture in particularly dark colours might pursue a different kind of goal: to deter the citizens of their countries from even thinking about an exit from the EU. Therefore, the near absence of commentary does not necessarily imply that no opinions are conveyed. Headlines can convey lots of opinions, even if a text is merely about facts. It is safe to say though that, at least in media coverage, there is no indication of anybody hailing the UK example and pursuing a similar route. Unlike in the UK, where quite a few media outlets fuelled anti-EU sentiment before the referendum, there seems to be a strong awareness in European media about where such an expression of frustration might lead. It seems that at least the media organisations in our sample see their role in bringing facts to the conversation and also keeping separatist tendencies at bay.

Finally, it is worth pointing out the differences between the view taken by Europe's media and the European public when it comes to Brexit and its implications for the EU. Where they adopted a position, the media in our sample were overwhelmingly against Brexit (71%), a finding that is in tune with public opinion. According to a 2017 Pew survey, few citizens on the European Continent are eager to see their own country depart the EU (a median of just 18% in the nine EU nations surveyed in the Pew study was in favour of their own country leaving the EU). Eurobarometer's latest poll in November 2017 reached similar conclusions. Yet something not reflected in the coverage is the desire of many EU citizens to have their voice heard through their own referendum on EU membership. According to Pew, majorities in Spain (65%), France (61%), Greece (58%), and Italy (57%) would support such a national vote, and roughly half of Swedes (53%), Poles (51%), and Germans (50%) agree too (Stokes et al. 2017). Despite all this, it can be argued that European media are largely in step with public opinion about Brexit in their respective countries, countering notions of detached media that fail to grasp public opinion.

## 7. Who Was Cited in the EU Press?

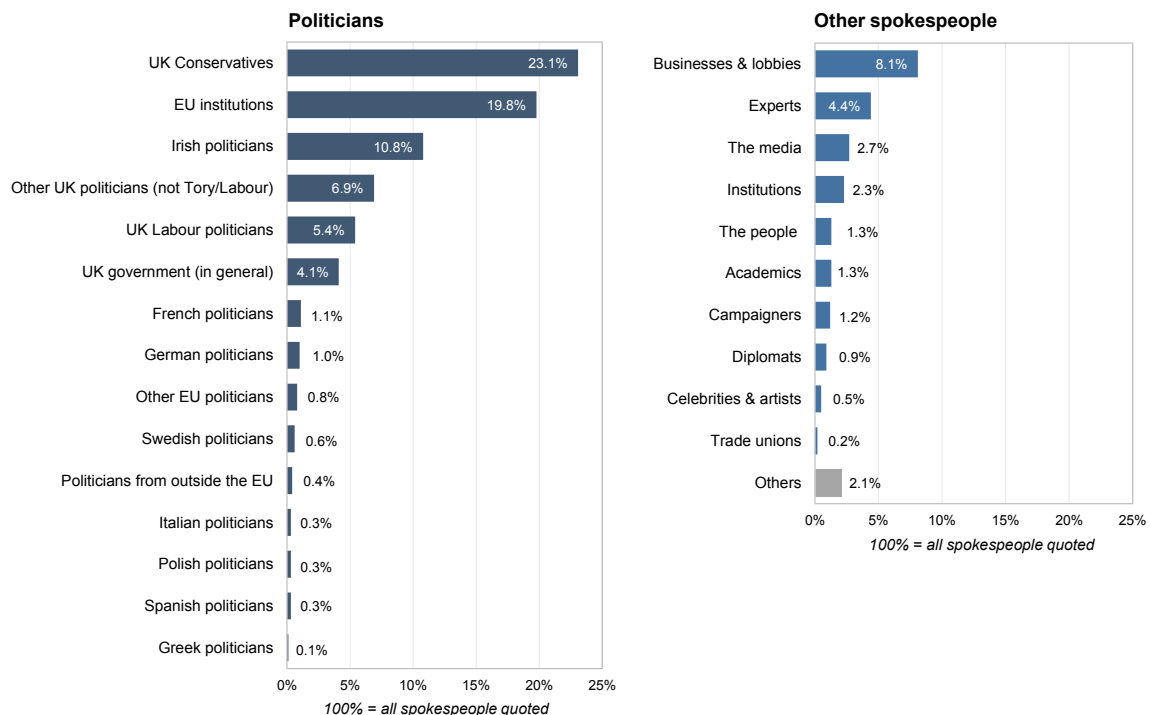
### 7.1 Summary

- Most of the articles cited somebody: UK politicians, EU institutions, and, to a much smaller amount, experts, businesses, and the media.
- Of the cited people, UK Conservatives surprisingly took the lead with 23.1%, whereas 19.8% belonged to EU institutions and, given Ireland's importance in the Brexit negotiations, Irish politicians (10.8%).
- Labour politicians and other UK politicians were only cited 5.4% and 6.9% of the time, respectively. French and German politicians as well as politicians from other EU countries received next to no attention in the press coverage, countering the perception that EU member states such as Germany and France wield great influence in the debate around Brexit.
- Of all the spokespeople quoted or mentioned in articles on Brexit, UK Prime Minister Theresa May and EU chief negotiator Michel Barnier received the most attention, followed by the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, David Davis, and Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar. Individual EU politicians and other UK politicians received little attention.

### 7.2 People Quoted in Total

Another way we used to assess the nature of the coverage was by looking at the people quoted in articles. We found that 78% of the media items analysed (or 3,572 items) included at least one quote, and 43% of them (1,952 items) featured multiple quotes. In analysing which spokespeople were quoted in the media, PRIME's researchers logged the name and affiliation (where available) of each single spokesperson. In a second step, the names were then classified according to 26 broader categories (listed in Figure 27).

**Figure 27. Spokespeople**



Of these, it was surprisingly UK Conservative politicians who received the highest attention in the articles focusing on Brexit (23.1%), followed by representatives from the European institutions

(19.8%), Irish politicians (10.8%), businesses and lobbies (8.1%), as well as other UK politicians (excluding Conservative and Labour politicians; 6.9%) and politicians from the Labour Party (5.4%). Only a marginal amount of Brexit-focused news cited French (1.1%), German (1%), or other EU politicians (from the countries we did not analyse; 0.8%). Even less visible were the voices of politicians from other countries we analysed, who, within the total sample, only accounted for 0.6% (Swedish politicians) or less.

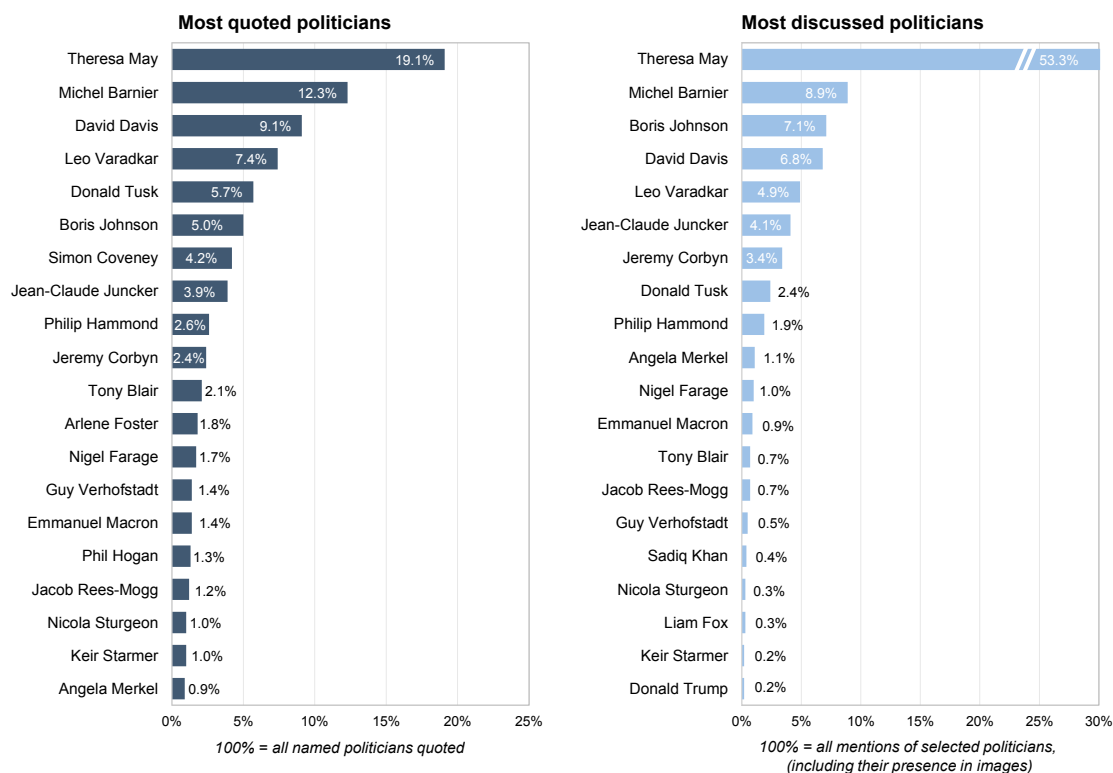
Equally absent were the voices of academics (1.3%), who ranked just below 'the people' (a group that includes any quotes that journalists collected from people in the street), campaigners (1.2%), and diplomats (0.9%), a category who arguably would have first-hand experience in negotiating trade deals and multinational cooperation frameworks.

The analysis reveals the very high attention granted to UK politicians of the Conservative Party and, to a lesser extent, EU institutions. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given Ireland's importance in the Brexit negotiations, Irish politicians also feature strongly in the coverage. Their high presence in our sample was largely, but not exclusively, dictated by the strong Brexit coverage in Irish media: 90% of the time Irish politicians were quoted in their home country, but their comments also appeared consistently throughout all other EU member states analysed, as they remained the most quoted group of national EU politicians in the sample, even excluding Ireland coverage.

Surprisingly, EU politicians played only a marginal role and were rarely quoted on Brexit issues, a finding that contrasts with the perception sometimes given in UK media coverage that European politicians 'meddle' in UK affairs or that EU member states such as Germany and France wield great influence in the debate around Brexit. Instead it fits the image of a 'united front' promoted by the EU during the negotiations.

## 7.3 Most Quoted Politicians in the Brexit Coverage

**Figure 28. Most quoted and most discussed politicians**





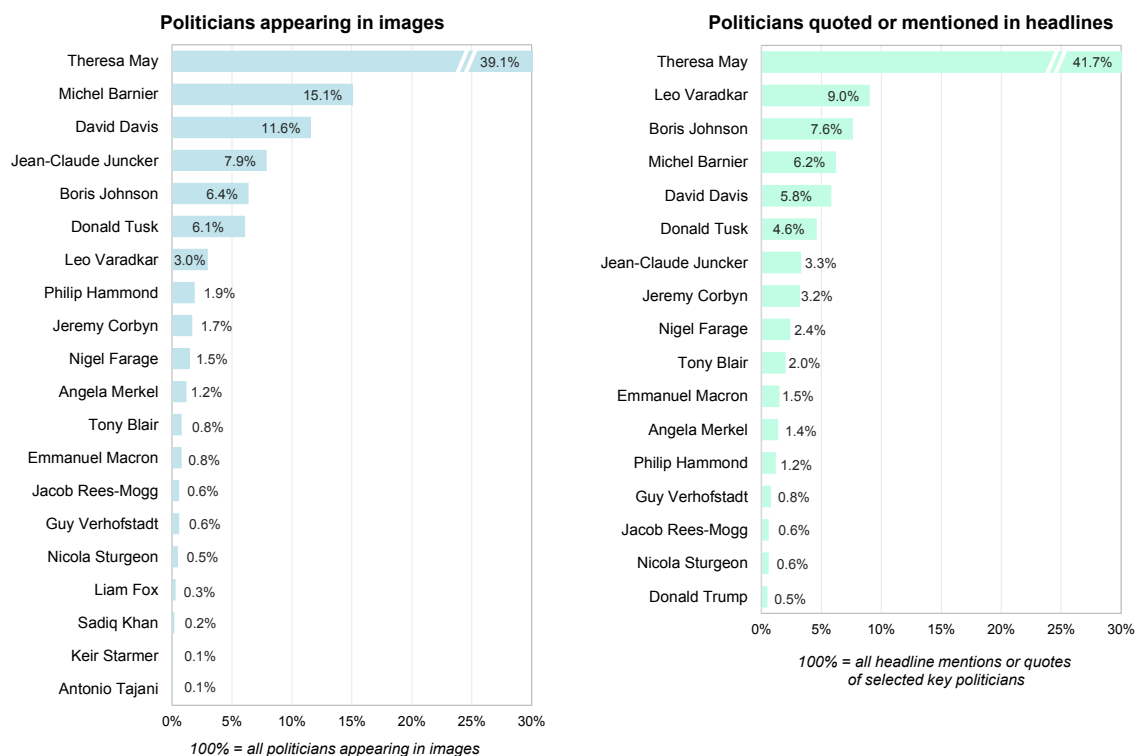
We also analysed which politicians were quoted the most during the sample period and over the course of the negotiations. Of all the political spokespeople quoted in articles on Brexit, UK Prime Minister Theresa May received the most attention, being quoted approximately 19.1% of the time out of all articles quoting spokespeople, followed by EU chief negotiator Michel Barnier (12.3%), David Davis (9.1%), and Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar (7.4%). Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn was the tenth most quoted politician (see Figure 28), while European leaders such as Emmanuel Macron (1.4%) and Angela Merkel (0.9%) were barely quoted at all. Surprisingly, Conservative MP Jacob Rees-Mogg, a prominent face of Brexit in the UK media, received roughly similar amounts of attention, despite the fact that he has no official role in the Brexit negotiations (1.2%) (see Figure 28).

When it came to politicians mentioned or referenced in articles, rather than being quoted, an even clearer picture emerged, with 53.3% of all mentions falling to Theresa May, followed at considerable distance by Michel Barnier (8.9%), Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson (7.1%), and David Davis (6.8%) (see Figure 28).

In order to complement article-level analysis, we also conducted headline and image analyses to identify which politicians dominated the most prominent part of the Brexit news. An examination of the images used in the Brexit articles also showed that a high proportion of images focused on Theresa May, who was depicted in 39.1% of all images analysed in both the printed press and broadcast, followed by Michel Barnier (15.1%) and David Davis (11.6%); and interestingly, considering his relatively lower overall ranking in the charts above, the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, also appeared in many images (7.9%) (see Figure 29).

In terms of politicians' presence in the media headlines, looking at both quotes and mentions of the main actors, again Theresa May was the most visible (41.7%), followed by Leo Varadkar (9%), whose high headline presence came exclusively from Irish media, however. Our data also confirm Boris Johnson's knack for making headlines, as he ranked third (with a 7.6% share), ahead of Michel Barnier and David Davis (see Figure 29).

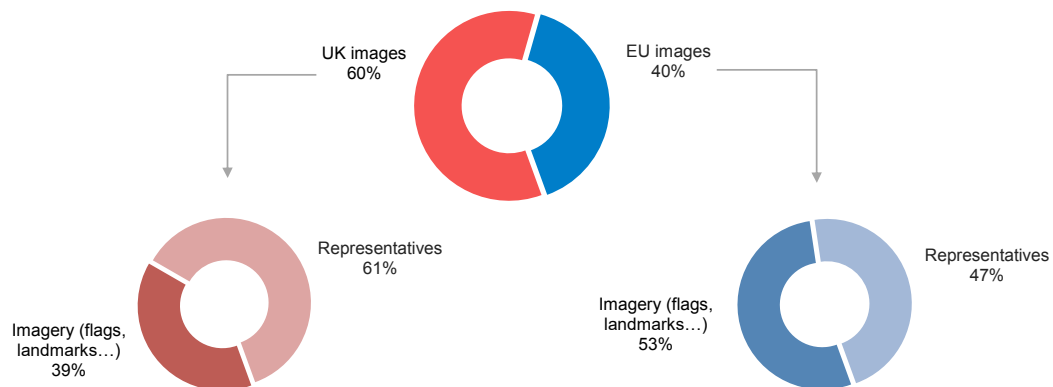
**Figure 29. Most prominent politicians | Images and headlines**



## 7.4 Visual Representation of the Negotiations in the EU Media Coverage

To understand how the Brexit negotiations were received and discussed in the European media, we also looked at their visual representation in the press and on broadcast, in addition to the text- and speech-level analysis. We found that images referring to the UK were more commonly used (60% of the time) than images referring to the EU (40%) in the media coverage. However, there was a clear difference in the types of images used. Whereas images of the UK tended to portray key actors in the negotiations (61% of the time), such as Theresa May, David Davis, or Boris Johnson, the majority of the images referring to the EU (53%) were abstract, such as European flags or institutional buildings in Brussels and Strasbourg (see Figure 30). This reflects the fact that European politicians tend to have much less face recognition than prominent national figures. It is a significant challenge for picture editors everywhere to avoid filling up their publications with pictures of ‘just another white middle-aged man’ nobody can identify.

**Figure 30. Visual representation analysis**



## 8. Conclusion

### 8.1 Key Findings

The picture that emerges from this detailed, largely quantitative study of the EU media coverage during the period from 1 September 2017 to 31 March 2018 is fairly clear and can be summarised as follows:

1. **We asked:** How much do European media care about Brexit? Our working assumption was that they do so very much and that there would be strong opinions about Brexit. **We found:** There is a consistent interest of European media in the Brexit debate, but reporting is based mainly on facts and commentary is rare.
2. **We asked:** What do European media think about the future of the EU? Do the media think that Brexit will drive Europe apart or do they regard it as a UK phenomenon that can be dealt with without affecting the EU? **We found:** There is little worry about how Brexit could affect the EU. In the case of France, it is even regarded as an opportunity.
3. We assumed that there would be much criticism of the UK's Brexit move. **We asked:** Was there also support for the UK's view? **We found:** There was very little to no support for the UK's view and approach to negotiations.
4. **We asked:** Which topics and issues are European media most concerned about as regards Brexit? Is it citizen rights and the future of expats on both sides? Or are they more worried about business relations or maybe even political stability? **We found:** The biggest share of the reporting is dedicated to the progress of the negotiations and political questions surrounding them. Economic questions dominate the issue-related coverage of Brexit, and the rights and future of EU citizens living in the UK or vice versa play a minor role.
5. **We asked:** Who was quoted most? While we expected UK sources to play a predominant role, our assumption was that political leaders everywhere would voice opinions about Brexit and have suggestions. **We found:** European national politicians are rarely quoted on Brexit. The person quoted by far the most is Theresa May, followed by EU chief negotiator Michel Barnier.
6. **We asked:** Are there significant national differences in judgement and coverage? One could easily foresee that for Ireland, but what about the other seven countries examined? **We found:** European media focus much more on the UK perspective than on their respective national perspectives, and many try to point out the detrimental consequences of Brexit to their audiences. Apart from Ireland, the differences among the countries are nuanced. France is somewhat of an outlier with a rather opinionated and unconcerned view. There is hardly any support for the UK's move out of the EU. The case of Ireland, the major victim of the break-up, is special and reflected in the volume and diversity of the coverage.

### 8.2 Implications

1. The fact that most reporting is on the progress of negotiations reflects the prevalence of a very traditional kind of journalism, the so-called 'he said, she said' journalism. There is relatively little reporting on how ordinary citizens will be affected by Brexit and how it will impact upon their lives. Brexit is an abstract spectacle taking place in Brussels and London, far removed from ordinary citizens' lives. It could be worth media organisations considering how to address this.

2. There does not seem to be any media interest in furnishing the various EU-critical or separatist movements with arguments. Much of the coverage is about the potentially dire consequences of Brexit for the UK and Ireland, and how this could be a message to these audiences.
3. Despite the overwhelming rejection of Brexit, most media refrain from commentary and instead they simply report the facts. Yet, one could argue that there is no need for commentary if the facts are convincing enough and largely speak for themselves.
4. Judging by the media coverage, one of the biggest challenges of the Brexit process will be finding a solution to the Ireland problem.

## Appendix A: Background on the Media Sample

### A.1 France

1. **bfmtv.com:** France's most-watched news network with 10 million daily viewers. It is sometimes seen as populist with a conservative to right-wing leaning. Our analysis was based on the relevant video content that appeared on the network's website.
2. **Le Monde:** A French daily newspaper, published in Paris, with a centre-left perspective. 2017 print circulation c. 301k copies.
3. **Le Figaro:** A French daily newspaper, published in Paris, with a centre-right leaning. 2016 print circulation c. 313k copies.
4. **20minutes.fr:** A free French daily newspaper, published in Paris. It has 220,000 unique daily visitors as of April 2018.
5. **L'Obs:** A French weekly magazine, published in Paris, with centre to centre-left leaning. 2016 print circulation c. 359k copies.

### A.2 Germany

1. **ARD Tagesschau:** A national and international television news service, produced by the German public service broadcaster ARD. It has an audience share of 33%. For the purpose of this analysis, we monitored the news bulletin *Tagesschau* (20:00).
2. **Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung:** A German daily newspaper (abbreviated FAZ), published in Frankfurt am Main, with a liberal-conservative leaning. 2017 print circulation c. 244k copies.
3. **Süddeutsche Zeitung:** A German newspaper (abbreviated SZ), published daily in Munich, with a liberal to centre-left leaning. 2017 print circulation c. 357k copies.
4. **Bild:** A German tabloid, published daily in Berlin, with a conservative to nationalist leaning. 2017 print circulation c. 1,620,758 copies. For the purpose of this project we analysed the online content appearing on bild.de, which has 477,000 unique daily visitors as of April 2018.
5. **Der Spiegel:** A German weekly news magazine, published in Hamburg, with a liberal to centre-left leaning. 2017 print circulation c. 740k copies.

### A.3 Greece

1. **Skai:** A television network based in Piraeus, Greece, with a conservative, at times right-wing, leaning. It has an audience share of 12.5%. For the purpose of this analysis, we monitored the news bulletin *Τα Νέα του ΣΚΑΪ* 20:00.
2. **Kathimerini:** A Greek daily newspaper, published in Athens, with a liberal-conservative/centre-right and generally pro-European leaning. 2017 print circulation c. 16k copies during the week and c. 73k on Sundays.
3. **To Vima:** A Greek daily newspaper, published daily in Athens, with a centre-left leaning. 2016 print circulation c. 63k copies. Due to the troubles the publication has experienced with its print version, our analysis focused on its online version, tovima.gr, which has 25,000 unique

visitors daily as of April 2018.

4. **in.gr:** A Greek news website and among the most visited news websites in Greece. The website has 240,000 daily visitors as of April 2018.
5. **Proto Thema:** A Greek tabloid newspaper, published on Sundays, with a conservative to right-wing leaning. 2016 print circulation c. 77k copies.

## A.4 Ireland

1. **RTÉ 1:** A television channel of Raidió Teilifís Éireann (RTÉ), the national public service broadcaster of Ireland. It has an audience share of 25%. For the purpose of this analysis, we monitored the news bulletin *RTÉ News: Nine O'Clock* (21:00).
2. **Irish Times:** An Irish daily newspaper, published in Dublin, with a liberal leaning. 2017 print circulation c. 62k copies.
3. **Irish Independent:** An Irish daily newspaper, published in Dublin, with a conservative leaning. 2017 print circulation c. 94k copies.
4. **thejournal.ie:** An Irish digital-born outlet. It has 55,500 unique daily visitors as of April 2018.
5. **The Sunday Business:** An Irish Sunday newspaper, published in Dublin, with a liberal leaning. 2017 print circulation c. 29k copies.

## A.5 Italy

1. **Rai 1:** A television channel of Radiotelevisione italiana (Rai), Italy's national public service broadcaster with a leaning historically close to the ruling party. It has an audience share of 17%. For the purpose of this analysis, we monitored the news bulletin *TG1* (20:00).
2. **Corriere della Sera:** An Italian daily newspaper, published in Milan, with a liberal-centrist leaning. 2018 print circulation c. 293k copies.
3. **La Repubblica:** An Italian daily newspaper, published in Rome, with a centre-left leaning. 2018 print circulation c. 202k copies.
4. **tgcom24.mediaset.it:** One of the leading Italian news portals, and the online platform of all-news TV channel TGCOM24. It is owned by Mediaset, the media company founded by Silvio Berlusconi and is still controlled by the Berlusconi family's holding company, Fininvest. Tgcom24 news website has a daily unique audience of 320,000 visitors as of April 2018.
5. **Panorama:** A weekly Italian news magazine, published in Milan, with a centre-right leaning. 2018 print circulation c. 182k copies.

## A.6 Poland

1. **Gazeta Wyborcza:** A Polish newspaper, published daily in Warsaw, with a left-wing leaning. 2016 print circulation c. 151k copies.
2. **onet.pl:** The largest Polish web portal and one of the country's most frequently visited websites. It has 648,000 unique daily visitors as of April 2018.

3. **Rzeczpospolita:** A Polish newspaper, published daily in Warsaw, with a conservative to centre-right leaning. 2017 print circulation c. 70k copies.
4. **TVN 24:** A Polish 24-hour commercial infotainment channel, independent of the government. It has an audience share of 3.22%. For the purpose of this analysis we monitored the news bulletin *TVN 24* (19:00).
5. **Newsweek Polska:** A Polish weekly magazine, published in Warsaw, with a liberal leaning. 2014 print circulation c. 119k copies.

## A.7 Spain

1. **Antena 3:** A Spanish television channel with a conservative leaning. It has an audience share of 13.3 %. For the purpose of this analysis we monitored the news bulletin *Noticias 2* (21:00).
2. **El Mundo:** A Spanish daily newspaper, published in Madrid, with a centre-right leaning. 2016 print circulation c. 108k copies.
3. **El País:** A Spanish daily newspaper, published in Madrid, with a pro-European and centre-left leaning. 2015 print circulation c. 238k copies.
4. **El Confidencial:** A Spanish digital-born outlet, with a liberal leaning. The website has 245,000 unique daily visitors as of April 2018.
5. **Tiempo:** A former Spanish magazine, which terminated its operations in January 2018, with a centre to liberal-left leaning. 2013 print circulation c. 29k copies.

## A.8 Sweden

1. **svt.se:** The national public service broadcaster of Sweden, SVT maintains its own website, which acts as an online news portal and has an audience share of 36.4%. For the purpose of this analysis, we monitored the news programmes *Rapport* and *Aktuellt* via the video archive on the SVT website.<sup>11</sup>
2. **Dagens Nyheter:** A Swedish daily newspaper, published in Stockholm, with a liberal leaning. 2013 print circulation c. 282k copies.
3. **Göteborgs-Posten:** A major local Swedish daily newspaper, published in Gothenburg, with a liberal leaning. 2016 print circulation c. 138k copies.
4. **Aftonbladet:** A large Swedish tabloid, published daily in Stockholm, with left-wing leaning. 2014 print circulation c. 154k copies. For the purpose of this project, we analysed the online content appeared on *aftonbladet.se*, which has 196,000 unique daily visitors as of April 2018.

<sup>11</sup> The decision to include two news programmes, as opposed to one, as we did for the other countries, was made to compensate for our inability to identify a relevant mainstream national magazine in Sweden.

## Appendix B: Methodology

Data for this study were provided by PRIME Research, who collected them from 39 media sources in eight countries, analysed for the period from 1 September 2017 to 31 March 2018. The selection of countries and media sources was dictated in part by resources, and partly by the desire to cover the most prominent mainstream outlets in a set of countries that was representative of different perspectives on the matter. Unlike many research projects, we also decided not to limit our analysis to print and online media: for each country we also monitored a prominent news programme, applying the same analysis methodology to the relevant speech and images that were broadcast.

Once an automated search<sup>12</sup> gathered all media items with at least one relevant mention of Brexit, a team of researchers covering all languages assessed whether the articles were relevant<sup>13</sup> and then performed the detailed coding in PRIME's proprietary content analysis system. Researchers constructed a total sample of 4,553 media items discussing Brexit. The articles included news items, opinion pieces, and editorials.

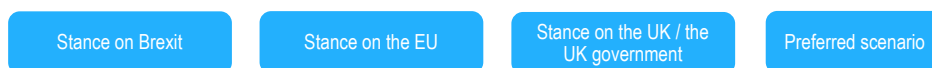
PRIME Research systematically analysed media content by using a combination of qualitative and quantitative media content analysis. The media items were analysed in a two-step process.

**Figure B.1. Two-step analysis**

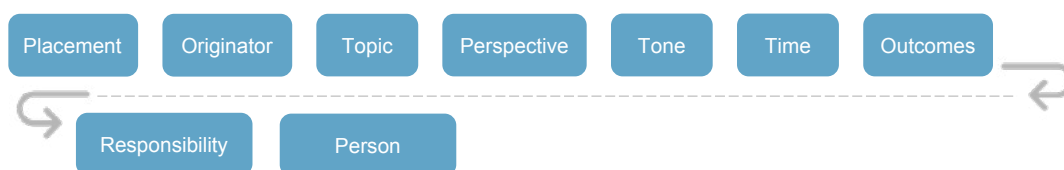
### Article level: metadata and formal criteria



### Article level: overall attitude



### Message level (content units) – one line for each topic



## B.1 Article-Level Analysis

The first set of data collected for each article included automatically coded metadata, such as media sourcename, date, and page number, as well as human-coded information such as size and prominence of the item and the portion of the item that discussed Brexit. Details such as page number, prominence, and size (measured in column millimetres or length in seconds and weighted based on the portion of coverage focused on Brexit) were used to establish the impact of the content analysed. PRIME Research also tracked the presence of images and whether colour was used in each article to establish how eye-catching it was.

<sup>12</sup> This research process was fully automated for the content source from print and online outlets. Broadcast content was instead screened by PRIME's researchers and selected with the help of speech-to-text technology.

<sup>13</sup> The selection criteria adopted were: 1) mentions of Brexit or key Brexit figures (e.g. David Davis, Michel Barnier) in a prominent position (headline, sub-headline, caption, image, quote blurb), or 2) in case of items discussing Brexit but without such prominent mentions, at least 40% of the content about Brexit.



Finally, four other variables were captured once for each media item: whether the item had an overall stance (favourable, mixed, or sceptical, either explicitly or implicitly) on Brexit, on the EU, and on the UK, and on its government. This coding reflected the general editorial line of each item, as PRIME's analysts were asked to look at the balance of quotes and opinions included in the item and assess what was the prevailing view (if any). Similarly, the preferred scenario variable aimed at capturing any overall preference that the media items expressed for a particular outcome of Brexit (e.g. the UK retaining its membership in the European single market).

## B.2 Message-Level Analysis

In the second stage of the analysis, all the articles were sub-divided into content units. A content unit represents a single thematic unit, ranging in size from a single sentence or image to a paragraph. Each message within the media item was therefore assessed separately. This method was crucial in order to ensure that all issues covered within an item were analysed systematically to provide a granular level of insight into the media coverage of Brexit and the Brexit negotiations. This message-level approach also allowed us to compare media coverage in text format with that in speech format, effectively capturing the same set of details for each sentence appearing in a TV news broadcast or a print or online article.

In total 32,236 messages were analysed across all 4,553 media items. In the example in Figure B.2, PRIME Research's analysts analysed 14 separate content units, or messages.

**Figure B.2. An article divided into content units**






When analysing media items at a message level, the analysts collected information such as the placement or position of the content unit within the item, whether politicians, spokespeople, or originators were quoted or not, and if so their name and affiliation. The placement coding included options such as, for example, headline, lead, text/speech, image, and caption. This allowed for analyses targeting only highly prominent parts of articles, such as headlines and images. The originator variable allowed us to measure how often the different spokespeople groups, such as politicians, academics, experts, or business leaders, were cited. As the spokespeople codes were message-specific, and logged each single spokesperson quoted in the coverage, the analysis was able to combine each originator of content with the rest of the message-level variables: topic, tone, time, perspective, outcomes, responsibility, and person.

The topic field helped us capture what exactly each content unit was discussing: the Reuters Institute and PRIME Research worked together to identify a list of specific categories of issues and topics, such as: economy, business and trade; migration and mobility; regulations; security and defence; and sovereignty. We also identified more general themes, such as discussions about the future of Europe or of the UK after Brexit, and references to political developments and party

politics in the context of Brexit. Finally, a subset of topics captured in particular the discussions about (and reporting from) the summits and meetings held during the negotiation process, as well as coverage on the status of said negotiations, and specific negotiation items mentioned in that context (such as the Brexit bill, citizens rights, the transition period, or Northern Ireland). These macro-categories were then further developed to include a list of 138 sub-topics, available for analysis at a more granular level.

**Figure B.3. Brexit in the EU | Codebook**

<div>    </div> <h2>Brexit in the EU   Codebook: topics</h2>		
<b>Negotiations</b> References to negotiations, meetings EU white papers, official data, speeches UK white papers, official data, speeches State of the negotiations / sufficient progress Brexit bill, settlement as a negotiation item Northern Ireland as a negotiation item Citizen rights as a negotiation item Gibraltar as a negotiation item Transition period UK–EU relations in general Role of the Commission Role of the European Parliament Role of Member States	<b>Politics</b> Conservative Party politics Labour Party politics LibDem Party politics SNP Party politics UK break-up Scottish referendum Second referendum on Brexit Protests, demonstration against Brexit Legal challenges to Brexit ‘Will of the people’ References to the EU referendum campaign ‘350 million a week’ (referendum claim) Repeal bill / Withdrawal bill Fake news (in relation to the EU referendum) Brexit reversal UK relations with the Trump administration UK relations with the Commonwealth UK general elections 2017: results and consequences Britain’s global influence, global UK vision UK’s influence on Europe Good Friday Agreement Geo-political instability / political tensions United Ireland, Irish re-unification Globalisation Protectionism Referenda Attitude towards the EU institutions	Organised crime <b>Migration and Mobility</b> Migration and mobility in general Free movement / Schengen EU citizens’ rights, right to stay in the UK Mobility in Ireland Ease of mobility for British people Visa regime UK–EU Migration quotas system Migration and UK demographics Impact of immigration on the UK Shortage of labour Culture and languages (Brexit’s impact on) Migrant crisis
<b>Economy, Business, Trade</b> Economy in general Jobs, employment Prices and inflation GDP Exchange rate, currencies Stock markets Automotive Agriculture and fishing Education, universities (economic impact on) Financial industry NHS, health service (economic impact on) Real estate and housing (economic impact on) Science (economic impact on) Tech (economic impact on) Tourism (economic impact on) Transport, aviation (economic impact on) Business in general Businesses relocations (from the UK to the EU) Trade in general, import/export Tariffs and border controls on goods Trade over the Irish border Supply chains UK contributions to the EU budget Investment from the EU to the UK, subsidies Research funding Juncker Plan Economic impact of Brexit (abroad) EU growth, recovery Cost of the Brexit bill for the UK	<b>Standards and Regulations</b> Regulations in general Economic regulations Environment, climate regulations Labour rights Women’s rights EURATOM Tax system, fiscal regimes Brexit’s regulatory impact on SMEs Brexit’s regulatory impact on agriculture Brexit’s regulatory impact on food Brexit’s regulatory impact on energy Brexit’s regulatory impact on education Brexit’s regulatory impact on science Brexit’s regulatory impact on raw materials Brexit’s regulatory impact on justice / rights	<b>Other topics</b> <b>General topics</b> Brexit in general Brexit vision / strategy in general Studies / dossiers about Brexit Pro-Europeism / pro-European movements Euroscepticism / eurosceptic movements Celebrities / personalities taking sides Media impartiality <b>Future of Europe</b> Future of Europe in general The EU won’t change The EU will break up Further EU integration Multi-speed Europe EU enlargement EU budget, finances post-Brexit Future of the EU institutions <b>Negotiators profiles</b> UK negotiators’ performance/leadership UK negotiators’ credibility/competence/preparedness UK negotiators’ popularity/likeability EU negotiators’ performance/leadership EU negotiators’ credibility/competence/preparedness EU negotiators’ popularity/likeability
<b>Sovereignty</b> UK independence from the EU British values, traditions, patriotism / Britishness Democracy of the European institutions ECJ jurisdiction	<b>Security and Defence</b> Security will decrease with Brexit Security cooperation / terrorism NATO EU army Cybersecurity Conflicts	<b>Images</b> UK images: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• flags, logos, landmarks, buildings</li> <li>• representatives speaking</li> <li>• representatives not speaking</li> </ul> EU images: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• flags, logos, landmarks, buildings</li> <li>• representatives speaking</li> <li>• representatives not speaking</li> </ul>

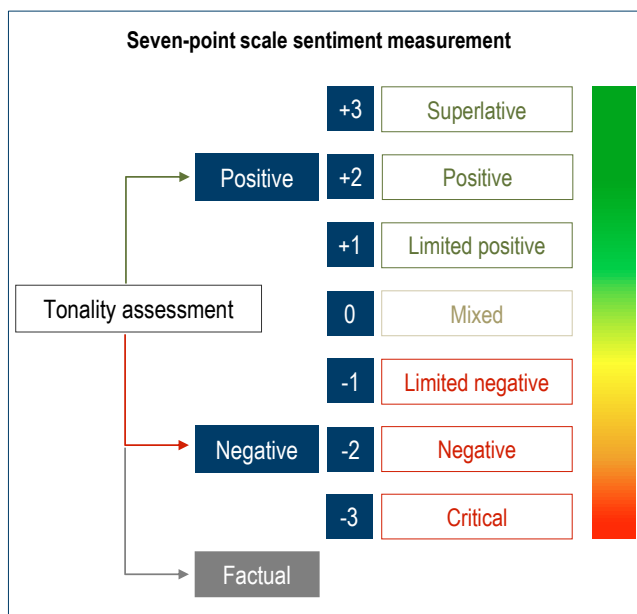
The perspective variable allowed us to analyse whether each topic or issue was discussed from the UK or the EU's perspective, or whether instead the journalist or the spokespeople quoted were taking a national viewpoint in discussing Brexit. The possible outcomes of the Brexit process that media discussed were also captured via a dedicated variable, and so were any attributions of responsibility, in case the media coverage attempted to explain why a particular development may take place over the course of the UK's exit from the EU.

Additionally, PRIME Research's media analysts also coded each mention of a selected group of key figures (the top UK politicians and EU representatives involved in the negotiations) whenever the coverage discussed them in reference to Brexit.

### B.3 Tone of Coverage

The tone and time coding established the way in which the topics were used, distinguishing for example between negative economic forecasts, positive assessments about the progress of negotiations in the present, and so forth. The tone, or sentiment, was measured according to a seven-point scale, with options ranging from very positive (superlative) to very negative (critical). Any content unit that did not feature an evaluation was also captured as 'neutral' (factual).

**Figure B.4. Approach to measuring sentiment**



### B.4 Note on How the Data Analysis Was Carried Out

Article-level analysis is used when looking at the volumes of coverage within the sample, as well as for the examination of media attitudes towards Brexit, the EU, and the UK, and of the outcomes discussed and preferences expressed. When it came to a detailed examination of the topics covered and the sentiment attributed to those, the researchers found message-level analysis to be more robust, as it allowed us to capture the full range of issues tackled within each article, rather than just the main issue contained therein. The analysis of the key figures quoted and discussed in relation to Brexit is based on the number of mentions, but we also focused only on the most prominent parts of the articles, such as headlines and images.

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# Selected RISJ Publications

## DIGITAL NEWS PROJECT PUBLICATIONS

### Digital News Report 2018

Nic Newman, Richard Fletcher, David A. L. Levy and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen

### The Digital Transition of Local News

Dr Joy Jenkins, Dr Rasmus Kleis Nielsen

### Public Service News and Social Media

Annika Sehl, Alessio Cornia & Rasmus Kleis Nielsen

### The Global Expansion of Digital-Born News Media

Tom Nicholls

### Bias, Bullshit and Lies: Audience Perspectives on Low Trust in the Media

Nic Newman

### Going Digital: A Roadmap for Organisational Transformation

Lucy Küng

### Developing Digital News Projects in Private Sector Media

Alessio Cornia, Annika Sehl & Rasmus Kleis Nielsen

### Mapping Online News Discovery for Computer Users in the UK

Nic Newman and Antonis Kalogeropoulos

### 'I Saw the News on Facebook': Brand Attribution when Accessing News from Distributed Environments

Antonis Kalogeropoulos and Nic Newman

### Virtual Reality and 360 Video for News

Zillah Watson

### Developing Digital News in Public Service Media

Annika Sehl, Alessio Cornia, and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen

### Beyond the Article: Frontiers of Editorial and Commercial Innovation

Kevin Anderson

## DIGITAL NEWS PROJECT FACTSHEETS

### Third-Party Web Content on EU News Sites: Potential Challenges and Paths to Privacy Improvement

Tim Libert

### Understanding the Promise and Limits of Automated Fact-Checking

Lucas Graves

### Measuring the Reach of 'Fake News' and Online Disinformation in Europe

Richard Fletcher, Alessio Cornia, Lucas Graves & Rasmus Kleis Nielsen

## SELECTED RISJ BOOKS

(published jointly with I.B.Tauris)

### Journalism and the NSA Revelations

Risto Kunelius, Heikki Heikkilä, Adrienne Russell and Dmitry Yagodin (eds)

### Journalism in an Age of Terror

John Lloyd

### The Euro Crisis in the Media: Journalistic Coverage of Economic Crisis and European Institutions

Robert G. Picard (ed)

## SELECTED RISJ CHALLENGES

(published jointly with I.B.Tauris)

### The Right to Be Forgotten: Privacy and the Media in the Digital Age

George Brock

### Reporting the EU: News, Media and the European Institutions

John Lloyd and Cristina Marconi

## SELECTED RISJ BOOKS

### Global Teamwork: The Rise of Collaboration in Investigative Journalism

Richard Sambrook

### Something Old, Something New: Digital Media and the Coverage of Climate Change

James Painter et al

Front cover: Anti-Brexit demonstrators wave EU and Union flags outside the Houses of Parliament in London, Britain, January 30, 2018. REUTERS/Toby Melville

