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Towards the European(-ised) Public Sphere: The Case of EP Elections in the Czech Republic and Slovakia

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Abstract

European Parliament (EP) elections fall within the category of second-order elections: because these types of elections do not lead to the formation of government there is less at stake and, consequently, voters behave differently when casting ballot. However, since the behaviour of voters in elections cannot be perceived in isolation from the behaviours of political parties and media, the question then arises if media (and political parties) also perceive that there is less at stake and hence they behave differently. To this aim, this article analyses the news media coverage of the 2004 and 2009 EP elections in the Czech Republic and Slovakia (N = 5672) and, at the same time, integrates the second-order election theory with the behaviours of the media. Moreover, the article provides unique comparative evidence of news coverage of national parliamentary (N = 5435) and EP elections in both countries. The results indicate that media across the EU only marginally cover EP elections and particularly less than national first-order elections and that coverage of EP elections is dominated by domestic EU political actors. The findings are discussed in the light of existing literature on EP elections, the existence of Europeanised public spheres and EU's legitimacy as well as democratic deficit.

Keywords

Europeanisation; EP elections; Media; Second-Order Elections; First-Order Elections

The existence of a European public sphere, or a network of Europeanised, interrelated national public spheres, is often deemed a precondition for democratically legitimate governance in the European Union (EU) (Eriksen and Fossum 2002; Habermas 2004), not just because an informed public is commonly regarded as necessary for a well-functioning representative democracy (Althaus 2003) but also because a public sphere is a precondition for the realisation of popular sovereignty (Grundmann 1999), and its basic function is to democratise political institutions (Trenz and Eder 2004). Given that the majority of authors have abandoned the possibility of an encompassing, unified European public sphere, Europeanisation of national public spheres remains the more realistic approach (Schlesinger 1999; Gerhards 2000). Such an Europeanised public sphere would emerge as a result of the national public spheres of the EU member states being Europeanised largely through the Europeanisation of reporting in national media (Machill *et al.* 2006).

In this respect, media reporting of European Parliament (EP) elections offers the most likely scenario for the Europeanisation of national public spheres. EP elections are pivotal moments in the democratic process of the EU and national news media play a key role in communication between a polity's institutions and citizens or, in other words, between the electorate and the political arena, especially but not only during the campaign periods (de Vreese 2003). Nevertheless, in their immediate aftermath, Karlheinz Reif and Hermann Schmitt (1980) labelled the first direct EP elections "second-order national elections" (for an overview, see Marsh and Mikhaylov 2010). Compared to national first-order elections (FOEs), in SOEs there is less at stake since they do not determine the composition of government. The result is that EP elections, in particular due to their second-order character, have failed to engage the public through a Europe-wide electoral process and creation of public space (Marsh and Mikhaylov 2010).

More than three decades after Reif and Schmitt (1980) published their seminal work, the SOE model has, by and large, become one of the most widely tested and supported theories of voting behaviour in elections to the EP (e.g. Marsh 1998; Schmitt 2005; Hix and Marsh 2007). Moreover, it is not surprising that, given their aggregate nature (see below), the SOE model's predictions have mostly been tested using aggregate electoral and election-related survey data. Nonetheless, reliance on such data has led scholars to

focus primarily on sophisticated strategies of voters. However, by primarily focusing on the strategies of *voters*, the model is rendered blind to independent actions of the rest of the electoral circle, namely the *media* and *political parties* (see also Weber 2007).¹ Since perhaps the most important aspect of SOEs is that there is less at stake (Reif and Schmitt 1980: 9), it is viable to assume that all the three abovementioned actors perceive the less-at-stake dimension likewise.

At this point, the aim of this article is to contribute to the literature by explicitly integrating the SOE model with independent actions of other actors in the electoral circle than to voters, specifically the media. The study does this through the analysis of the whole range of news media coverage of the 2004 and 2009 EP elections in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, two small and new EU member states, and, at the same time, making use of the literature on the Europeanisation of national public spheres. The next section reviews the literature on Europeanisation of national public spheres, the coverage of European integration-related issues in the media, and SOE model. This section thus introduces the main concepts and presents the theoretical background. The third section unveils the expectations derived from the discussion in previous section, clarifies methodological issues, operationalises concepts, and presents the data. The fourth section presents the results of the analysis, and the last section concludes by summarising the findings and discussing their implications.

EXISTING LITERATURE. EUROPEAN(-ISED) PUBLIC SPHERE(S)

Since the conditions for the existence of pan-European public sphere are absent, the standard approach is to focus on Europeanisation of national public spheres (Gerhards 2000; Trenz 2008). Europeanised national public spheres can be observed by measuring the different degrees of Europeanisation of existing national media spheres, as the media are taken as the best "proxy" and expression of the public sphere (de Vreese 2007: 6, Gripsrud 2007) and visibility of communication (through the media) is the necessary precondition for the existence of a public sphere (Trenz 2004).

Many different conceptualisations and indicators of the Europeanisation of national public spheres have been developed (e.g. Gerhards 2000; Koopmans and Erbe; 2004; Trenz, 2008). Generally, the key indicators for assessing the degree of Europeanisation of public spheres include the visibility of European topics² and inclusion of EU-actors and actors from other EU countries (de Vreese 2007: 10). For Jürgen Gerhards (2000: 293-294), for example, Europeanisation is primarily indicated by an increase in the reporting on European topics and actors in the national media and evaluations of them that extend beyond their country's interests. In addition, Ruud Koopmans and Jessica Erbe (2004) build their conceptualisation around three forms of Europeanisation: (1) *supranationally Europeanised communication*, where European-level institutions and collective actors interact around European themes; (2) *vertical Europeanisation*, where national actors address European actors, the national actors make claims regarding European issues or European actors who partake in national debates on European issues (see also Peters *et al.* 2005); and (3) *horizontal Europeanisation*, where national media covers issues regarding other EU member states and national actors address issues or actors in other EU member states.

Finally, Thomas Risse and Marianna van de Steeg (2003) have pointed out three conditions for establishing the degree to which a Europeanised public sphere exists. It exists (1) if and when the same (European) themes are discussed at the same time at similar levels of attention across national public spheres and media; (2) if and when similar frames of reference, meaning structures, and patterns of interpretation are used across national public spheres and media; and (3) if and when a transnational community of communication emerges in which speakers and listeners not only observe

each other across national spaces but also recognise that “Europe” is an issue of common concern for them.

The question then remains, if and to what extent does the Europeanised public sphere really exist? In his review article, Claes de Vreese concludes that ‘the contours of a European public sphere can be sketched’ (2007: 9). The meta-analysis of Marcel Machill (*et al.* 2006: 57) supports this conclusion, reporting ‘developmental tendencies (...) towards a Europeanisation of the national public spheres’. The degree of existence of Europeanised public spheres highly depends on the type of media outlet one considers. Studies relying on analyses of quality broadsheet newspapers tend to find some evidence of Europeanised news coverage, while studies focusing on television and tabloids teach us about the non-existence of Europeanisation of national public spheres (de Vreese 2007).

THE EU IN THE MEDIA

In relation to the blossoming of the literature on the Europeanisation of national public spheres, an increasing amount of scholarly work has aimed at analysing whether, how, and when news media cover European integration-related issues (e.g. Machill *et al.* 2006; Boomgaarden *et al.* 2010). This strand of research concludes that EU topics account for an extremely small proportion of reporting in national media, EU-level actors tend to feature only in minor roles (cf. Kandyla and de Vreese 2011), and negative evaluations of the EU outnumber positive ones (Peter and de Vreese 2004).

A variety of studies thus focuses on media coverage before and during EP elections. It has been shown that, during the campaign preceding the first direct elections to the EP, EU affairs played no role in the news until the actual start of the election campaign (Blumler 1983; Siune *et al.* 1984). Overall, elections to the EP have consistently been found to be only minimally visible in national news media (de Vreese *et al.* 2007) and accompanied by limited personalisation through coverage of EU representatives and protagonists (Peter *et al.* 2004; de Vreese *et al.* 2006). Moreover, to the extent that national news media concentrate on EP elections, they tend to focus on the national aspects and concerns of the campaigns (Siune *et al.* 1984). Finally, previous empirical research also reports considerable cross-national variation in the degree to which the EU is covered in the news during the EP elections (Schuck *et al.* 2011b).

THE SOE MODEL

The SOE model has become the dominant one in any academic discussion of elections to the EP. An operational definition of SOEs has been put forward by Pippa Norris and Reif, ‘All elections (except the one that fills the most important political office of the entire system and therefore is the first-order election) are “national second-order elections”, irrespective of whether they take place in the entire, or only in a part of, the country’ (1997: 117). It is important to note that in their ideal form, SOEs are contested within the same party system as the FOEs.³ The SOE model suggests that there is a qualitative difference between different types of elections depending on the perception of what is at stake; compared to FOEs, in SOEs there is less at stake due to the fact that they do not determine the composition of government (Reif and Schmitt 1980: 9).

Owing to this fact, the SOE model is built around three broad propositions: (1) *lower level of voter’s participation*; (2) *brighter prospects for small parties*; and (3) *losses for government parties*. Furthermore, as a consequence of the less-at-stake dimension, ‘voters cast their votes (...) not only as a result of conditions obtaining within the specific context of the second-order arena but also on the basis of factors in the main political arena of the nation’ (Reif and Schmitt 1980: 9). Put differently, the campaigning for and

results of SOEs are influenced by the political constellation of the national political arena (Norris 1997). Hence, the last proposition is (4) *election campaigns comprise not only second-order-arena-specific issues but also (if not dominantly) first-order-arena-specific issues* (Reif 1984; Irwin 1995).

One important shortcoming inherent in the SOE model is its primary focus on strategies of voters. The model does not explicitly link to independent actions of the rest of the electoral circle, the *media* and *political parties*, despite the fact that scholarship has recently started to integrate the SOE model with behaviours of political parties and the media (see Adam and Maier 2011) and despite the conclusions of many studies showing that (1) parties allocate fewer resources for campaigns in SOEs than in first-order contests, which has consequences for the organisation and conduct of campaigns (Maier and Tenscher 2009; Hertner 2011); and (2) EP election campaigns are of low intensity (de Vreese 2009; Maier and Tenscher 2009) and are dominated by national issues (Irwin 1995). Moreover, EP elections have been consistently found to have limited visibility in national television news (Peter *et al.* 2004; Kovář 2010).

Since the most important aspect of SOEs is perhaps that there is less at stake, it is plausible to assume that all the three abovementioned electoral actors likewise perceive the less-at-stake character of SOEs, and thus, EP elections matter less not only to voters but also to political parties and the media. This means that the relationship among party strategies, media coverage, and voter motivation is likely to be reciprocal (see also Hobolt and Spoon 2010). In other words, the behaviour of voters in EP elections at large cannot be perceived in isolation from the behaviours of political parties or the media, and hence, it is necessary to integrate the SOE model with behaviours of political parties and the media (Strömbäck *et al.* 2011: 7).

The studies reviewed in this section give us important insights into the indicators and existence of European(-ised) public sphere(s); into whether, how, and when news media cover European integration-related issues; and into the second-order character of EP elections. However, they often focus only on a limited range of media outlets or on bigger and older EU member states (de Vreese 2001; Machill *et al.* 2006), do not link the media, political parties and voters sufficiently when analysing SOEs (Marsh and Mikhaylov 2010), or do not generally integrate the literature on Europeanisation of the public sphere and the literature on media coverage of the EU with SOE model. Moreover, research on coverage of EP elections in the media does not explicitly address the question of how the coverage differs across FOEs and SOEs and does not provide hard cross-national comparative evidence in these terms (de Vreese *et al.* 2007). In this area of research, we have so far had to rely on indicative and anecdotal evidence. This is where this study tries to contribute some theoretical structure as well as empirical evidence.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The study looks for signs of the development of an Europeanised national public sphere during the 2004 and the 2009 EP elections in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. The two countries have been selected as case studies for several reasons. First, research on media coverage of (EP) elections in the post-communist EU member states is much scarcer compared to analyses focusing on (EP) election coverage in the established EU democracies. Second, to the best knowledge of the authors no study offers comparative analysis of media coverage of different orders of elections (i.e. first-order vs. second-order). This statement is valid not only for the post-communist EU member states but also for the established EU democracies. In other words, there is need for lead-off comparative studies to be conducted that will focus on cross-order election media coverage.

The third set of reasons can be labelled technical or practical: due to practical as well as technical problems we were unable to carry out the analysis in more than the two countries mentioned. Carrying out the analysis in the other Central and Eastern European countries (CEEC) would presuppose not only knowledge of languages of these countries (while Czech and Slovak are mutually intelligible) but also resources for purchase of and access to audiovisual broadcasting and print outlets in these countries. This is typically conducted by a cross-national team of researchers with significant amount of financial resources (e.g. Boomgaarden et al. 2013).

Fourth, even though both states are quite similar as they were for a long time parts of one state, there is a discernible difference between them which increases their comparative value: ever since the Czech Republic and Slovakia joined the EU, it was evident that in general there is higher level of public and party based Euroscepticism in the former country while in the latter country, particularly after joining the EU, political parties and publics are in general much more supportive towards the EU (European Commission 2003-2010; Beichelt 2004; Kopecký 2004; Taggart and Szczerbiak 2004; Havlík and Kaniok 2006: 32-44, 63-80; Taggart and Szczerbiak 2008; Vachudova and Hooghe 2009; Boyd 2011). For these reasons this study conducts the analysis only on the Czech Republic and Slovakia.⁴ The driving engine of this search is the premise that a European public sphere can develop via the Europeanisation of national public spheres, which are in turn essentially constituted via the national media (Machill et al. 2006). The logic for this stems from the idea that the media is taken as the best "proxy" for the public sphere (de Vreese 2007: 6).

The abovementioned research on media coverage of European integration-related issues stresses the importance of three main aspects of news media coverage of EP election campaigns: *visibility* of the coverage, degree of *domesticisation/Europeanisation* of the coverage, and *tone* of coverage. This study analyses all three aspects of news media coverage. Two of these three aspects of news media coverage closely relate to different indicators of Europeanisation of national public spheres (see above). Gerhards (2000) understands Europeanisation of the public sphere as an increase in reporting of European issues (*visibility*) and coverage of actors (*domesticisation/Europeanisation*). One of the indicators Koopmans and Erbe use is vertical Europeanisation, in which national actors address European actors and national actors make claims regarding European issues or European actors who partake in national debates on European issues (2004: 101). Vertical Europeanisation can be observed in terms of the extent to which EU politicians, issues, actors, and events (*visibility; domesticisation/Europeanisation*) are covered by national news media (Trenz 2008).

Expectations

Two of the three aspects of media coverage of EU issues analysed here, namely the *visibility* and the degree of *domesticisation/Europeanisation* of the coverage, are also closely connected to the SOE model, which allows us to derive clear expectations from the theory. First, as far as the degree of *domesticisation/Europeanisation* is concerned, the characterisation of EP elections as SOEs, where the national arena provides the dominant frame of reference for all other elections (Norris 1997), suggests that a domestic frame will be strongly dominant (de Vreese et al. 2007). It signals domesticisation rather than Europeanisation of news media coverage. Therefore, this study expects the coverage of EP election campaigns in the media to be predominantly domestic (national) in nature with little reference to the European dimension. Furthermore, since prior research indicates that predominantly domestic appeals play a greater role in the subsequent EP elections (Leroy and Siune 1994; Peter et al. 2004), it is expected that the Europeanisation of news media coverage of the 2004 EP elections to be less pronounced, given their novelty, than that of the subsequent 2009 EP elections.

Second, with respect to *visibility*, it is viable to assume that the news media coverage will be greater in elections that are more salient and more competitive and when campaign spending is greater (Banducci and Semetko 2002). In other words, elections that are more important will receive greater media coverage. The less-at-stake character of SOEs suggests that visibility will be low, and is expected to be notably lower in the case of EP elections in comparison to FOEs. Moreover, previous research suggests the initial EP elections receive some amount of (obligatory) media coverage because of the novelty of the events, and with subsequent elections, they disappear from the coverage (Leroy and Siune 1994; de Vreese *et al.* 2007). Given that both countries held their first EP elections in June 2004, this analysis expects that the media coverage of the 2004 EP elections to be higher than that of the subsequent EP elections of 2009.

Given that both countries' media systems include both market-based and public service-oriented broadcasters as well as a variety of quality papers and tabloids, the analysis focuses on all types of media. Public service broadcasting (PSB) has, by definition, an obligation to provide a sufficient amount of news and public affairs coverage, which is pluralist in terms of both issue content and coverage of political actors (Toka and Popescu 2009; Act No. 231/2001; Act No. 308/2000). On the other hand, private television channels are usually assumed to focus mainly on soft news and infotainment instead of conveying everyday politics to the viewers (Pfetsch 1996; Blumler 1997). In fact, it has been pointed out that "quality" media outlets, such as public broadcasting news and broadsheet newspapers, tend to have more political and economic news than their private counterparts and provide more news about the European integration-related issues and EU-level actors than "commercial" news outlets, such as private television news and tabloids (Semetko and Valkenburg 2000; Peter and de Vreese 2004). Taken together, this gives rise to two expectations related to the analysis. First, we expect "quality" media outlets (public service broadcasting and broadsheet newspapers) to report more on EP election campaigns than private outlets (private broadcasting and tabloids). Second, "quality" media outlets will include more relevant EU actors in their coverage than private media outlets. Finally, in interaction with the SOE model, we are interested whether the difference between PSB and private outlets is lower or higher in European as compared to national elections.

As far as the *tone* of coverage is concerned, the SOE model does not offer any clear expectations or premises from which expectations might be derived. The coverage of EP elections may be both positive and negative in tone. Following previous research concluding that news about the EU is mostly neutral and, if evaluative, then negative (Peter *et al.* 2003; de Vreese *et al.* 2007), we expect the coverage of EP elections to be, for the most part, neutral or slightly negative. We have no *ex ante* expectations about differences in the tone of the news across years or the type of outlets.

Methods and data

The study of news media coverage of the 2004 and the 2009 EP elections in the Czech Republic and Slovakia is carried out using media content analysis. Content analysis of the media coverage of EP elections can provide insights into how much importance and salience the media ascribe to the coverage of second-order EP elections (Peter *et al.* 2003), since content analysis (through the content-analysed materials) can provide, even without the cooperation of the media, insights about how high are the "stakes" the media ascribe to elections (Hermann 2008). For the purposes of this study, we consider the media as a whole, thus avoiding the existing bias towards broadsheet newspapers and public service broadcasting (Machill *et al.* 2006: 80). Moreover, as Steven Chaffee and Stacey Frank Kanihan (1997: 421) point out, different types of media serve different needs in the citizenry, and it is thus reasonable to focus on the whole range of media types.

The two weeks prior to Election Day became the subject of the analysis because prior research has demonstrated that election coverage tends to cluster around the period shortly before the election day (Leroy and Siune 1994), and thus it makes this study comparable to other research conducted in the field. Since election days vary across both countries, the coding periods also vary.⁵ For the purposes of this study, we focus on all main national PSB and private TV stations and all main newspapers. This analysis includes three TV stations and five newspapers in the Czech Republic, and four TV stations and four newspapers in Slovakia (see Table 1).

Table 1: Summary of analysed TV stations and newspapers according to the type of outlet

	Czech Republic	Slovakia
Public Service	Česká televize (ČT 1/ČT 24)	Slovenská televízia (STV 1)
Private	TV Nova, Prima TV	Joj TV, TV Markíza, TA3
Broadsheet	Lidové Noviny, Mladá Fronta Dnes, Právo, Hospodářské Noviny	Pravda, SME, Hospodárske noviny
Tabloid	Blesk	Nový čas

We focus on national television and newspapers, since these media outlets are consistently cited as the most important sources of information among European citizens looking for information about the EU (European Commission 1999-2007) as well as about the EP elections (European Commission 2004). Moreover, television is generally seen as the most influential mass medium (Blumler 1970; Mazzoleni and Schulz 1999), while newspapers clearly remain a major source of political information and information about the EU, given that the EU receive more attention in newspapers than on television (Trenz 2004). In addition, these outlets were selected to provide a comprehensive idea of the news coverage in both countries. Specifically, we focus on main evening television newscasts of each outlet, because, of all the news programmes, these usually have the largest audiences (Table 2). Moreover, as pointed out by Jochen Peter (*et al.* 2004: 416) 'these "flagship" news programs provide an indicator of the importance that broadcasters attach to the EU and European parliamentary elections'. We also consider all main broadsheet newspapers and the most widely circulated tabloids from each country.

Table 2: Summary of main evening TV newscasts

	Newscasts analysed
Czech Republic	ČT1/ČT 24: <i>Události</i> ; TV Nova: <i>Televizní noviny</i> ; Prima TV: <i>Zpravodajský deník/Zprávy TV Prima</i> *
Slovakia	STV1: <i>Hlavné správy/Správy STV</i> *; Joj TV: <i>Noviny</i> ; TV Markíza: <i>Televízne noviny</i> ; TA3: <i>Hlavné správy</i>

* During the analysed period, the channel has changed the name of its main evening news programme.

In the case of television, the entire newscast of each TV station is coded. In line with prior research (Schuck *et al.* 2011b), we base all analyses of television coverage on the

length of the individual news story in relation to the total length of each newscast (word count-based).⁶ Length is a more appropriate measure of visibility of topics than the number of stories, because the length of the newscasts (from 15 to 35 minutes) and of individual news stories vary, as do the number of stories per newscast (de Vreese 2001: 290). The unit of analysis and coding is the individual news story, defined as a semantic entity with at least one topic delimited from another story by a discernible change of topic (Peter and de Vreese 2004). In total, 3504 TV news stories are analysed. For newspapers, we focus on and code the title page and one randomly selected inside page⁷ as well as all stories pertaining to EP elections on any other page.⁸ The analysis is based on the volume of the individual newspaper story in relation to the total volume of newspaper front-page and a randomly selected inside page (volume-based). The individual news story is again the unit of analysis. Overall, 2,168 newspaper stories are analysed. Content from all relevant news outlets are collected either digitally (TV and newspapers) or as hardcopies (newspapers).

Visibility: the first key measure used in this study is the *visibility* of the EP elections. As noted above, *visibility* in television newscasts is operationalised as the percentage of *EP election stories* of the total coverage (word-count based). *Visibility* in newspapers is operationalised as the percentage of *EP election stories* of the total coverage on newspaper front-pages and randomly selected inside pages (volume-based). *EP election stories* were operationalised as stories in which the EP election campaign (e.g. candidates, parties, polls, and policy areas) is mentioned in at least two complete, independent sentences or, in the case of a newspaper, once in the heading and once in the text (Peter and de Vreese 2004). EP election campaign coverage should be distinguished from EU-related coverage. EU-related coverage comprises both coverage of EU topics other than the European election and coverage with some reference to the EU but no direct reference to EP elections. This study focuses on EP election campaign coverage only, thus excluding other EU-related coverage. The inter-coder reliability test for this measure yielded a satisfactory result (Krippendorff's alpha = .90).⁹

To test the expectation, derived from the SOE model, that EP elections receive less coverage in main TV newscasts and national newspapers than FOEs, we conduct further content analysis, this time covering the two-week period preceding the election day for national parliamentary elections. In both countries, FOEs took place in 2006 and 2010, always within two weeks one to the other.¹⁰ Since EP elections can be affected by the point of the national electoral cycle at which they take place (Marsh and Mikhaylov 2010), it should be noted that both countries held the 2006 as well as 2010 national first-order elections at almost same time. Hence, in both countries EP elections took place at almost same position of the national electoral cycle. Here, again, the key measure is the visibility of national parliamentary elections. *National election stories* are operationalised as stories in which a national election campaign (e.g. candidates, parties, polls, and policy areas) are mentioned in at least two complete, independent sentences or, in the case of a newspaper, once in the heading and once in the text. Again, all stories in television news programmes and all stories on newspaper front pages and randomly selected inside page¹¹ are analysed to identify stories about national parliamentary elections. Within this second content analysis, a total of 3,440 television news stories and 1,995 newspaper stories are analysed. Inter-coder reliability for this measure is Krippendorff's alpha = .89.

Actors: Domesticisation/Europeanisation: the second key measure used in this study is the *domesticisation/Europeanisation* of EP elections in the news, measured as the visibility of different actors. We decided to use this particular operationalisation of Europeanisation/domesticisation of the news story since, next to operationalisation based on topics/issues, it is the most widely used operationalisation for tapping the *domestic* versus *EU* nature of news stories (see e.g. de Vreese 2003; de Vreese *et al.* 2006; Boomgaarden *et al.* 2010; Schuck *et al.* 2011b). In addition, studies using the operationalisation of Europeanisation/domesticisation based on topics has already been

conducted for these countries (Kovář and Kovář 2012). Thus, we rely on the coding of actors in the news stories, since looking at actors can reveal whether the news media cover EP elections as either national or European contests (de Vreese *et al.* 2006: 482). For both television and newspapers, actors in all *EP election stories* are coded. In contrast to the analysis of visibility and tone, where the individual news story is the unit of analysis, individual actors are the units of analysis in the analysis of domestication/Europeanisation. An actor is defined as a person (e.g. an MEP candidate), a group of persons (e.g. a political party), an institution (e.g. a national parliament), or other organisation featured in the news story (Peter *et al.* 2004).¹² Up to 15 actors per news story are coded. Each actor is coded only once per story.

EU actors are operationalised as EP election candidates, the EU president and members and representatives of EU institutions, including the EU Commission, persons appointed by the EU, spokespersons, and other actors clearly connected with the EU (the head of state or government of the country holding the rotating presidency is coded as an EU-actor). *Domestic political actors* are members of the government, spokespersons for government agencies, or members of opposition parties. This includes all members of both chambers of national parliaments. The category of *other actors* includes journalists, celebrities, ordinary citizens, and other actors who do not fall into the EU or domestic political actor categories. In total, 509 actors in relevant television news stories and 635 actors in relevant newspaper stories are coded. For this measure, Krippendorff's alpha proves a satisfactory .92.

Tone: the last key measure used in this study is the *tone* of the EP elections' coverage. *Tone* is operationalised as the explicit evaluation of the EU, EP, other institutions, and/policies. It was ensured that the news stories did contain explicit evaluations clearly referring to the EU. In television and newspaper, the tones of all *EP election stories* are coded. The individual news story is the unit of analysis. EP election stories are coded for being neutral (i.e. without any evaluation¹³), negative or positive, rather negative or rather positive, or mixed. We use a mean score ranging from 1 (negative) to 5 (positive), where 3 signifies mixed evaluation (see de Vreese *et al.* 2006). In total, 156 television news stories and 278 newspaper stories are analysed. For this measure, Krippendorff's alpha is .84.

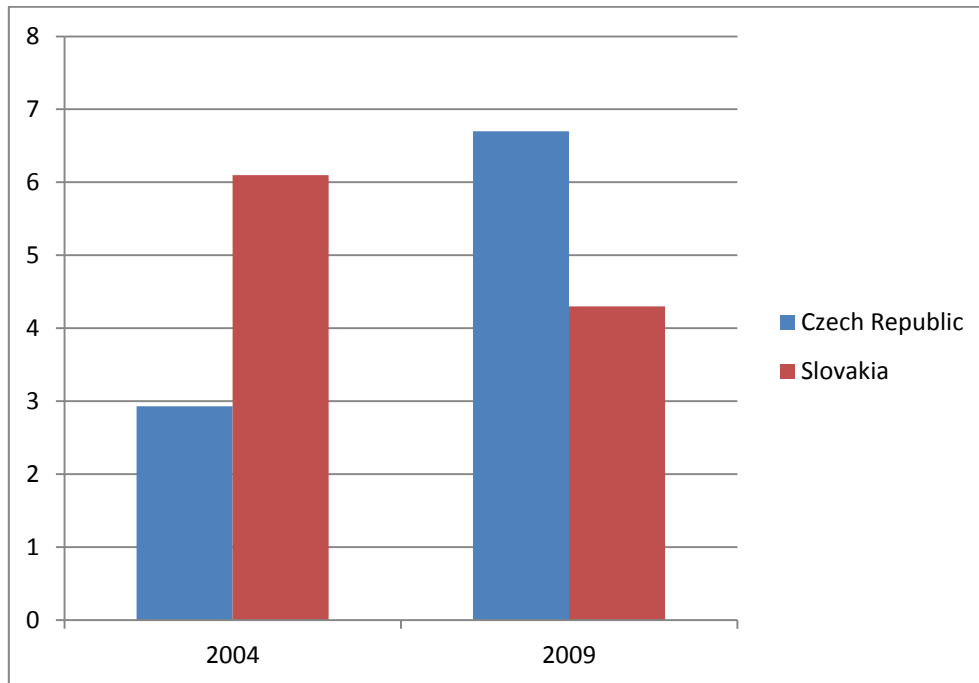
RESULTS

Visibility: the 2004 and 2009 EP elections generally received marginal visibility in the TV news and newspapers in both countries (see Figure 1).¹⁴ Looking at the TV newscasts from 2004, I find that EP election stories took up from 3 per cent (Czech Republic) to 6.1 per cent (Slovakia) of the news. In 2009, EP election stories also took up a small proportion of the news, ranging from 4.3 per cent (Slovakia) to 6.7 per cent (Czech Republic). Turning to national newspapers, Figure 2 shows the visibility of EP election stories on the newspaper front page and one randomly selected page. Visibility was higher in the Czech Republic in both election years: 9 per cent in 2004 and 11.3 per cent in 2009. In Slovakian newspapers, visibility was similar in both election years, dropping from 6.4 per cent in 2004 to 6.2 per cent in 2009.

Regarding the expectation that the first EP elections in a given country receives some amount of (obligatory) visibility because of the novelty of the event and that coverage diminishes in subsequent elections, this proved true only in Slovakia (Figures 1-2). In TV news, the visibility of the EP elections decreased by almost half from 2004 to 2009 (8.5 per cent to 4.3 per cent). In Slovak newspapers, the trend is almost negligible: a decrease from 6.4 per cent in 2004 to 6.2 per cent in 2009. In the Czech Republic, on the other hand, the visibility of EP elections increased in both newspapers and TV news. In TV news, the visibility of EP elections doubled from 2004 to 2009 (from 3 per cent to

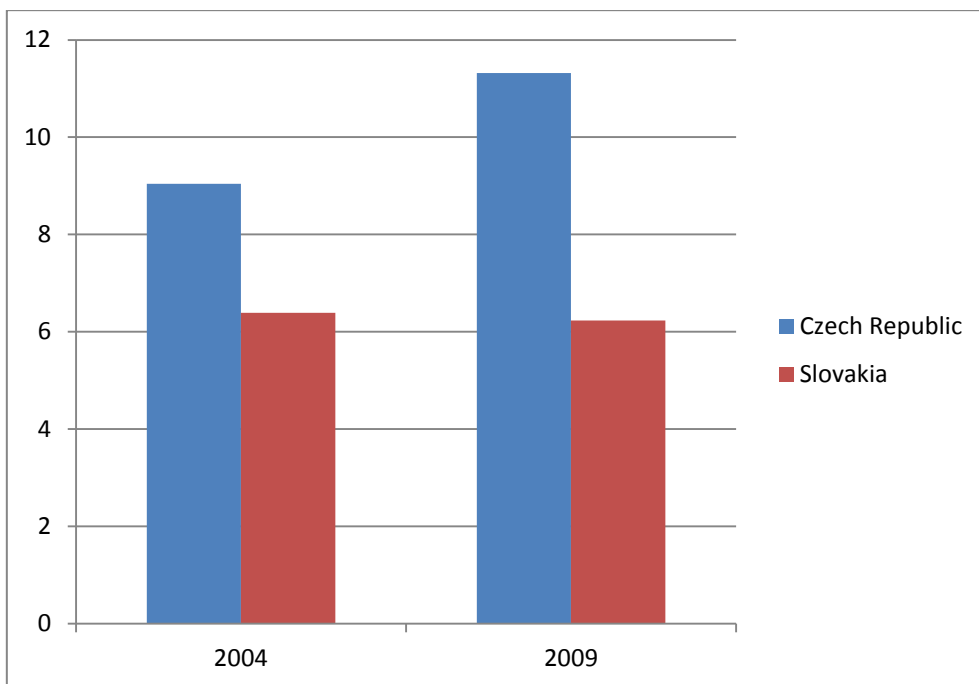
6.7 per cent) while it increased slightly in newspapers during the same period (from 9 per cent to 11.3 per cent).

Figure 1: Visibility of the 2004 and 2009 EP elections in television newscasts



Note: Percentage of EP election news of overall TV news (time-based).

Figure 2: Visibility of the 2004 and 2009 EP elections in newspapers

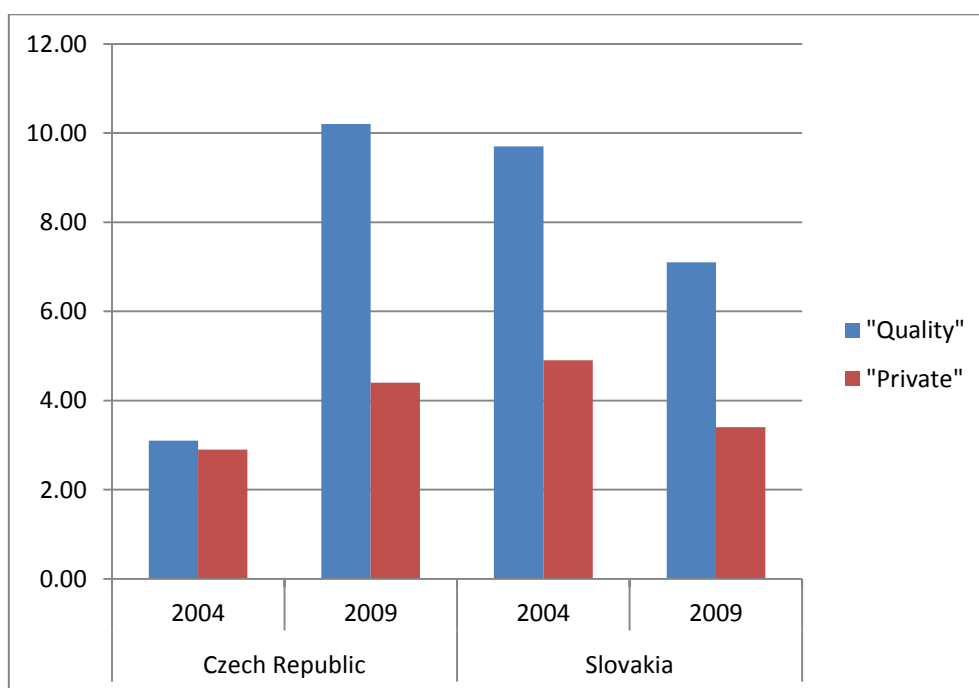


Note: Percentage of EP election news of overall news on newspaper front-pages and a randomly selected page (volume-based).

Comparing the visibility of EP elections in "quality" media outlets (PSB and broadsheet newspapers) and "private"¹⁵ media outlets (private broadcasting and tabloids), we find support for the expectation that "quality" outlets devote more time and space to EP elections than "private" outlets (Figure 3-4); EP elections were consistently more visible in "quality" outlets than "private" outlets. This trend can be observed for the 2004 as well as 2009 EP elections in both countries. Also, in three out of four cases, we find that the difference in visibility between "quality" and "private" outlets is significantly larger for European elections than for national elections.¹⁶ This suggests that the SOE model logic applies more to private media outlets than to PSB.

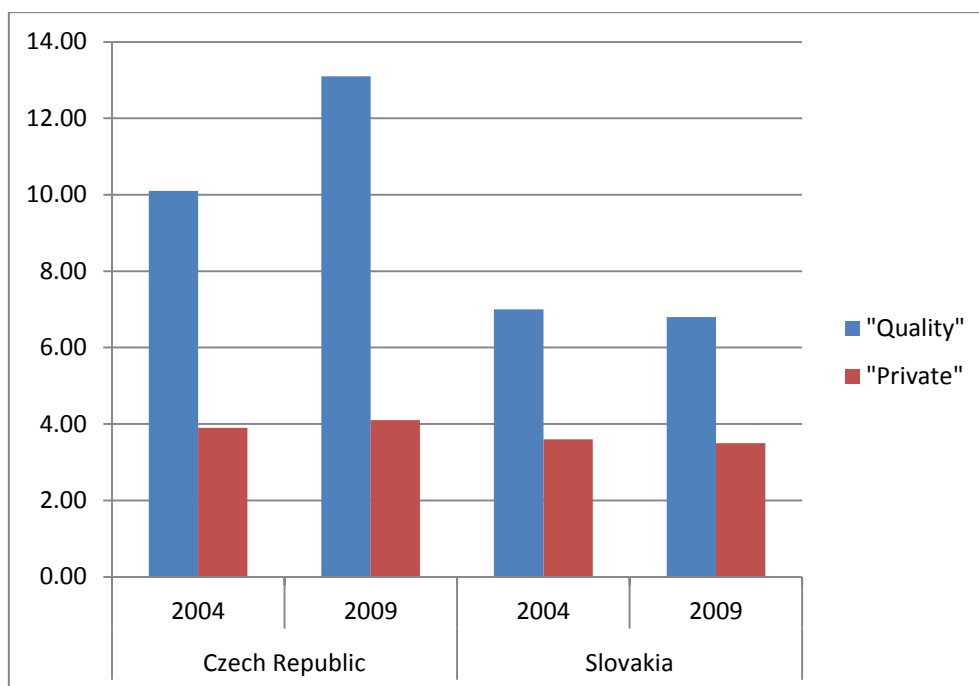
In TV news, the trend is more pronounced in Slovakia. In 2004, PSB devoted 9.7 per cent of newscasts to EP elections, while private broadcasters devoted only 4.9 per cent; in 2009, PBS devoted 7.1 per cent of news coverage to the EP elections, while private broadcasters devoted only 3.4 per cent. In the Czech Republic, the margin between PSB and private broadcasters is narrower for 2004 (3.1 per cent vs. 2.9 per cent). However, the data for 2009 confirm the expectation, with PBS devoting 10.2 per cent to EP election coverage and private broadcasters devoting only 4.4 per cent. The pattern is more pronounced in newspapers than in TV news in the Czech Republic. In 2004, Czech broadsheet newspapers devoted 10.1 per cent of front pages and randomly selected pages to EP election stories, while tabloid papers devoted only 3.9 per cent; in 2009, broadsheet papers devoted 13.1 per cent and tabloids only 4.1 per cent. Slovakian broadsheet papers devoted 7 per cent to EP elections while tabloid newspapers devoted 3.6 per cent in 2004 and the difference between broadsheet papers and tabloids was similar in 2009 (6.8 per cent vs. 3.5 cent).

Figure 3: Visibility of EP elections in public service and private television newscasts



Note: Percentage of EP election news of overall TV news (time-based).

Figure 4: Visibility of EP elections in broadsheet papers and tabloids



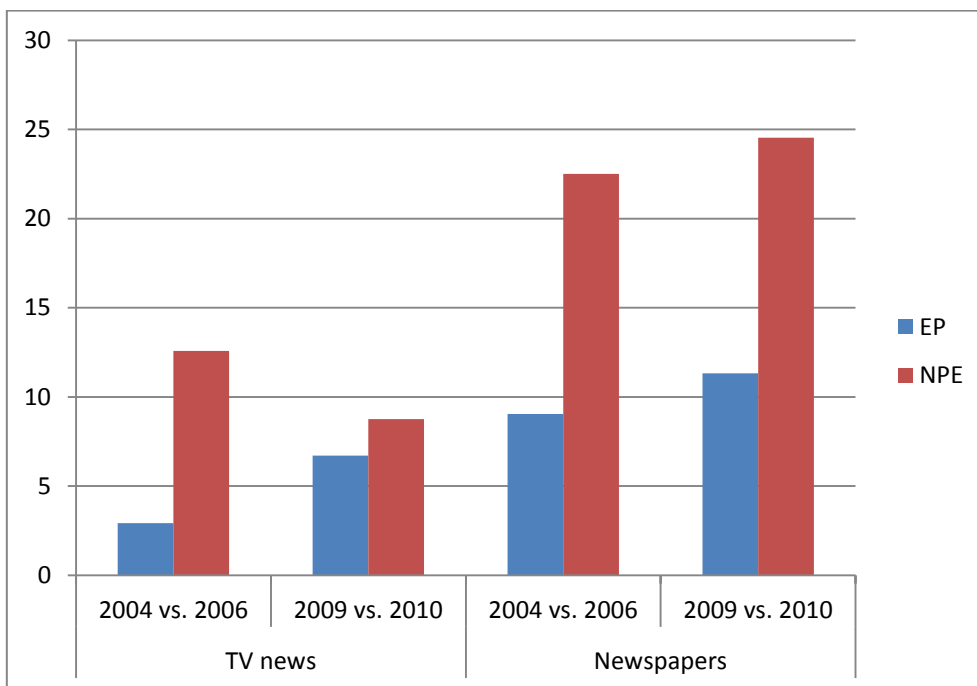
Note: Percentage of EP election news of overall news on newspaper front-pages and a randomly selected page (volume-based).

The expectation that visibility would be lower in the case of EP elections in comparison to FOEs is graphically addressed in Figures 5-6. The visibility of EP election stories proves consistently lower than the visibility of national FOEs, regardless of the type of media analysed. In both TV news and newspapers, the difference between the visibility of SOEs and FOEs proves higher in Slovakia. In Slovakian TV news, for both election pairs, the visibility of FOEs was at least twice as high as the visibility of SOEs: 6.1 per cent vs. 17 per cent, and 4.3 per cent vs. 11.5 per cent. In newspapers, the trend in visibility of SOEs compared to FOEs resembles the one found in TV news: 6.4 per cent vs. 17.2 per cent for one election pair and 6.2 per cent vs. 16.9 per cent for the other.

In Czech TV news, the situation changed rapidly across the two election dyads. While FOEs were more than four times more visible than SOEs in the first election pair (3 per cent vs. 12.6 per cent); the visibility of SOEs almost reached that of FOEs in the other election pair (6.7 per cent vs. 8.8 per cent). In Czech newspapers, the differences are more pronounced than in Czech TV news, and the visibility of FOEs was at least twice as high as the visibility of SOEs for both election pairs: 9 per cent vs. 22.5 per cent and 11.3 per cent vs. 24.5 per cent.

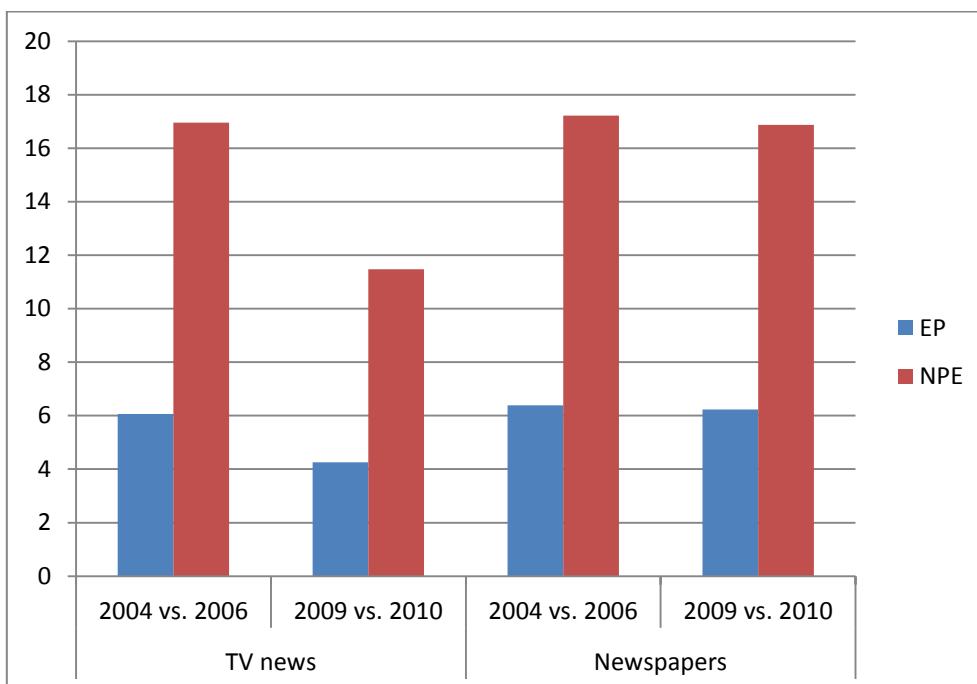
Actors: Domesticisation/Europeanisation: Turning to the visibility of actors in EP election stories, the expectation that EP election stories are dominated by national political actors is addressed graphically in Figures 7-8. Figure 7 summarises the proportion of actors who appeared in EP election stories in Czech and Slovak TV newscasts. Among the groups of actors, domestic political actors clearly dominated the coverage of EP election stories in both countries in both election years. The picture from newspapers resembles the one from the analysis of TV newscasts (see Figure 8). Again, domestic political actors occupied the biggest share of EP election stories on newspapers front pages and randomly selected pages. The presence of EU actors or, in other words, Europeanisation of newspaper reporting, was, nevertheless, higher than in the case of TV news.

Figure 5: Visibility of EP elections as compared to visibility of the subsequent national parliamentary elections in the Czech Republic



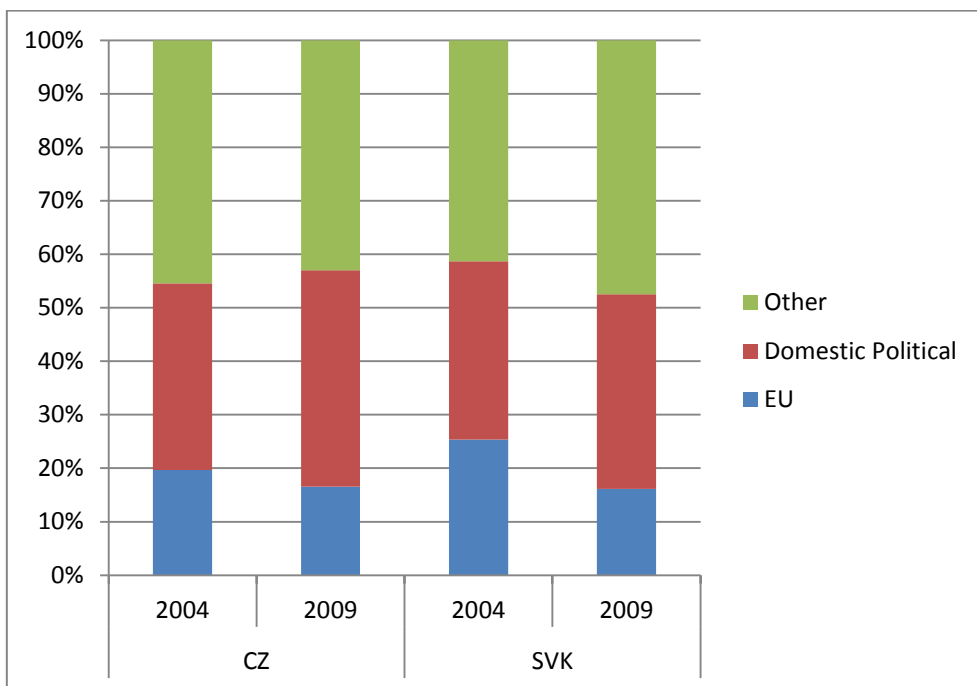
Note: Newspapers: percentage of election news of overall news on newspaper front-pages and a randomly selected page (volume-based); TV newscasts: percentage of election news of overall TV newscasts (time-based).

Figure 6: Visibility of EP elections as compared to visibility of the subsequent national parliamentary elections in Slovakia



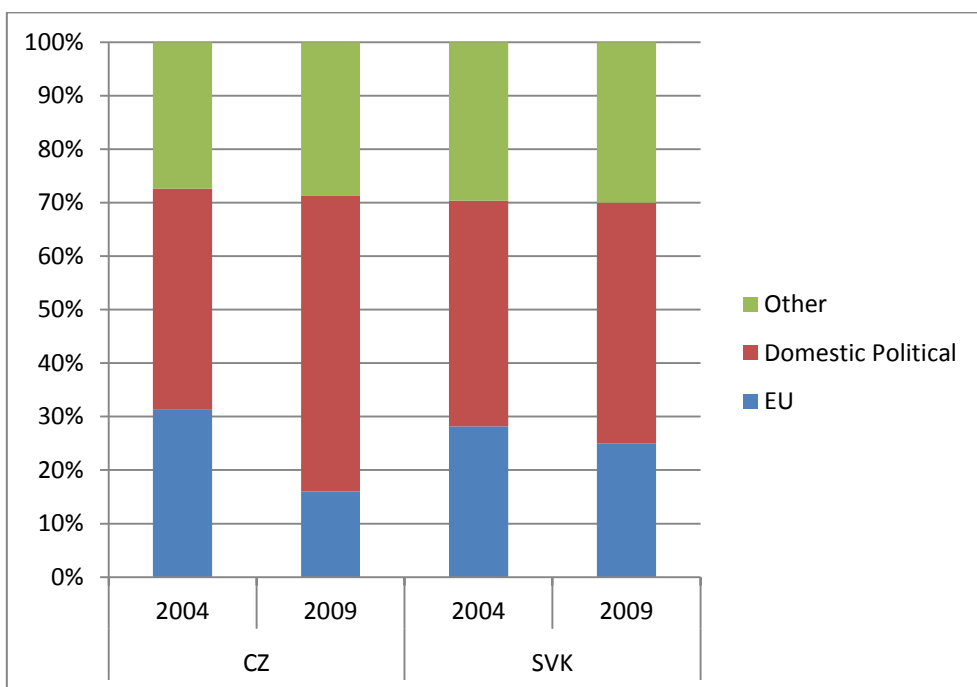
Note: Newspapers: percentage of election news of overall news on newspaper front-pages and a randomly selected page (volume-based); TV newscasts: percentage of election news of overall TV newscasts (time-based).

Figure 7: EU actors, domestic political actors and other actors in EP elections stories in TV newscast



Note: The figure compares all actors in the news in 1999 with all protagonists in 2004.

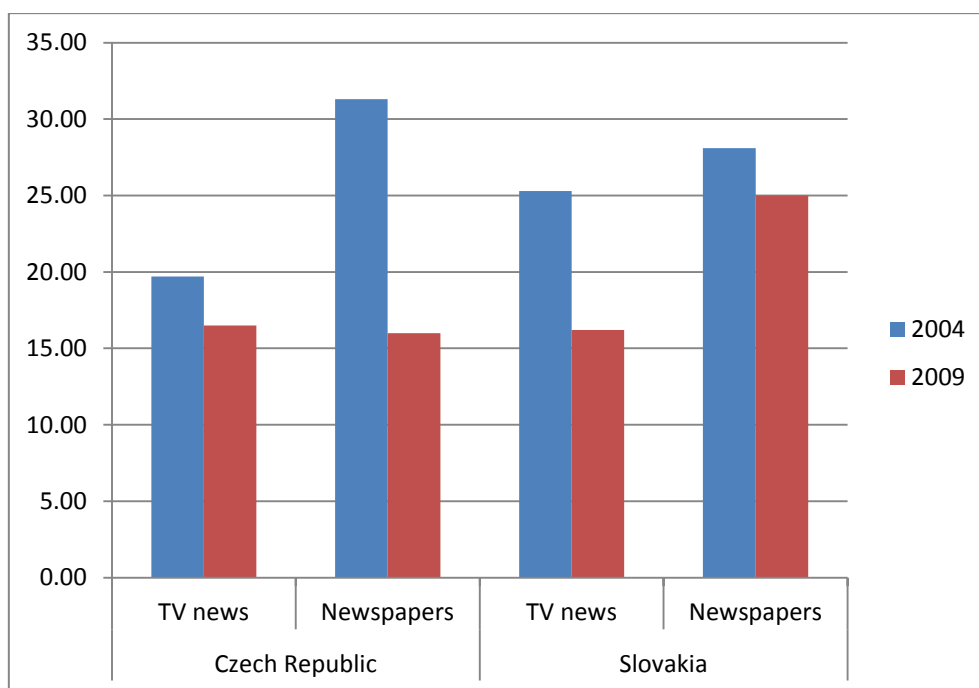
Figure 8: EU-level actors, domestic political actors and other actors in EP elections stories in newspapers



Note: The figure compares all actors in the news in 1999 with all protagonists in 2004.

The data also confirm the expectation that the first EP elections in a given country are dominated less by national political actors or, conversely, more Europeanised than subsequent EP elections (Figure 9). In both TV news and newspapers, an increase in the proportion of coverage occupied by domestic political actors from 2004 to 2009 is shown. In TV news in the Czech Republic, the proportion of EU actors decreased from 19.6 per cent to 16.6 per cent; the proportional decline was larger in Slovakia, with percentages falling from 25 per cent to 16 per cent. In newspapers, the proportion of EU actors covered dropped from 31.3 per cent to 16 per cent in the Czech Republic and less in Slovakia, falling from 28.1 per cent to 25 per cent.

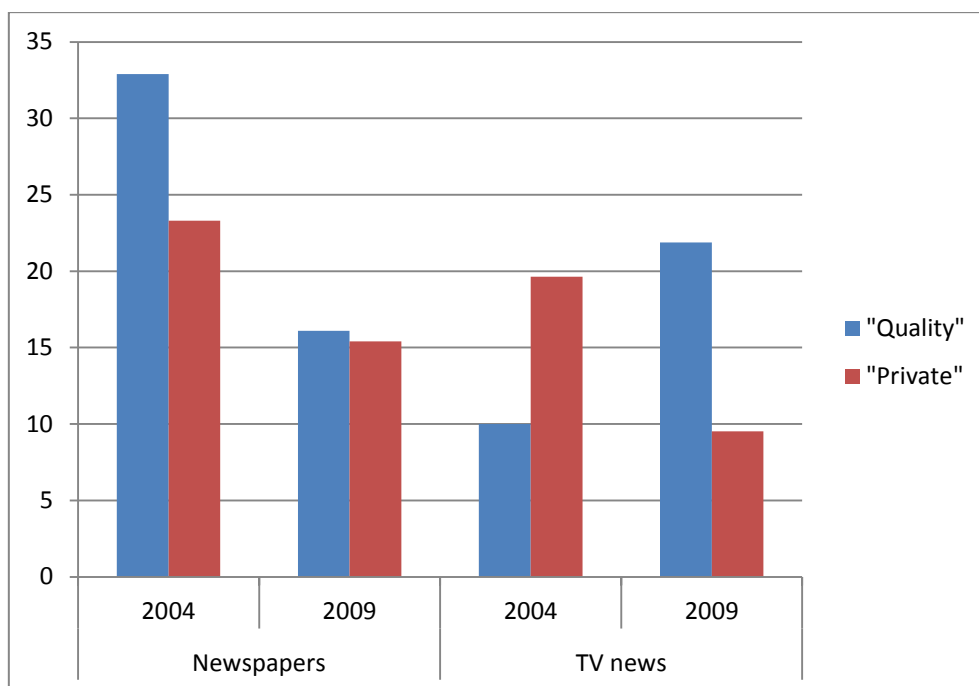
Figure 9: EU-level actors in the first and subsequent EP elections in newspapers and TV news



Note: Percentage of EU-level actors of overall number of actors. The figure compares EU-level actors in 2004 with EU-level actors in 2009.

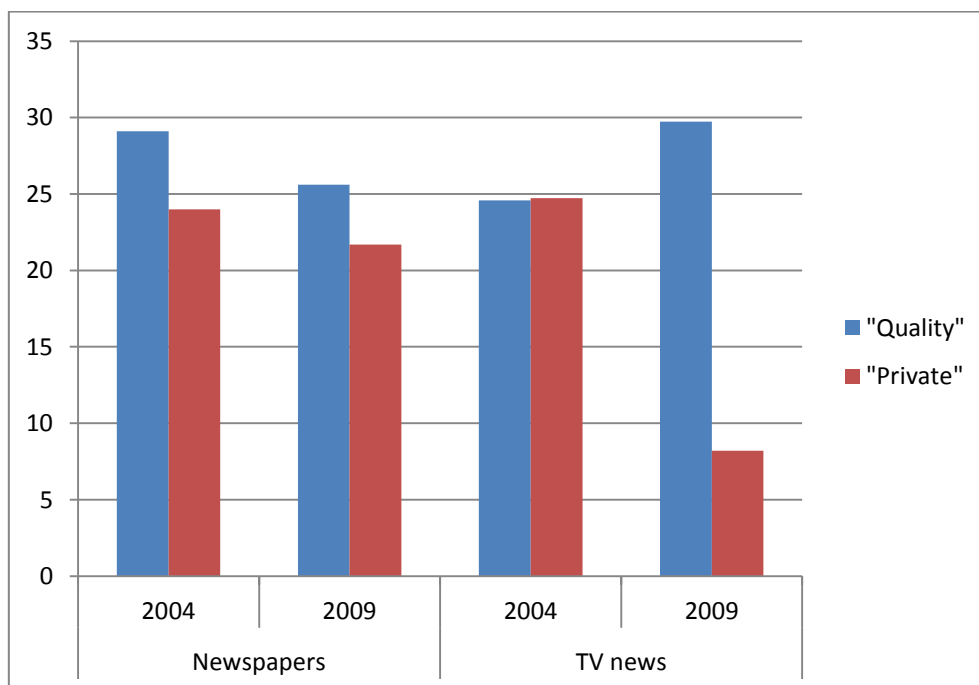
Finally, we also expected “quality” media outlets to include more relevant EU actors in their coverage than “private” media outlets (Figures 10-11). In the Czech Republic, broadsheet papers involved more EU actors than tabloids, but the margin was much smaller for the second EP elections (2004: 32.9 per cent vs. 23.3 per cent; 2009: 16.1 per cent vs. 15.4 per cent). In contrast, Czech PSB devoted less space to EU actors than private broadcasters in 2004 (10 per cent vs. 19.6 per cent) (for similar conclusions, see de Vreese *et al.* 2006), whereas they included more EU actors in 2009 (21.9 per cent vs. 9.52 per cent). The picture from Slovakia is similar: broadsheet papers included more EU actors during both EP elections (in 2004: 29.1 per cent vs. 24 per cent; in 2009: 25.6 per cent vs. 21.7 per cent). However, Slovakian PSB included almost the same portion of EU actors as private broadcasters in 2004 (24.6 per cent vs. 24.7 per cent) and significantly more EU actors in 2009 (29.7 per cent vs. 8.2 per cent).

Figure 10: EU-level actors in "quality" and "private" outlets in the Czech Republic



Note: Percentage of EU-level actors of overall number of actors.

Figure 11: EU-level actors in "quality" and "private" outlets in Slovakia



Note: Percentage of EU-level actors of overall number of actors.

Tone: Regarding the tone of EP election stories, this analysis finds that, for the most part, EP election stories appear in a neutral, non-evaluative manner (Tables 3-4). Overall, about 88 per cent of the stories related to EP elections were neutral without making explicitly positive or negative evaluation of the EU. Looking at the remaining 12

per cent of EP elections stories that contained explicit evaluation of the EU, we use a mean score ranging from 1 (negative evaluation) to 5 (positive evaluation), where 3 signifies mixed evaluation. In what follows, we consider the tone of EP election stories and type of media in each member state individually in order to assess the mean tone of the information available to citizens in each country according to the media type.

Table 3: Evaluations of the EU in newspapers

		Evaluative	No Evaluation
Czech Republic	2004	10	73
	2009	10	81
Slovakia	2004	7	46
	2009	7	44

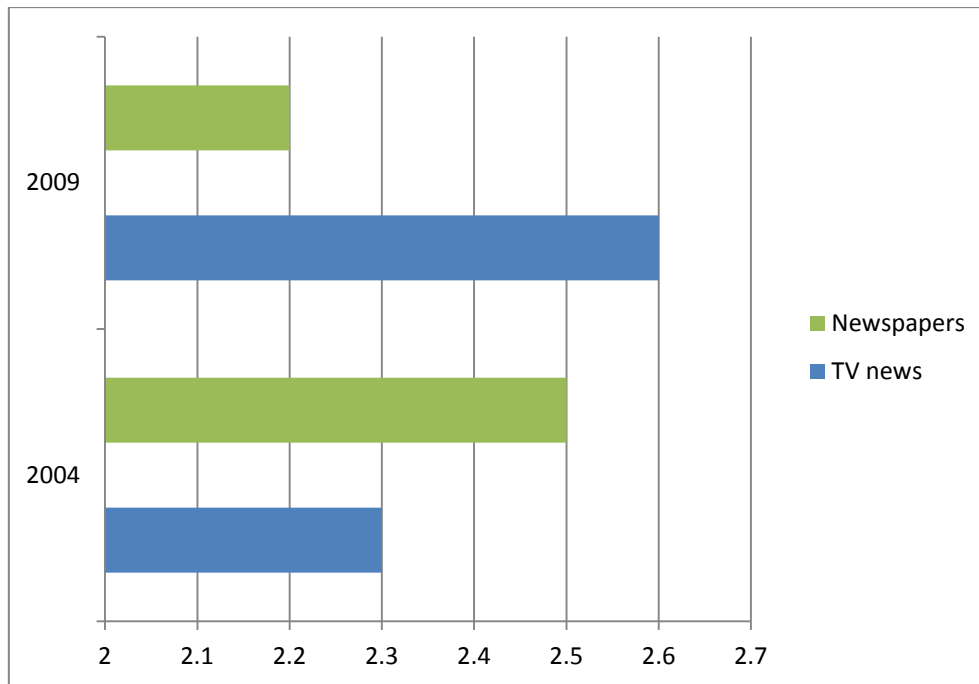
Table 4: Evaluations of the EU in TV news

		Evaluative	No Evaluation
Czech Republic	2004	3	21
	2009	7	40
Slovakia	2004	3	35
	2009	6	41

Figures 12 and 13 show the average tone in Czech and Slovak TV newscasts and newspapers. In all the cases, the tone of EP election stories is in line with our expectations, proving slightly neutral. In 2004, in the Czech Republic, EP elections stories were presented more negatively in TV newscasts (2.3) than newspapers (2.5), whereas in 2009, they were presented more negatively in newspapers (2.2) than TV news (2.6). In Slovakia, EP election stories were presented as negatively in TV newscasts (2) as in newspapers (2) in 2004 while, in 2009, they were presented more negatively in newspapers (2) than TV news (2.3). Moreover, these figures show that, when EP election stories contain explicit evaluation of the EU they tend to be presented more negatively in Slovakia than in the Czech Republic. The election environments were thus less negative in the Czech Republic than in Slovakia in both years.

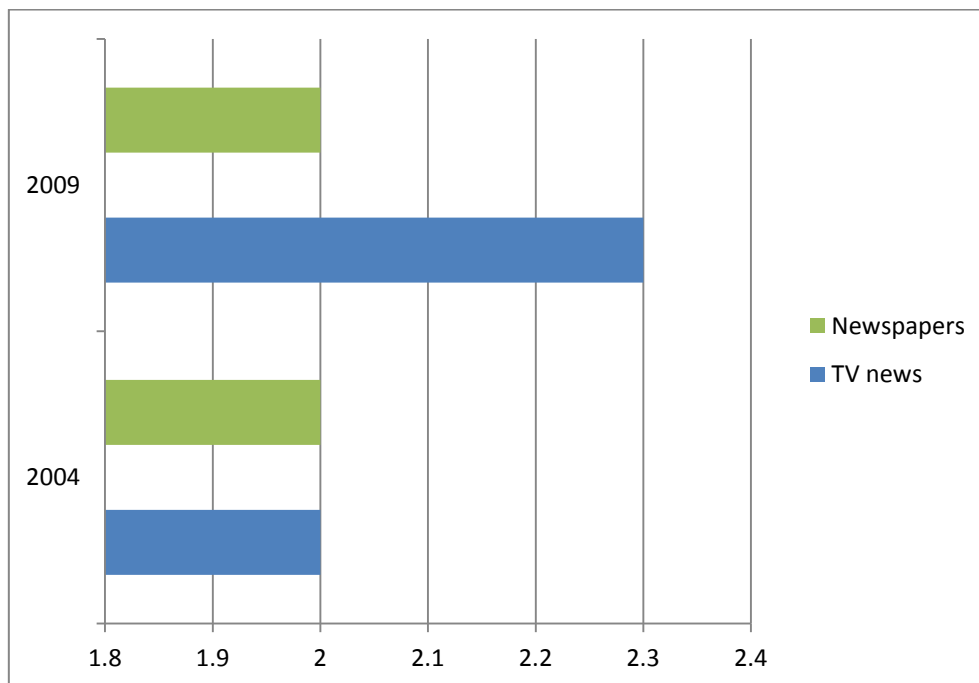
To summarise, the results support most of the initially held expectations and are in line with previous research suggesting that media across the EU only marginally cover EP elections¹⁷ (de Vreese *et al.* 2006; Schuck *et al.* 2011b). The coverage of EP elections in television news and print media was indeed low, in no case exceeding 11.5 per cent of the news coverage. EP election stories were dominated by domestic rather than EU political actors, indicating domesticisation rather than Europeanisation of election campaigns. Moreover, when comparing SOEs with FOEs, the visibility of national (first-order) elections was, in all cases, higher than that of preceding EP elections. In addition, two expectations proved only partly confirmed, or not confirmed at all.

Figure 12: Tone of EU news (explicit evaluations of the EU) in the Czech Republic



Note: Values range from 1 (negative) to 5 (positive), where 3 signifies mixed evaluation.

Figure 13: Tone of EU news (explicit evaluations of the EU) in Slovakia



Note: Values range from 1 (negative) to 5 (positive), where 3 signifies mixed evaluation.

First, we expected that the visibility of EP election campaign stories would be higher in the first EP elections in a given country than in subsequent ones. This proved valid only

in Slovakia, while the opposite trend appeared in the Czech Republic. Second, we expected that “quality” media outlets would include more relevant EU actors in their coverage than “private” media outlets. Across television news, however, the differences between PSB and private broadcasters were very small and not always in the expected direction. In contrast, in newspapers the differences in the proportion of EU actor coverage between broadsheet and tabloid newspapers were wider and always in the expected direction.

These results may be taken as an indication that the media coverage reflects the nature of EP elections as second-order national elections. The results also indicate only a minimal degree of existence of Europeanised national public spheres during pivotal moments in the democratic process of the EU in both countries. Moreover, they are in line with conclusions of previous studies, finding evidence of Europeanisation of national public spheres when looking at newspapers and less Europeanisation when analysing TV news (Machill *et al.* 2006; de Vreese 2007). The results, generally speaking, additionally support the assumption that the SOE model may enhance our understanding of behaviours of political parties and media in SOEs.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study can be discussed in relation to at least two different strands of literature: the SOE model and EP elections in general, and the existence of European(-ised) public sphere(s). In relation to the first, at the outset of the paper, we argue that, in theoretical terms, the analysis of political parties and the media during EP elections benefits from the application of SOE model and vice versa (Adam and Maier 2011; Strömbäck *et al.* 2011). In fact, Marsh and Mikhaylov (2010: 17-18) recently argued that, in order to better understand second-orderness of EP elections, more attention should be given to the mechanism(s) that give rise to the second-order effects. In particular, it might be the actions of political parties and the media that help giving rise to these second-order effects by intensifying the less-at-stake character of SOEs (see also Strömbäck *et al.* 2011). Consequently, in order to better understand EP elections, we would benefit from focusing on the links between voters, candidates, political parties, and the media (see also Hobolt and Franklin 2011).

Recent inspections into electoral democracy in the EU demonstrate that voters are most inclined to vote according to their EU-specific preferences (EU-issue voting): (1) if the media politicise EP elections by covering European issues extensively and provide high levels of EU-specific political information (Hobolt *et al.* 2009; de Vries *et al.* 2011), and (2) if political parties politicise EP elections and offer clear choices when it comes to EU issues (Hobolt and Spoon 2010: 23; Hobolt and Franklin 2011). One of the ways through which EP elections may become politicised is the increased attentiveness of and reporting by the media (de Wilde 2011), because politicisation of EU issues can indirectly be assessed by studying the extent to which it is publicly debated (e.g. in the media). Another study argues that, should citizens be fully informed at EP election time, this would result in roughly a 30 per cent increase in turnout, and even realistic changes in knowledge could affect turnout noticeably (Bhatti 2010). Moreover, Andreas Schuck (*et al.* 2011b) argues that the political parties’ articulation of their divergent positions determines the extent to which SOEs are salient to the media. Put differently, the behaviour of parties and the news media is crucial for shaping the nature of electoral choices and determining levels of turnout in EP elections. One cannot blame voters for their electoral behaviour without taking into account the behaviour of political parties and the media, and hence it is advisable to integrate the SOE model with their behaviours (Strömbäck *et al.* 2011).

Second, at the outset of this article, we argue that a European public sphere is deemed a precondition for democratic governance in the EU and that, since the possibility of an

encompassing European public sphere has been discarded, Europeanisation of national public spheres remains the more realistic option. The Europeanisation of national public spheres is particularly observed by measuring the different degrees of Europeanisation of reporting in national media. Therefore, the *visibility* of European *issues* amongst a set of EU *actors* in the media is crucial to the development of Europeanised national spheres (Risse and van De Steeg 2003). Without the visibility of EU *actors*, political accountability remains invisible and political representation weak (Meyer 1999: 633). Moreover, a functioning European(-ised) public sphere(s) has been seen as both a solution and an instrument for producing a European identity (Eder and Trenz 2007; Gripsrud 2007), and a reliable collective identity is often considered a precondition for legitimate democratic procedures in the EU (Wimmel 2009).

To conclude, the Europeanised public sphere emerging as a result of increased public debate of EU actors and issues would help legitimise the EU polity (de Vreese 2007: 5; Trenz 2008). A common hypothesis among scholars is thus that the EU's democratic deficit will not find redress as long as no European-wide public sphere is emerging (cf. Hoffmann and Monaghan 2011). More generally, as part of input legitimation, political communication contributes to the legitimacy of governance by increasing citizens' influence on decision-making and helping to hold political actors accountable (Meyer 1999: 622). The effects of increased media coverage of European integration-related *issues* and *actors* on politicisation of EP elections could contribute to alleviating the EU's democratic as well as legitimacy deficit (Føllesdal and Hix 2006; Lord, 2010).

Nonetheless, since this study's results indicate a rather marginal amount of coverage of EP elections, particularly when compared to FOEs, they do not support the existence of vivid Europeanised national public spheres during EP elections in either country. Thus, the positive effects of increased media coverage of EU affairs on public attitudes towards the EU, voting choices and turnout in EP elections and, indirectly, on the EU's legitimacy as well as the positive effects of European(-ised) public sphere(s) on the legitimacy of the EU polity hardly materialise. Moreover, given that the media is the key information source for Europeans, the results do not provide much optimism that they will help change the perception of European elections as "second-order national elections".

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¹ This apparent lack of interest can be also result of methodological issues, in particular of application of methodological individualism, common in economics. Then the parties (and media) are viewed in analogy to firms not as individual actors making their decisions, but as actors simply concentrating on optimisation process. In this view, the decisions of voters determine the behaviour of parties and media.

² According to Hermann Schmitt (2007: 21), European issues are the "raw material" of a Europeanised public sphere.

³ In the countries under analysis (i.e. Czech Republic and Slovakia) this condition is satisfied, as both types of elections were fought within almost identical party system.

⁴ The drawback is that choosing more dissimilar cases could have been more helpful for proving the general expectations forwarded in the paper. But since there are no previous studies, even this case

selection should be helpful. The two countries are usually researched together since they were for a long time in the same state and share many characteristics, and are thus suitable for application of the most similar system design (MSSD) (e.g. Kovář and Kovář 2013). Since this research does not address variance in results between the case studies, we do apply the MSSD.

⁵ At the 2004 EP elections it varied from May 27th to June 11th in the Czech Republic and from May 29th to June 13th in Slovakia; and from May 21st to June 5th in the Czech Republic and from May 22nd to June 6th at the 2009 EP elections.

⁶ The analysis was conducted as follows: initially all television newscasts were videotaped and analysed according to the methods indicated. Length was operationalised in terms of time. However, due to missing data for some TV outlets and election years, we turned to Newton Media and analysed their transcripts of the news. Here, length was operationalised in terms of word count. Because both analyses were yielding very similar results, we eventually decided to use Newton Media transcripts not only because of the missing data but also because of the increased ease of carrying out the analysis using transcripts.

⁷ The random choice of newspaper page was ensured using statistical programme specifically written for these purposes.

⁸ All newspaper were acquired as hardcopies and analysed according to the methods indicated. All stories mentioning EP elections are coded in the following sections: Political/News section, Editorial and Business/Economy section. Sections as Sport, Travel, Housing, Culture, Motor/Auto, Fashion or Entertainment are not analysed. Magazines that come together with a newspaper are not analysed either. Randomly selected page has to be part of one of the following sections: domestic news, foreign/international news, business/economy news.

⁹ Two analysts repeatedly coded the data sample, consisting of randomly selected 50 analysed days, including both newspaper and TV. Reliability data were thus obtained under test-test conditions (Krippendorff 2004).

¹⁰ In 2006, national parliamentary elections took place on June 2–3 in the Czech Republic and on June 17 in Slovakia. The parliamentary elections of 2010 took place on May 28–29 in the Czech Republic and on June 12 in Slovakia. Just for clarification, pre-term elections took place in March 2012 in Slovakia and these first-order elections are not included in the analysis.

¹¹ The random choice of newspaper page was ensured using a statistical programme specifically written for these purposes.

¹² We decided to use this operationalisation instead of developing our own as it is well-established in studies of media coverage of (EP) elections (de Vreese 2003; de Vreese *et al.* 2006; Boomgaarden *et al.* 2010; Schuck *et al.* 2011a). Moreover, in accordance with previous studies we included candidates for MEPs as "EU" actors rather than "domestic" actors since we want to see how they are presented by the media. In practice, if a candidate for MEP is presented by the media acting in his capacity of domestic politician, the actor is coded as "domestic" actor. On the other hand, if an actor is presented acting as a candidate for an EU office, the actor is coded as "EU" actor. The same approach was executed in any case of actors' potentially conflicting roles.

¹³ This is a special category and is assigned a value of "0", to be distinguished from mixed evaluation with assigned value of "3".

¹⁴ A tentative analysis (not reported) has shown that news related to, for example, culture/entertainment takes up around 15–20 per cent of newscasts. The term marginal here refers to the fact that EP elections have never taken up more than 10 per cent of the news.

¹⁵ We acknowledge that broadsheet newspapers are based on private ownership; in this article, we use the category of "private" media outlets to include only private broadcasting and tabloids only for analytical reasons.

¹⁶ Results are not reported in the table or figure.

¹⁷ Note that these results are obtained even though one could expect upward bias in EP election coverage due to specific factors surrounding the EP elections in both countries. Specifically, the first elections in both countries were held immediately following accession; and the 2009 elections were held during the Czech Presidency of the EU, both of which should boost the coverage of EU elections in media. The fact that even with these factors we obtain results supporting our initial expectations makes them more robust, as the reported difference in visibility between both elections likely understates the actual difference.

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