



Should I stay or should I go?

Images of the EU in the British press during the Brexit debate

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Abstract

Citizens of the member states of the EU generally lack knowledge about the EU. This gives the media an important role in shaping public opinion. Media ascribing attributes to a subject of public discussion, is referred to as second level agenda setting. One recurring critique against the EU is its lack of democracy. In the scholarly debate, this phenomenon has been labelled the democratic deficit of the EU. In the debate leading up to Brexit in 2016, an intense discussion about lack of democracy, as well as other issues regarding the EU, took place in the British media. This essay uses qualitative data analysis in order to analyse the arguments presented in *The Telegraph* and *The Guardian* in the final weeks before the referendum. One of the attributes most frequently used to create the image of the EU during the Brexit debate, was regarding democracy. The results also indicate that those positive of the EU, still presented negative aspects of the institution.

Keywords: *Brexit, media, second level agenda setting, democratic deficit, EU, UK.*

Medborgarna i EU:s medlemsländer har i allmänhet brist på kunskap om EU. Detta ger media en viktig roll i att forma den allmänna opinionen. Att media tillskriver attribut till ett ämne som är aktuellt inom den offentliga diskussionen, kallas agendasättande journalistik. En återkommande kritik gentemot EU är dess brist på demokrati. I den vetenskapliga debatten har detta fenomen betäcknats som EU:s demokratiunderskott. I Brexit-debatten år 2016, ägde en intensiv diskussion om bristande demokrati, liksom andra frågor om EU, rum i brittisk media. Denna uppsats använder kvalitativ dataanalys för att analysera de argument som presenteras i *The Telegraph* och *The Guardian* under de sista veckorna före folkomröstningen. Undersökningen visar att ett av de attribut som oftast användes för att skapa en bild av EU under debatten gällde demokrati. Resultatet visar också att de som var positiva gentemot EU, fortfarande presenterade negativa aspekter av institutionen.

Nyckelord: *Brexit, media, agendasättande journalistik, demokratiunderskott, EU, Storbritannien.*

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1 Introduction

The referendum in June 2016 on whether the UK should leave the EU, sparked, as would be expected, a heated public debate in British media about the relationship between the UK and the EU. However, it also led to a more general public discussion about the EU as a political institution. This discussion provides an important window into how the media presents political institutions. How the image of a political institution is constructed by the press, can impact the political choices citizens make. The images put forward by the media can be based on many different things, on correct knowledge and reasoned assessments, but also on misconceptions or simplifications. In the case of the EU, research has shown that media in the UK overwhelmingly portrays the EU as a less than desirable political institution.¹ There is also a long tradition of presenting negative examples of the consequences of EU membership, both for businesses and for everyday life in the UK. Such images and attitudes may have their roots in nostalgia for the historical role of Britain as a former colonial superpower, which stands in contrast to its current role as just one of many member states of the EU.

Significant scholarly attention has been paid the issue of the public image of political institutions. For example, Balmas and Schaefer (2010) have shown that *how* citizens perceive a political institution is closely related to which attributes the institution is being ascribed in the media.² Researchers have made generalisations about this phenomenon, formulated in the theory of “second level agenda setting”. This theory indicates that the image of a political institution in media can have significant impact on popular opinion. However, this mechanism is not simplistic. The media does not simply tell people *what to think about*, like traditional agenda setting theory sometimes assumed.³ Rather, as Balmas and Schaefer have shown, the impact on public opinion comes from

¹ Spigelman, Ariel, The depiction of Polish migrants in the United Kingdom by the British press after Poland's accession to the European Union, *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, vol. 33 issue ½ (2013): 98-113.

² Balmas, Meital & Sheaffer, Tamir, Candidate Image in Election Campaigns: Attribute Agenda Setting, Affective Priming, and Voting Intentions, *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, vol. 22 (2010): 204-229.

³ Ibid.

how political phenomena are presented. Through their coverage, newspapers ascribe certain characteristics to institutions. In that way, newspapers set the agenda for which attributes the public connects to a political institution.

Although Balmas and Schaefer as well as other studies have provided valuable insights into the interplay between the public image of political institutions and citizen perceptions of it, recent events motivate an in depth look at how this dynamic plays out in the current political climate. This essay focuses on the role of the media in shaping conceptions about the EU during the Brexit debate. As a case study, the essay presents an analysis of the arguments put forward in *The Guardian* and *The Telegraph* during the final weeks before the vote, focusing on which attributes were ascribed to the EU, by these newspapers. In particular, the essay focuses on attributes related to democracy.

The democratic nature of the EU is something that researchers have been concerned with for a long time, and the different (un-)democratic attributes ascribed to the EU have become a staple of public debate. Scholars have labelled this the “democratic deficit” of the EU, and provided detailed analysis on where in the EU this democratic deficit lies. This motivates that special attention be paid to attributes and arguments connected to democratic properties of the EU during the Brexit debate.

1.1 Aim of the study

The image of the EU presented by newspapers and other media is important for several reasons. Firstly, the focus on negative aspects of the EU makes it harder for the institution to become legitimate in the eyes of the citizens of its member states. The EU is often seen as secretive and elitist, as well as being too distant from the citizens of its member states. Secondly, research has shown that the general public has very little actual knowledge about the EU.⁴ This makes it hard for the citizens to form informed opinions about the EU. The lack of knowledge creates a gap, in which media have an opportunity to shape public opinion. By analysing the attributes which were ascribed to

⁴ Standard Eurobarometer 85, *Public opinion in the European Union*, First results, Spring 2016.

the EU in the British press during the Brexit debate, this essay will show how the media fills this gap. The aim of this essay is thus:

To investigate how the media creates images of political institutions, through an analysis of which attributes were ascribed to the EU in *The Guardian* and *The Telegraph* in the weeks leading up to the British referendum in June 2016 regarding EU membership.

The essay seeks to fulfil this purpose by answering the following concrete questions:

1. Which arguments and images of the EU were presented in the respective newspapers?
2. Which was the relationship between positive and negative attributes of the EU, in the respective newspapers?
3. Which role did arguments related to the democratic nature of the EU play in the debate?

Taken together, the answers to these questions will provide new knowledge regarding how the images of political institutions are created in the media, and thereby contribute to fulfilling the purpose of the essay.

1.2 Material and delimitations

This essay focuses on the role of the media in shaping conceptions about the democratic nature of the EU. In order to analyse this, newspapers have been chosen as the key media form. *The Guardian* and *The Telegraph* were chosen, because they are two of the leading newspapers in the UK, in number of readers as well as in reputation. They also provide two different political standpoints (*The Guardian* leaning to the left and *The Telegraph* to the right).⁵ The articles were selected by searching for all opinion articles mentioning "EU", published during the time period stretching from 1 and 22 of June

⁵ Statista, *Monthly reach of national newspapers and their websites in the United Kingdom (UK) from April 2016 to March 2017 (in 1,000 individuals)*, The Statistics Portal. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/246077/reach-of-selected-national-newspapers-in-the-uk/> (accessed on 22-11-2017)

2016. The search resulted in 37 articles. The selection was then further limited to only include the opinion columns, which expressed clear recommendations concerning the EU. This narrowed the sample to a total of 24 articles, which constitutes the primary sources for the research undertaken in this essay. All data was found on the official website for each newspaper (theguardian.com and telegraph.co.uk). The time period was chosen due to the fact that many voters remained undecided up until the very day of the election, making the last weeks prior to the election an important time for newspapers (and politicians) to make their last efforts to affect the outcome of the election.⁶ Because the focus of this essay is on the arguments that were presented during the Brexit debate, rather than facts or information, the research will only include opinion columns. Further, mediums of communication such as television, radio and social media also play a vital role in informing and shaping public opinion. However, because the main interest of this essay lies within newspaper reporting, I have chosen to focus solely on this medium in order to keep the essay concise.

The selected opinion columns are written by journalists and some guest columnists, and they are hence not entirely reliable in terms of facts, but rather portray personal opinions. The articles have been published in newspapers that hold a certain political view, and are therefore likely to be angled in a similar manner. They are also directed towards the readers of the newspapers, who are also likely to hold a similar political view. The sources that each author of an opinion column has used in most cases remain unknown, further contributing to the uncertainty of the facts that are presented. However, the aim of this study is to map out opinions and arguments, an aim for which the opinion articles are well suited.

The secondary material will include earlier research about the so called democratic deficit of the EU. Research about the democratic deficit provides an important context to how the arguments in the media framed the democratic properties of the EU during the Brexit debate. Although these studies provide important structure regarding properties of democracy, it should be pointed out that in some cases they have their basis in nor-

⁶ Lansons, *The Impact of Brexit on Consumer Behaviour*, June 2016.
<http://www.lansons.com/download-brexite-report-2/> (assessed on 05-01-2018)

mative concerns regarding what constitutes the “ideal” democracy. The secondary material will also include earlier research about the relationship between the EU and the UK.

2 Theory and methodology

The essay will use the concept of second level agenda setting as its theoretical framework. This theory helps put into perspective how the media creates an image about the EU, and how that in turn impacts the citizens who consume the information. However, the theory of second level agenda setting has also been criticised, and the following section will discuss some of this criticism. In order to categorise and analyse the arguments that are found in the articles, this essay will use a qualitative data analysis.

2.1 Theory – Media and public opinion

How citizens perceive political institutions are connected to which attributes the media ascribes the political institution in question. The relationship between media and the public has been discussed by McCombs (2015). He uses the term *second level agenda setting*, to describe how the attributes of a topic shapes public opinion.⁷ Second level agenda setting switches focus from the media's role in telling citizens *what* to think about, which was the subject of classic agenda setting theory, to instead focusing on the role of the media in telling citizens *how* to think about subjects.⁸ This means that the readers (in this case the readers of *The Guardian* and *The Telegraph*) are likely to adopt the attributes of a certain topic presented by the media. In this process, the media is not simply presenting an image of the EU as something that is good or bad, which the public thereafter adopts. Rather, it sets the agenda and associate certain attributes with the institution, for example that the EU is bureaucratic, secretive etc. - traits that we associate with a negative image of the EU.

⁷ McCombs, Maxwell, A Look at Agenda-setting: past, present and future, *Journalism Studies*, vol. 6 issue 4 (2005): 543-557.

DOI: 10.1080/14616700500250438

⁸ Ibid.

Criticism against the theory of second level agenda setting has been brought up by Baum (2003). Baum argues that people in some cases gain knowledge on current issues through unintentional exposure of information, even when not actively seeking it.⁹ This contradicts the theory of second level agenda setting, where it is presumed that information is consumed in order to fulfill a need for gaining knowledge, as well as forming opinions.¹⁰ The critique made by Baum however, has been countered by Cama (2014). She states that the people who actively seek information about a certain issue, also are the ones who are most likely to adopt the attributes the issue (in this case institution) have been ascribed by the media.¹¹ Therefore the media thus sets the agenda through ascribing attributes, as presumed by second level agenda setting theory.

The relationship between the media and the public is further discussed by Trezn (2008). Trezn points out that the media constitutes an important place for debate and differentiating opinions. However, even though media could fulfil the need for a shared space of shared opinions, the influences of commercial forces, has made it difficult to create a joint public sphere for the whole of Europe.¹² It thus follows that national media are the key channels for information about the EU available to the citizens of the respective countries. Media discourse regarding the EU can often follow nationalistic or one-sided patterns. The lack of opposing standpoints in newspapers can make it easier for information that is based on misconceptions or simplifications to thrive. This seems to be the case when the EU is reported in British media. Copeland and Copsy (2017) argue that the increasing number of euro sceptics within the UK is due to the lack of an opposition to contradict negative arguments and statements that are made about the EU.¹³ The euro sceptic discourse is even adopted by leftist newspapers, when issues like the undermin-

⁹ Baum, Matthew A, Soft news and political knowledge: Evidence of absence or absence of evidence?, *Political Communication*, vol. 20 (2003): 173–190.

¹⁰ Moon, Soo Jung, Attention, Attitude, and Behavior: Second-Level Agenda-Setting Effects as a Mediator of Media Use and Political Participation, *Communication Research*, vol. 40 issue 5 (2013): 698-719. DOI: 10.1177/0093650211423021.

¹¹ Camaj, Lindita, Need for Orientation, Selective Exposure, and Attribute Agenda-Setting Effects, *Mass Communication & Society*, vol. 17 issue 5 (2014): 689-712. DOI: 10.1080/15205436.2013.835424.

¹² Trezn, Hans-Joerg, Understanding Media Impact on European Integration: Enhancing or Restricting the Scope of Legitimacy of the EU?, *Journal of European Integration*, vol. 30 issue 2 (2008): 291-309. DOI:10.1080/07036330802005516

¹³ Copeland, Paul & Copsy, Nathaniel, Rethinking Britain and the European Union: Politicians, the Media and Public Opinion Reconsidered, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, vol. 55 issue 4 (2017): 709-726. DOI: 10.1111/jcms.12527

ing of UK interests (according to the press) occur. This, Copeland and Copsey argue, affects the citizens of the UK, who are the least well informed public about the EU, of all member states.¹⁴ Similarly, Seaton (2016) argues that the way that news are framed, does indeed impact how political institutions are perceived.¹⁵ The fact that most of the reports about the EU have been focusing on absurdities, or extreme cases and consequences (cucumber regulations etc.), could have had an impact on public opinion.¹⁶ Because citizens rarely have personal experience in these matters, they become more dependent on the image presented in the media.

2.2 Methodology

The analysis in this investigation is based on newspaper texts. Such texts have been an important material in many research fields for a long time. The articles on which the investigation is based were collected in the following manner: First, a suitable time period was determined. Since the referendum was held on June 23, a period of circa three weeks (22 days) before that date was considered appropriate to capture the final and most intense parts of the public debate. Thereafter searches were made on the homepages of the respective newspapers (telegraph.co.uk and theguardian.com) for articles in the opinion sections, which mentioned “EU”.

This resulted in 22 articles in *The Guardian* and 15 articles in *The Telegraph*. Thereafter, the articles presenting arguments either for or against the EU were selected. Since one of the research questions concern arguments presenting a negative or positive image of the EU, the articles which had a neutral stance and did not present any clear recommendations, were removed from the sample. This method of selecting articles for further analysis thus resulted in 12 articles in *The Guardian* and 12 articles in the *Telegraph* articles meeting the criteria.

¹⁴ Ibid, 709-726.

¹⁵ Seaton, Jean, Brexit and the Media, *Political Quarterly*, vol. 87 issue 3 (2016): 333-337. DOI: 10.1111/1467-923X.12296

¹⁶ Ibid.

In analysing the material, this essay follows an established tradition of using *qualitative data analysis*. The version of this method that is used, is the one presented in *Qualitative data analysis: a methods sourcebook* by Matthew B Miles, A. Michael Huberman & Johnny Saldaña. Their recommendations align closely with the general procedures for qualitative analysis prescribed by other methodological guidelines.¹⁷ When analysing newspaper articles, the method of qualitative data analysis suggests the following three steps; data organization, display, and analysis. The method is relevant to the purpose of this essay because it captures the data in its context and will help structure the material.¹⁸ As a first step coding of the articles will be performed as a part of data organization, in order to identify the arguments that are presented in the articles. This step will include *all* arguments related to the EU during the chosen time period. After the arguments in each article have been assigned codes, patterns and themes will be noted. In a next step, these patterns and themes will be clustered together into overarching categories. The analysis will thereafter focus on the types of arguments which are posited by the democratic deficit theory, and map out how those arguments stand in relation to the other arguments related to the value of the EU that the primary material has presented. In a last step, the analysis will draw out the results in relation to the overall purpose of the essay, using the theories spelt out in the previous chapter.

The essay will use the following steps to generate meaning:

- 1) *Noting patterns and themes*. This means finding argumentative patterns that are occurring frequently and putting them into themes. The themes will initially be determined by the empirical material, but will be grouped into overarching categories through clustering.¹⁹
- 2) *Making contrasts/comparisons*. Through drawing comparisons and contrasts, we find roles, activities, variables, cases as a whole that differ from each other.²⁰
- 3) *Noting the relations between variables*. This part investigates the relationship between variables.

¹⁷ Bazeley, Patricia, *Qualitative data analysis: practical strategies*, SAGE, London, 2013.

¹⁸ Miles, Matthew B, Huberman, A. Michael & Saldaña, Johnny, *Qualitative data analysis: a methods sourcebook*, 3. ed., Sage, Los Angeles, 2014. 4.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 277.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 284.

4) *Creating conceptual/theoretical coherence.*²¹ This part will relate the results of the research to the theoretical frameworks of a democratic deficit and second level agenda setting.

²¹ Ibid, 292.

3 Literature review and prior research

The purpose of this essay is to analyse how media presents the properties of political institutions, and in this case the EU. In particular, the essay focuses on arguments related to the democratic properties of the EU. The following section presents previous research in these two fields.

3.1 Media and the image of the EU

The relevance of the image of the EU in media is discussed in *The European Union - From Agenda Setting and Media Frames to Citizens' Conversations*.²² According to the authors, the media plays a key role in the future of the EU. By including all citizens in the 'European project', and not only elites, media fills the purpose of connecting the ordinary citizens to the distant EU. In a study researching topics of interest concerning the EU in Romanian online media, the major focus was on topics relating to the member nation, rather than to the EU as a whole.²³ This, the authors argue, results in no real development of the public interest in the EU.

Resistance towards the EU, is by Clement (2015) explained as being related to the lack of EU-perspective in the public discourse.²⁴ This issue becomes apparent in the discourse concerning European integration, but also for the Eastern expansion discussed in 2004. Issues regarding these events were largely blamed on the EU, since the narratives presented in the media were angled from national points of view. This has resulted in incommensurable understandings of different aspects of the EU. Reporting on the eco-

²² Corbu, Nicoleta, Ștefanita, Oana, Oprea, Denisa, Udrea, Georgiana, *The European Union - From Agenda Setting and Media Frames to Citizens' Conversations*, *Romanian Journal of Communication & Public Relation*, vol. 17 issue 1 (2015): 41-57.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Clement, Andrew Anzur, *Reporting on the 'ever closer union': narrative framing in national news medias and resistance to EU integration*, *Eastern Journal of European Studies*, vol. 6 issue 1 (2015): 123-135.

nomical reality of the EU has often been at odds with the public opinion regarding the subjects.²⁵

The Eastern enlargement also constitutes a good example of how the reality of political actions and priorities often differs from the debate in the media. The enlargement in 2004 resulted in the biggest number of foreign workers entering into the UK.²⁶ However, this also resulted in a positive economic development for the UK. This positive economic development, Spigelman (2013) argues, was not the image conveyed in the press. Rather, the media presented a hostile and dramatic image of the results of the increased number of foreign workers entering the UK. Reporting was, for example, concerned with “Poles stealing jobs from the honest Brits”.²⁷ This kind of reporting ascribes negative attributes to the EU, which in turn shapes public opinion about the EU.

3.2 The EU and democracy – the idea of a democratic deficit

The issue of whether the EU is democratic or undemocratic has been analysed by many scholars. In a broader sense, this has become a collective concern after the decreasing support for the EU from around 1990 and onwards.²⁸ The Brexit case offers the opportunity to gain new insights into the dynamic between the level of democracy in the EU, and the image of the EU presented by the media in the current political climate.

In 1979 David Marquand coined the term *democratic deficit* to highlight the lack of democracy within the EU.²⁹ In 1995, a more strict definition of the concept was presented by Joseph Weiler. The definition was further developed by Andreas Føllesdal

²⁵ Ibid, 123-135.

²⁶ Drinkwater, Stephen, Eade, John, Garapich, Michal, Poles Apart? EU Enlargement and the Labour Market Outcomes of Immigrants in the United Kingdom, *International Migration*, vol. 47 issue 1 (2009): 161-190. DOI: 10.1111/j.1468-2435.2008.00500.x

²⁷ Spigelman, The depiction of Polish migrants in the United Kingdom by the British press after Poland's accession to the European Union, 98-113.

²⁸ Hix, Simon & Høyland, Bjørn, *The political system of the European Union*, 3., [rev. and rewritten] ed., Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2011. 133.

²⁹ Sieberson, Stephen C, The Treaty of Lisbon and it's impact on the European Union's Democratic Deficit, *Columbia Journal of European Law*, vol. 14 issue 3 (2007): 445-466.

and Simon Hix in 2006. They point out five main issues regarding the level of democracy in the EU, including the fact that 1) executive figures make most of the decisions 2) the European Parliament doesn't have enough power 3) a lack of elections 4) difficulties for the masses to even understand the system of the EU, and finally, as a result of the previous factors 5) a failure in terms of only adopting policies supported by the majority of the citizens.³⁰ However, Føllesdal and Hix argue that through practice, democracy will increase in the EU. On this matter, Decker (2002) disagrees. He argues that democracy within the EU is connected to *identity* within the EU. Because democracy and identity, Decker argues, are dependent on each other, the practice towards a more democratic EU must occur together with increased identity policy measures. Because the member states of the EU do not share the same cultural traditions, the citizens of the member states of EU must in order to identify with the EU, *feel* the EU's presence and impact.³¹ Here, the media obviously plays a key role.

It is important to note that the concept of a democratic deficit has been proclaimed both as misleading and faulty by scholars such as Moravcsik (1998) and Majone (1999). Moravcsik argues that the EU does not suffer from a democratic deficit, because the EU works in accordance with *checks and balances*. This means that the EU *does* have some questionable structures and institutions that lacks justification- such as 1) the European Central Bank, which is completely unaffected by political pressure, 2) the rights of immigrants, 3) administrative proceedings, meaning that the formal rights of Europeans are exceeded by the American *Administrative Procedures Act* and 4) administrative and constitutional law in the EU could be moving in a direction that would be dangerous to the social welfare provision.³² However, Moravcsik argues that the EU should be judged against existing industrial democracies, rather than against an ideal version of parliamentary democracy.³³ Moravcsik further argues that the accusations of an

³⁰ Føllesdal, Andreas & Hix, Simon, Why There is a Democratic Deficit in the EU: A Response to Majone and Moravcsik, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, vol. 44 issue 3 (2006): 533–562. DOI:10.1111/j.1468-5965.2006.00650.x

³¹ Decker, Frank, Governance beyond the nation-state. Reflections on the democratic deficit of the European Union, *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol. 9 issue 2 (2002): 256-272.

³² Moravcsik, Andrew, Reassessing Legitimacy in the European Union", *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, vol. 40 (2002): 603-624.

³³ Moravcsick, Andrew, Legitimacy in the European Union, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, vol. 40 issue 4 (2002): 603–624.

undemocratic EU are *misplaced*.³⁴ In the light of other nation states and the multi-level system that is the European Union, the EU does *not* suffer from a democratic deficit.³⁵ This means that the EU does indeed suffer from factors that lack explanation (factor 1-4 presented above), but that calling the EU directly undemocratic is still incorrect. Instead, Moravcsik argues that the EU is often being viewed as an isolated phenomenon, a view that fails to include the relationship between the EU and the member states.³⁶ Further, the EU often fills the role of creating higher level functions and structures, whereas the member states take on the role of implementing the more concrete functions that the public can relate to and understand, and which often attract popular participation. Moravcsik argues that this makes the EU come across as undemocratic from the outside.³⁷

Other criticism against the existence of a democratic deficit within the EU has been raised by Giandomenico Majone (1999). Majone argues that it is unrealistic to achieve democracy at a parliamentary level, while economic integration seems to be in the main interest of the voters.³⁸ However, characteristics such as democracy are still rather connected to the member states.³⁹ This means that the EU does *not* exist in order to be or become a democratic institution. Rather, maintaining democracy is left to the member states. This produces a gap between political and economic integration, and it is this gap that makes the democratic deficit occur. In this sense then, Majone argues, sovereignty and political independence come at a cost, namely a democratic deficit. Since this is a result of the voters' wishes, the democratic deficit could be considered to be democratically justified. Instead of suffering from a democracy crisis, Majone argues that the EU suffers from a *credibility* crisis. This crisis could according to Majone be put to an end through several improvements. These include increased transparency in their decision-making process, rules working to protect minorities, ex-post being reviewed by courts and representatives and a higher degree of professionalism.⁴⁰

³⁴ Ibid, 603–624.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Majone, Giandomenico, The regulatory state and its legitimacy problems, *West European Politics*, vol. 22 issue 1 (1999): 1-24. DOI:10.1080/01402389908425284

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

The notion of a distant EU can according to Føllesdal and Hix be explained both in institutional and psychological terms. Institutionally speaking, the possibility for citizens of the member states to control the Council or the Commission through elections is non-existent. On a psychological level, the democratic institutions that the public are used to are different than those of the EU, causing citizens to struggle when trying to understand it. This results in the EU being seen as undemocratic and hard to identify with.⁴¹ This is, by Wallace and Smith (1995), explained by 1) the Commissions complexity in that it neither constitutes a government, neither a pure bureaucracy, with an untraditional election procedure. 2) The Council as well holds some confusing mandates, in that it is both legislative and executive. 3) The European Parliament is technocratic in its policy processes, and due to the many languages being spoken during the debates it cannot be seen as a typical parliamentary decision-making organ.⁴²

⁴¹ Føllesdal & Hix , Why There is a Democratic Deficit in the EU: A Response to Majone and Moravcsik, 533–562.

⁴² Ibid.

4 Background

When the UK on the 23rd of June in 2016 voted to leave the EU, it was not the first time that euro scepticism had been felt throughout the nation. Rather, the relationship between the UK and the EU has been rocky, ever since the UK's first entry into what was then named the European Economic Community (EEC) in January 1973. Within the first three years of the UK entry into the EEC, they experienced both oil crisis and inflation, issues which were accordingly blamed on the EEC.⁴³ However, this was not a completely fair accusation, seeing that the six initial member states economy had flourished under the EEC.⁴⁴ This critical attitude towards the EU is by Corner (2006) explained as having some historical roots. Because Britain as an imperial power had had the world as its playground, the membership in the EEC meant a narrowing of power. Ireland on the other hand, would instead benefit from a membership, opening to the doors to an entire continent and making Ireland less dependent on Britain.⁴⁵

Even though the referendum held in 1975 resulted in favour of remaining a member, the question about whether the UK should stay or leave the European project was never fully resolved. However, the reason for why the UK voted to stay, Copeland and Copsey (2017) argues, was due to the economic integration that the membership meant wouldn't have any effect on UK sovereignty or impose any large costs (two key arguments in the Brexit debate).⁴⁶ Starting in the 1990s, voices were raised demanding a new referendum, which was seen as connected to the growing euro-scepticism in the UK.⁴⁷ The growth of euro scepticism has been explained as the natural position for people who, prior to her fall from power in the 1990s, had been supporters of Margaret

⁴³ Corner, Mark, The EU and the Roots of British Euroscepticism, *Contemporary Review*, vol. 289 issue 1687 (2007): 466-469.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Copeland & Copsey, Rethinking Britain and the European Union: Politicians, the Media and Public Opinion Reconsidered, 709-726.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

Thatcher.⁴⁸ This argument is supported by the facts that the Conservative Party has advocated euro-scepticism already since the 1980s.⁴⁹ A significant media debate was raised by the transformation in 1993 of the union from an economical to a political union.⁵⁰ This transformation was the result of the Maastricht Treaty, which turned the European Community into the European Union. This resulted in much attention from the media, as well as from the public. It was in the aftermath of the Maastricht Treaty, that people all over Europe increasingly demanded referenda on continued membership. David Cameron's promise to hold a referendum, would the Conservative Party win the upcoming election in 2015, was in a sense only a result of current trends in Europe at the time.⁵¹

Another topic attracting much attention from the media, was, as previously mentioned, the Eastern enlargement of the EU in 2004, which was the biggest enlargement in the history of the EU. The public debate in the UK as well as in France mainly focused on immigration and unemployment issues.⁵² Dursun (2007) makes the point that even though the enlargement was already predetermined; the citizens of the UK still wanted to make sure that their main areas of interest were being dealt with.⁵³ Dursun also shows that, the impact on British press in public opinion on Eastern enlargement in fact contradicts the theory of second level agenda setting, since the picture conveyed in British press did not match public opinion surrounding the issue at the time. This Dursun argues, could be due to the lack of trust for British press at the time.⁵⁴

If the relationship between Britain and the EU had prior to the referendum long been unstable, 2016 constituted a particularly turbulent year for the EU. With financial crisis,

⁴⁸ Ibid, 709-726.

⁴⁹ Dorey, Peter, Towards Exit from the EU: The Conservative Party's Increasing Euroscepticism since the 1980s, *Politics and Governance*, vol. 5 issue 2 (2017): 27-40. DOI: 10.17645/pag.v5i2.873

⁵⁰ Hix, & Høyland, *The political system of the European Union*, 5.

⁵¹ Hooghe, Liesbet & Marks, Gary, 'A Postfunctionalist Theory of European Integration: From Permissive Consensus to Constraining Dissensus', *British Journal of Political Science*, vol. 39 issue1 (2009): 1-23.

⁵² Dursun, Oya, *Press coverage of the enlargement of the European Union and public opinion in the United Kingdom and France : a cross-national comparative study of the first- and second-level agenda-setting and priming effects*, Networked Digital Library of Theses & Dissertations, 2007. 98.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

refugee crisis and right extreme crisis, the pressure on the EU was high. The engagement and concerns regarding particular issues of the EU, often lead to discussions about the more general questions regarding the EU. Some of these questions were that the EU is aiming to become a super state, a United States of Europe, that the EU is costly and secretive, and an overall undemocratic institution. This was the case in the discussions leading up to Brexit, where a democratic deficit within the EU was one of the main issues (along with national security, refugee quota etc) brought up in press and debates in preparation for the referendum. The much-discussed concept of a democratic deficit has often been used by euro sceptics in order to pinpoint one of the major problems that they see with the EU, which is that it might be an institution using democracy as the leading word in its work at domestic as well as at international level, but seemingly failing to maintain these democratic values at an internal level.

5 Framing the EU in the British press: Argumentation analysis

This chapter will systematise and analyse the arguments and statements about the relationship between the EU as a political institution and the citizens of the member states that were used in the newspaper articles. The themes that will be discussed in this chapter are based on the arguments found in the aforementioned articles, and how they relate to the relationship between the press and the public.

5.1 Types and categories of arguments

In the analysis, the arguments have been structured according to the following themes: democracy, economy, politics, togetherness, credibility. The types of arguments that have been included in each theme will now be specified. In the theme of *democracy* the following five types of arguments have been included; 1) Democracy in general. This includes arguments that talk about democracy within the EU in a general sense. This is done either in a way that argues that the EU is a democratic institution, or that it is not. The other arguments that have been included in the theme are in accordance with the theory of why the EU suffers from a democratic deficit according to Føllesdal and Hix, namely: 2) arguments stating that executive actors takes most decisions, 3) that the EU suffers from lack of elections, 4) that the EU is hard to understand, and 5) that the EU fails in adopting policies supported by the citizens. In the overarching theme of *economy*, the broad argument of economy in general has been included. It also includes arguments that directly or indirectly affect the economy, such as migration in terms of economic gain or loss, jobs, trade and fishery. The argument of migration was used by *The Telegraph* in a negative sense as it communicated an economical loss, as was the argument of jobs. In the overarching theme of *politics* arguments that have to do with the more political side of the EU, such as what it does for/against the environment, se-

curity and war and peace were included. It also includes arguments for/against the institutional set up of the EU. The overarching theme of *credibility* includes arguments that indirectly frame the EU as being either a credible institution or not. Claiming that the EU is in need of a reform, was for example used both as an argument for remaining in the EU in order to change it from within, but also as an argument for leaving the EU. By calling the EU bureaucratic, secretive and elitist, the arguments frame the EU as being "not for everyone". The EU's handling of crisis indicates the trust that is felt for the EU in future crisis situations. In the overarching theme of *togetherness*, a sense of a united Europe with free movement is the primary type of argument. This argument clearly relates to a Europe that works together. The theme also includes arguments related to that the UK should stay in the EU due to its relationship with Ireland.

5.2 Arguments in *The Guardian*

In the following section, the arguments presented in *The Guardian* will be discussed. The analysis is structured along the themes presented above, democracy, economy, politics, credibility and togetherness. The position of *The Guardian* was in favour of a vote for the UK continuing its membership in the EU.

5.2.1 Democracy

Overall, the most presented argument about the EU in *The Guardian*, both from a negative and a positive aspect was democracy. Even though a typical argument presented in *The Guardian* included that leaving the EU would result in some practical, economical and political issues, it also discussed the more fundamental threat towards democracy. This includes both arguments framing the EU as a positive factor and a negative one. This is exemplified by Natalie Nougavrede. She argues that if EU policies were disintegrated, it "... would threaten democratic values, the essence of what we are supposed to

stand for”.⁵⁵ This frames the EU as a carrier of democracy. Nougavrede further contradicts the claim of EU standing in the way of democracy by saying that ”Saying Brexit would suddenly make democracy unravel across the continent is alarmist”.⁵⁶ Here, Nougavrede argues that leaving the EU would not dramatically change the level of democracy. However, Nougavrede does not seem to hold the EU as a prime example of democracy in terms of its internal structure. She says ”Nor is the EU a beacon of democracy. Its institutions have often been criticised for their “democratic deficit”⁵⁷, which stresses that even though the EU might help bring democracy to its member states, it might not be a role model when it comes to internal democracy. Again, this claim is contradicted by the fact that the flaws have to do with the choices of the national government: ”... the heart of power in the organisation is the European council, where heads of state and governments gather – not technocrats. The EU is fundamentally about democracy and individual freedoms.”⁵⁸ Even though Nougavrede on a final note concludes that the EU in fact is democratic, it does not follow a linear discussion, but rather acknowledges that the arguments for a democratic deficit at first glance might be justified.

Justifying the need for some internal division of tasks within the EU, and arguing against a democratic deficit in the EU, is Will Hutton.

Of course there is a secretariat... But it is run by elected politicians from members of the club and held accountable to representatives elected to the European parliament. It is open to scrutiny by the media and judicial arrangements of each member country.⁵⁹

Here, stressing the lack of transparency and lack of elections that permeates the EU, Hutton contradicts the claim that the EU is undemocratic. However, the arguments he uses to do so are very much in line with the arguments usually used to convey the exist-

⁵⁵ Nougavrede, Natalie, The aftershocks of a vote to leave the EU will rebound on Britain, *The Guardian*, 18-06-2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jun/18/aftershock-vote-leave-eu-rebound-britain-lurch-disintegration> (accessed on 04-12-2017)

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Hutton, Will, EU referendum: 'This is now a battle for an idea of Britain', *The Guardian*, 19-06-2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jun/18/eu-referendum-civil-war> (accessed on 04-12-2017)

tence of a democratic deficit, such as lack of elections and lack of transparency. Hutton further argues that the EU is "...well intentioned, democratic, accountable structure dedicated to improving the lot of ordinary Europeans – and it does surprisingly well".⁶⁰ Nevertheless, Hutton also refers to the claims that the EU is undemocratic by saying that "The bureaucratic, sinister, anti-democratic EU is part of the problem, not the solution", but then again contradicts it by saying that the claim is incorrect and championed by right wing press.⁶¹

So far, as is shown by the article above, the author who is generally positive towards the EU, seems to present this against a negative image of the EU. Even though Hutton concludes that the EU is democratic, he also frames the EU as being in need of some reform.

One of the key arguments for a democratic deficit within the EU is that executive actors take most of the decisions. This argument is frequently brought up by Jenny Jones, stating that "The most profound weakness of the EU, from the Green point of view, is that it is a super-sized top-down dogmatic project..."⁶² Throughout her article, Jones brings up the EU as an undemocratic institution on several occasions, and also criticises the size of the EU by saying that "In any case the EU exists on too large a scale for genuine democratic oversight and accountability".⁶³ Here, the argument that the EU is hard to understand is explained as being related to the size of the EU. This could be related to the fact that many believe that the EU was only supposed to be an economic trade union, without a political agenda. The fact that the EU is hard to understand is also considered to be one of the factors contributing to a democratic deficit.

The EU as a better option than the alternative is presented by Simon Jenkins, who writes: "it was right to join the common market but not the subsequent European Union,

⁶⁰ Hutton, Will, EU referendum: 'This is now a battle for an idea of Britain', *The Guardian*, 19-06-2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jun/18/eu-referendum-civil-war> (accessed on 04-12-2017)

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Jones, Jenny, The EU is an outsized behemoth beyond reform- the Green case for Brexit, *The Guardian*, 08-06-2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jun/08/eu-reform-green-brexit> (accessed on 04-12-2017)

⁶³ Ibid.

with all the toxic, undemocratic supranationalism that has come in its train.”⁶⁴ The author claims that the EU is undemocratic and supranationalistic, and goes on to argue that “the oligarchs of Brussels created this backlash”⁶⁵, indicating that executive actors take most of the decisions. Again, Jenkins concludes that the UK should still remain in the EU. The ambivalence of the arguments spelled out by the articles so far, are further exemplified by an editorial in *The Guardian*. Even though the article concludes that the UK should stay in the EU in order to reform it from within, many unflattering attributes are being ascribed to the EU. Initially, the lack of elections is exemplified through “Appointed officials telling elected governments how to be democratic is, to say the least, problematic.”⁶⁶ The article further presents arguments such as executive actors taking most decisions and that the EU struggles with keeping in contact with the public.⁶⁷

There are many arguments concerning democracy that is presented in *The Guardian*. The arguments are used both in order to frame the EU in a positive, as well as negative light. The arguments do include aspects that at first glance may not seem instantly related to a democratic deficit, but using Føllesdal and Hix helps define what aspects are contributing to lack of democracy within the EU.

5.2.2 Economy

George Monbiot’s article mainly focuses on arguments related to trade, economics and the TTIP. However, Monbiot also to some extent accuses the EU for being secretive and elitist. This again, shows that the arguments that may not be directly related to democracy in the EU, uses undemocratic properties of the EU as a backdrop when talking about it.

⁶⁴ Jenkins, Simon, I fear German dominance. Thats why im remaining in the EU, *The Guardian*, 16-06-2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jun/16/german-dominance-remain-eu-referendum-britain-votes-stay> (accessed on 04-12-2017)

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Editorial, The Guardian view on Europes future: British scepticism must be in the mix, *The Guardian*, 05-06-2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jun/05/the-guardian-view-on-europes-future-british-scepticism-must-be-in-the-mix> (accessed on 04-12-2017)

⁶⁷ Ibid.

The trade secrets directive, approved by the Council of the European Union last month, threatens to treat as commercial property any information that a corporation hopes to keep out of the public domain.⁶⁸

In this article, the image of the EU is framed as a less than desirable option, but a better one than the alternative. Even though Monbiot mainly focuses on economic and trade related arguments, he also brings up the fact that the EU is secretive and elitist, attributes also used to describe the EU as an undemocratic institution.⁶⁹

Monbiot also accuses the EU for being under much influence of lobbying. "The European Union is a festering cesspool of undue influence and opaque lobbying."⁷⁰ The less than flattering characteristics that are being ascribed to the EU would not pass unnoticed by the reader. Even though the main point of the article concerns economy and trade, and in the last sentence urges the reader to vote for the UK to stay in the EU, the article has framed the EU as a less than desirable option.

Economic and political reasons for a stay-vote are also being brought up by Patrick Stewart.

Why campaign to put us back there? I do not understand this thirst for isolationism. The most potent arguments, politically, economically, socially, urge us to remain. Let this just be a passing insecurity, and let us once more embrace reality, philosophy, common sense and hope for our country.⁷¹

He argues for a stay vote due to political and economical reasons, but also due to social reasons and staying united with the rest of Europe.

⁶⁸ Monbiot, George, The European Union is the worst choice- apart from the alternative, *The Guardian*, 15-06-2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jun/15/european-union-eu-britain-sovereignty> (accessed on 04-12-2017)

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Stewart, Patrick, I saw postwar Europe unite. We cant let it unravel, *The Guardian*, 2-06-2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jun/02/i-saw-postwar-europe-unite-reject-isolationism-leave-eu> (accessed on 04-12-2017)

5.2.3 Politics

A frequently used argument in favour of the EU is its ability to stop wars, and Harry Leslie Smith and Eddie Izzard on multiple occasions argue that peace is the key argument for why the EU is a positive thing.

... it would be a reckless leap into the dark to walk away from an organisation that, despite all its imperfections, has helped us to live in peace, and has made us safer from the threat of terrorism.⁷²

Again, the picture painted of the EU is, even though portrayed as majorly positive, is still that it is a flawed institution. Further, economic reasons are being brought in as a positive aspect to a membership of the EU, whilst the EU's handling of the refugee crisis is being criticised.⁷³ The issue of how EU handled the refugee crisis is also a concern for both credibility and trust in the EU.

Another political aspect that was brought up was the relationship between EU and the environment. Caroline Lucas and John Ashton argue that a membership in the EU is good for the climate, but that the institution is in need of a reform.⁷⁴

”Today’s European Union is, yes, tired, damaged and in need of reform. But without the EU the climate struggle would have been lost already.”⁷⁵

The fact that the EU is in need of a reform, might appeal to the voters who believe that this is in fact possible. However, many voters thought (especially after David Cameron’s unfruitful negotiations with the EU prior to the referendum) that this was not a realistic prospect. The quotation does argue that staying in the EU is better for the climate than leaving. Democracy on the other hand, seems less pre-

⁷² Smith, Harry Leslie and Izzard, Eddie, On the anniversary of D-day, we need the European Union more than ever, *The Guardian*, 06-06-2016.

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jun/06/anniversary-dday-eu-referendum-europe> (accessed on 04-12-2017)

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Lucas, Caroline and Ashton, John, If we’re to win the climate struggle, we must remain in Europe, *The Guardian*, 12-06-2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jun/12/win-climate-struggle-remain-europe-paris-summit> (accessed on 04-12-2017)

⁷⁵ Ibid.

sent in the EU according to the authors. By saying that "We can win our democracy back"⁷⁶ it further implied that democracy is not currently present in the EU. More arguments about a lack of democracy are presented, and the overall message of the article seems to be that we need to sacrifice some attributes, such as democracy and sovereignty, for the climate.⁷⁷ The relationship between democracy and politics in this case overlaps, and the issue of climate quickly becomes an issue of democracy.

The articles at this point seem to, even though they are published in *The Guardian*, a newspaper that was in favour of a vote to stay in the EU, have some criticism against the institution. Even though most articles end on a "stay-note", the criticism that is being presented throughout the articles would lead the reader to connect some of the negative attributes to the EU, regardless of what the overall message of the article actually is.

5.2.4 Togetherness

Making no remarks on the level of democracy in the EU, Dhananjayan Sriskandarajah rather argues that the EU is positive in terms of free movement and free trade.⁷⁸ Free movement is one of the factors that are connecting citizens of the member states of the EU. These are arguments that are mentioned frequently. A sense of community with the rest of Europe is exemplified by an Observer editorial published in *The Guardian*:

Remaining in the EU will not magically eliminate the challenges Britain faces in the years to come. But if we choose to do so, it will keep Britain at the heart of reforming the European project so that the nations of Europe are together better equipped to face them. At its core, the European Union remains a practical expression of the belief that liberal

⁷⁶ Lucas, Caroline and Ashton, John, If we're to win the climate struggle, we must remain in Europe, *The Guardian*, 12-06-2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jun/12/win-climate-struggle-remain-europe-paris-summit> (accessed on 04-12-2017)

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Sriskandarajah, Dhananjayan, Leaving the EU would not bring immigration under control, *The Guardian*, 10-16-2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jun/10/immigration-truth-brex-it-would-not-bring-it-under-control> (accessed on 04-12-2017)

democracies can achieve more acting in concert than they can alone. We must not turn our backs on that.⁷⁹

Even though the editorial acknowledges that the EU needs reforming, it still argues that it is important for UK to stay in the EU in order to 1) reform from within and 2) doing it together with other member countries.

Also Ireland would benefit from the UK remaining in the EU, claims Enda Kenny. He argues that it is good for economical reasons, as well as for the opportunity to change the EU from within.⁸⁰

5.2.5 Credibility

Distance to the citizens of the member states of the EU, created and strengthened through secrecy, is one of the reasons for why the EU is seen as lacking credibility. Jenny Jones argues against an EU which lacks scrutiny and oversight:

This creates a paradise for lobbyists, who can (and do) act unhindered by media or public scrutiny to influence the places where real power lies in Brussels, that is with the commission and within the even-more-secretive council.⁸¹

The EU in this perception is secretive, bureaucratic and executive actors take most decisions. Because the EU is framed as secretive, it creates an image of an EU that lacks credibility.

⁷⁹ Observer Editorial, The Observer view on how to vote in the European Union Referendum, *The Guardian*, 19-06-2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jun/18/observer-editorial-eu-referendum-how-to-vote> (accessed on 04-12-2017)

⁸⁰ Kenny, Enda, Why Ireland is so fearful of our closest neighbour leaving the EU, *The Guardian*, 20-06-2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jun/20/ireland-fearful-neighbour-leaving-eu-northern-ireland> (accessed on 04-12-2017)

⁸¹ Jones, Jenny, The EU is an outsized behemoth beyond reform- the Green case for Brexit, *The Guardian*, 08-06-2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jun/08/eu-reform-green-brexit> (accessed on 04-12-2017)

5.3 Arguments in *The Telegraph*

In the following section, the arguments presented in *The Telegraph* will be discussed. The analysis is structured along the themes presented above: democracy, economy, politics, credibility and togetherness. The position of *The Telegraph* was in favour of a vote for UK ending its membership in the EU.

5.3.1 Democracy

On the note that popular will is upheld by parliamentary democracy, Charles Moore writes in *The Telegraph* that, "The European Union was and is deliberately constructed to frustrate that will. Its government is not formed from a parliament or even by a vote."⁸² This shows that the EU in Moore's opinion is lacking elections, one of the arguments for the existence of a democratic deficit. He also puts it more bluntly, by writing that "The EU is leading us away from democratic modernity."⁸³ Moore is stating that the EU is an obstacle in terms of the UK keeping up with modern democracy. Also Tim Stanley argues for an undemocratic EU, writing: "We lose too much democracy in exchange for access to a declining market and a political union that is fraught with risk."⁸⁴ Stanley here argues that the gains of being in the common market don't make up for the decline in democracy that a membership of the EU constitutes. He also brings up arguments about the EU being hard to control, and being bad for migration and the economy.⁸⁵

Juliet Samuel on the other hand, argues for a stay vote.⁸⁶ However, this is only proposed as a option to change from within, since the EU is full of "...undemocratic, meddling,

⁸² Moore, Charles, We face a very serious decision next week – but not a terribly difficult one, *The Telegraph*, 17-06-2016. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/opinion/2016/06/17/we-face-a-very-serious-decision-next-week--but-not-a-terribly-di/> (accessed on 05-12-2017)

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Stanley, Tim, Brexit isn't about nostalgia. It's about ambition. Trust me. I'm a historian, *The Telegraph*, 21-06-2016. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/opinion/2016/06/21/brexit-isnt-about-nostalgia-its-about-ambition-trust-me-im-a-his/> (accessed on 05-12-2017)

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Samuel, Juliet, The referendum is a wake-up call: if Europe wont bend, it will break, *The Telegraph*, 15-06-2016. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/opinion/2016/06/15/the-referendum-is-a-wake-up-call-if-europe-does-not-bend-it-will/> (accessed on 05-12-2017)

incompetent and arrogant bureaucrats...”⁸⁷ Again, the article leaves on a vote to stay in the EU, but throughout the article, arguments framing the EU as being severely flawed are being brought up. This would affect the uninformed citizen. Juliet Samuel later in a new article, changes her standpoint in the referendum.

It stands for all of the ways in which globalisation is changing society and, by changing it, challenging the idea of democratic national sovereignty...Voting to return more of that power to our national government is a legitimate way to oppose the growing influence of international economic forces in our lives.⁸⁸

Here arguments such as sovereignty and lack of democracy frame the EU in a bad light. Samuel in her first article during the established time period argued that “The EU’s problem is that it is too clunky and remote to adapt to the public’s changing priorities. The EU’s elites can execute policies without voters’ consent. They have demonstrated that repeatedly. Doing so without even getting popular acceptance, however, leads to dysfunctional government.”⁸⁹ In this quotation, Samuel highlights many of the arguments for a democratic deficit, such as that it is too distant and failing to adopt policies supported by the citizens.

At this point, the results that have been found indicate that *The Guardian* delivered a more nuanced image of the EU. This can be effective in the sense that the arguments *for* the EU become more trustworthy when also the arguments *against* are being taken into account. However, the more straight forward approach of *The Telegraph* might be more convincing for the reader who is forming an opinion of the EU through the press.

Simon Heffner on a similar note includes an argument against the leader of Labour party, Jeremy Corbyn. He writes that “Labour remainers will scapegoat Mr Corbyn, given his dismal failure convincingly to urge Labour’s people to vote for the anti-

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Samuel, Juliet, A defence of this ghastly referendum campaign, *The Telegraph*, 22-06-2016. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/opinion/2016/06/22/a-defence-of-this-ghastly-referendum-campaign/> (accessed on 05-12-2017)

⁸⁹ Samuel, Juliet, Australia lets in more refugees than we do, but the point is that they choose to do so, *The Telegraph*, 01-06-2016. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/opinion/2016/06/01/australia-lets-in-more-migrants-than-we-do-but-the-point-is-tha/> (accessed on 05-12-2017)

democratic, elitist EU”.⁹⁰ Heffner directs his criticism towards Jeremy Corbyn, but also towards the EU for being both undemocratic and elitist.⁹¹

5.3.2 Economy

Trade and economy constituted two of the biggest categories of arguments in *The Telegraph*. In the Sunday Telegraph, concerns about a trade deficit were brought up.

Moreover, the idea that we benefit from membership is belied by the fact that the UK is currently running the biggest trade deficit in its history with the Eurozone nations, and especially with Germany. The fact is, we do not need a trade deal in order to sell and buy goods; and the contention that we will spend the next 10 years in some sort of economic limbo while we negotiate a new relationship with our neighbors is simply risible.⁹²

The Sunday Telegraph expressed a concern about the UK running a trade deficit, and that the membership of the EU is less than helpful.

The UK's then current Prime Minister David Cameron also published an opinion article in *The Telegraph*, in which the EU (not surprisingly) was portrayed as a rewarding partnership in terms of economy, trade and stability.⁹³

Our place in the EU's single market will be assured, and businesses can get back to hiring, investing and expanding. Our country will be back on track, building the strong economy on which all of our aspirations depend. And there'll be a majority Conservative government that is delivering for you, and on all our manifesto commitments.⁹⁴

However, not a single argument stated that the EU in fact constitutes a democratic institution. David Cameron's article was the *only* opinion article published in *The Telegraph*

⁹⁰ Heffner, Simon. The party leaders are Remain, but their voters aren't, *The Telegraph*, 11-06-2016. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/opinion/2016/06/11/the-party-leaders-are-remain-but-their-core-voters-arent/> (accessed on 05-12-2017)

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² The Sunday Telegraph, We must vote Leave to create a Britain fit for the future, *The Telegraph*, 18-06-2016. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/opinion/2016/06/18/we-must-vote-leave-to-create-a-britain-fit-for-the-future/> (accessed on 05-12-2017)

⁹³ Cameron, David. A vote for Brexit will cost pensioners dear if funds to pay for pension "Triple Lock" dry up, *The Telegraph*, 11-06-2016. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/opinion/2016/06/11/david-cameron-a-vote-for-brexit-will-cost-pensioners-dear-if-fun/> (accessed on 05-12-2017)

⁹⁴ Ibid.

during “Brexit month” that had a positive angle towards the EU and UK’s continued membership. The fact that it did not bring up democracy, would for the uninformed voter, and reader of *The Telegraph*, have meant that no single argument contradicted the image of an undemocratic EU. In *The Telegraph*, lack of democracy was not the only continuous argument.

5.3.3 Politics

On the topic of security, Alexander Clark argues the UK would benefit from leaving the EU. The issue with remaining in the EU in terms of security, Clark argues is the need for the EU to please all the nations involved.

In practice unless everything is worked out thoroughly in advance, and then stuck to religiously, the project tries to fulfil the wishes of every nation involved, no matter how contradictory or specialist.

Brexit could actually therefore improve the scenario for EU procurement integration, because Britain, due to its global interests and active tendencies, has very strong equipment requirements, making it difficult to accommodate.⁹⁵

Were the UK on the other hand to leave the EU, this would mean some relief in terms of manoeuvring these procedures.

5.3.4 Togetherness

On the theme of togetherness, only one argument in the articles from *The Telegraph* was presented, again, by David Cameron. He presses the issue of the stability that comes with a stay vote.

It would have to be something pretty special to justify these kind of risks. Yet they tell us nothing about what the future would hold. I don’t think they deserve your vote – not when leaving is so risky, not when it’s such a leap in the dark.

⁹⁵ Clarke, Alexander, What would Brexit mean for European security, *The Telegraph*, 20-06-2016. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/opinion/2016/04/21/what-would-brexit-mean-for-european-security/> (accessed on 05-12-2017)

So on June 23, I say: don't risk our economic security or your family finances. Don't let us go backwards again. Let's vote to remain – and let's look forward to a brighter future for you, and for every generation to come.⁹⁶

Here, Cameron argues that the risk of losing safety in exchange for the unknown is not worth the risk. Instead, he argues that people need to stand together in order to assure a great future for the generations to come.

5.3.5 Credibility

By spelling out arguments saying that the EU is bad for UK's trade and its handling of crisis, The Telegraph view pinpoints many of the reasons for why the EU is undemocratic, but also as to why it lacks credibility.⁹⁷ The article argues that executive actors are taking most decisions by saying:

... areas of policy-making that had previously been agreed among member states were brought within the competence of the European Commission, which became a super-charged administration-cum-government.⁹⁸

The article mentions many more arguments for an undemocratic EU, such as "The principal reason is its anti-democratic nature - the dislocation between those who govern and the governed. While people can vote for their national leaders, who then have an input into collective decision-making, they are no longer able to influence events that affect them directly through the ballot box."⁹⁹ This argument brings up issues such as a lack of elections and that the EU is too distant.

Christopher Booker highlights the problem for citizens to understand the EU. He underlines that even though people are starting to grip what the institution is about, he writes that the EU is:

⁹⁶ Cameron, David. A vote for Brexit will cost pensioner dear if funds to pay for pension "Tripple Lock" dry up, *The Telegraph*, 11-06-2016. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/opinion/2016/06/11/david-cameron-a-vote-for-brexit-will-cost-pensioners-dear-if-fun/> (accessed on 05-12-2017)

⁹⁷ Telegraph View, Vote leave to benefit from a world of opportunity, *The Telegraph*, 20-06-2016. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/opinion/2016/06/20/vote-leave-to-benefit-from-a-world-of-opportunity/> (accessed on 05-12-2017)

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

...ruled by a wholly unaccountable system of government that was never intended to be democratic, which most people scarcely begin to understand, and which is widely viewed, not just in Britain but across Europe, with ever-greater suspicion, resentment and hostility.¹⁰⁰

Booker argues that the fact that people are starting to understand the EU is not helping its credibility¹⁰¹, a statement that stands in opposition to Majones argument, that increased transparency in the decision-making process would increase the EU's credibility.

¹⁰⁰ Booker, Christopher, Will Vote Leave's blunder lose us the day?, *The Telegraph*, 18-06-2016. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/opinion/2016/06/18/will-vote-leaves-blunders-lose-us-the-day/> (accessed on 05-12-2017)

¹⁰¹ Majone, The regulatory state and its legitimacy problems, 1-24.

6 Analysis and discussion

It becomes apparent that the arguments that are related to democracy were the most frequently used by both *The Guardian* and *The Telegraph*. Another interesting aspect is that the arguments used to communicate a negative image of the EU, are more specific and detailed. The positive arguments on the other hand, presented a more general argumentation. Further, *The Telegraph* only published *one* opinion article that framed the EU in a positive sense. That article was written by David Cameron, then current Prime Minister of the UK, who supported a continued membership. *The Guardian* on the other hand, presented arguments both for and against the EU. Even though *The Guardian* published a majority of positive articles, the fact that *The Telegraph* only published one, would give an overwhelmingly negative picture.

The aim of the essay was to investigate which key arguments and standpoints concerning the EU were communicated by the press in the weeks (June 2016) leading up to the referendum, where the decision to leave the EU was made. The research has provided some interesting results, which will be analysed and discussed in this following and final section. Applying the theoretical framework of second level agenda setting as defined by Balmas and Schaefer, the impact of the media reporting about the EU will be analysed.

Further, focusing on the democratic properties of the EU, in accordance with the definition of the democratic deficit presented by Føllesdal and Hix, will help categorise the arguments related to democratic issues.

In the case of Brexit, the political engagement from the newspapers was high, and arguments for both a leave and a stay vote were presented by various newspapers. A democratic deficit within the EU has long been discussed, and it was therefore not surprising that arguments related to this concept was used in favour of a leave vote. However, this essay has shown that there seems to be agreement on the existence of a democratic deficit within the EU, between both the writers of *The Guardian Opinion* and *The Telegraph Opinion*.

6.1 Analysis

The first part of the analysis will explain the results and patterns that were found during the research process. This part will be presented in accordance with the steps suggested by the method. The second part will put the results in relation to the theoretical framework and earlier research.

6.1.1 Patterns of argumentation

During the research, patterns were quickly noted in the material. It became clear that writers for *The Guardian* did, even though the newspaper as such was in favour of a stay vote, seem to accept a democratic deficit within the EU. This meant that articles that were overall in favour of the UK staying in the EU, presented a negative image of EU, or even framed the EU as undemocratic. *The Telegraph* did not present a single argument stating that the EU does not suffer from a democratic deficit, but overwhelmingly many more saying that the EU does suffer from a democratic deficit. This then, could be outweighed by *The Guardian*. However, whilst *The Guardian* did indeed present some arguments saying that the EU does not suffer from a democratic deficit, it presented even more saying that it does. Only in the "credibility" category did *The Guardian* present an overall more negative picture than of the EU than *The Telegraph* did.

Another interesting pattern in the material was that the arguments against the EU were generally more detailed. When describing attributes as to why the EU is undemocratic, a variety of arguments stating why were presented. However, when a positive remark about the EU was made, it was in a more general manner. Further, the arguments that were used to communicate a democratic deficit within the EU differed between the newspapers. *The Guardian* mainly focused on the aspect of an EU that is hard to understand, whilst *The Telegraph* mainly focused on a secretive EU. There are two sides to this story. To some extent- a secretive EU, and an EU that is hard to understand, appeal to the same problem- an EU that isn't transparent enough. *The Telegraph*, by presenting the EU as secretive, framed the EU as hostile. *The Guardian* on the other hand, framed

the EU as hard to understand, which suggests that if the EU would be more see-through, it would also be more democratic.

6.1.2 Clustering, exceptions and contrasts

The difference between the newspapers in terms of portraying the EU in different light is plausibly due to their differencing political view. The approach of counting arguments and making contrasts/comparisons between the papers has provided a similar result as the qualitative discussion of individual opinion columns. The categories that were made up from the result of the coding made it clear "what went with what". The categories were thereafter created through grouping together different arguments, which referred to the same overarching theme. The themes that were found were: democracy, economy, credibility, politics and togetherness. After counting all the codes and putting them into categories, an even more clear result started to take shape. Democracy was the overarching theme that *The Guardian* and *The Telegraph* reported most negatively about throughout the weeks running up to the referendum, followed by economy. Some individual examples seemingly contradict the overall result. For example, journalists from *The Telegraph* occasionally argued for a stay-vote. Juliet Samuel, even though claiming that the EU is full of "undemocratic, meddling, incompetent and arrogant bureaucrats"¹⁰², argues for a vote to stay in the EU. This was an anomaly in the overall pattern of their reports. Further, the initial pattern of opinions presented in *The Guardian* indicated a positive attitude towards the EU. However, what at first seemed to constitute an occasional negative argument soon became a reoccurring theme in the articles.

6.1.3 Second level agenda setting

One of the main arguments presented by *The Guardian* was the difficulties for the public to understand the EU. Presuming that newspapers create the attributes of the institution in the eyes of the public, this means that there was no factual and impartial source of information to support the decision for where to place his/hers vote. A consequence

¹⁰² Samuel, Juliet, The referendum is a wake-up call: if Europe wont bend, it will break, *The Telegraph*, 15-06-2016. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/opinion/2016/06/15/the-referendum-is-a-wake-up-call-if-europe-does-not-bend-it-will/> (accessed on 05-12-2017)

of this would be that the media, through second level agenda setting contributes to this aspect of the democratic deficit. This also relates to the research that was earlier presented by Paul Copeland and Nathaniel Copsey (2017), who argued that the growth of euro sceptics within the UK is connected to the lack of an opposition to contradict negative arguments and statements that are being made about the EU.¹⁰³

If the newspaper we *expect* to have a negative attitude towards the EU, in this case *The Telegraph*, is not contradicted by the other (in this case *The Guardian*), public opinion will naturally lean towards the leave arguments. It should be acknowledged, that the majority of the articles from *The Guardian* did indeed contradict the claim about a democratic deficit. However, since the majority of newspapers in the UK were in favour of a leave vote, this could be said to create a pressure on the newspaper that we expect to object, to make a clear case for itself. When the theory about a democratic deficit within the EU is applied to the articles, we make some interesting findings. 1) *The Guardian* presents a more changeable image of a democratic deficit. Yes, it exists – but we need to stay in the EU to change that. 2) *The Telegraph* on the other hand, argues that the democratic deficit exists and will continue to do so as long as does the EU.

We know from other studies that the EU is bad at communicating its work.¹⁰⁴ We also know that citizens listen to media, and that the majority of newspapers in the UK were in favour of a leave vote, and the result of this essay indicate that the ones who were not in favour of a leave vote were still to some extent agreed on the idea of a democratic deficit. For the EU to become more transparent and as a result more democratic it needs to implement a higher level of attention towards the media to convey a more understandable and accurate picture of how EU works and what it actually does.¹⁰⁵

If we relate the arguments concerning the democratic nature of the EU in the newspaper material to the scholarly definition of the democratic deficit, we find that all categories contributing to the existence of a democratic deficit within the EU from Føllesdal and

¹⁰³ Copeland & Copsey, Rethinking Britain and the European Union: Politicians, the Media and Public Opinion Reconsidered, 709-726.

¹⁰⁴ Bârgăoanu, Alina, Negrea, Elena, Dascălu, Roxana, Communicating the European (Lack of) Union. An Analysis of Greece's Financial Crisis in Communicative Terms, *Romanian Journal of Communication & Public Relations*, vol. 12 issue 1 (2010): 27-38.

¹⁰⁵ Hix & Høyland, *The political system of the European Union*, p133.

Hix showed up in the articles, with the exception of the lack of power of the European Parliament. In *The Guardian*, the most mentioned was that executive actors take most decisions. In *The Telegraph*, a lack of elections and that the EU is hard to understand, were the most used arguments. Also the claim that the EU suffers from a credibility crisis as proposed by Majone, was found in the articles.

6.2 Discussion

The image of the EU as a democratic institution, presented in British press during the Brexit debate, has been the subject of this essay. Scholars and journalists have argued that a membership of the EU is vital to maintain democracy at a national level. They have also presented arguments claiming that the EU instead poses a threat towards democracy. The divided opinions regarding the level of democracy in the EU, could be related to which expectations people have of the institution itself. It seems that the ultimate issue of the pure existence of the EU, and all the questions that it raises are; what is the EU supposed to be for? Is it a political institution, a soon to be federal state, or simply an agreement to facilitate trade across Europe? The view taken on what the main purpose of the EU is tends to determine whether one considers that the EU suffers from a democratic deficit or not. Naturally, the EU considered as a pure trade system, initiates less value-based responsibility conflicts than an EU seen primarily as a political system. This is even more relevant if the EU is seen as a possible federal state.

Representatives in the European Parliament are often elected as a result of their domestic political career rather than because of their aims and goals for their nation within the EU, or for Europe as a whole. Elections to the European parliament are also often seen as less important than domestic elections of the member states, resulting in a low rate of participation. Voters more easily place their vote on grass root parties rather than party elites in the elections for European Parliament.

How the term democratic deficit is determined is highly dependent on the user of the term, which can create confusion about whether the EU suffers from a democratic deficit or not. This essay has shown that the key components in the concept of a democratic deficit are not only scholarly constructs, but occur clearly in the public debate. The case

of the newspaper discussion before the British EU referendum does not tell whether the EU actually is undemocratic. But it shows clearly that the newspapers, both left and right, were convinced that this is the case. Through their power to establish attributes to issues and institutions in the opinions of their readers, these newspapers also contribute to the public notion that the EU is undemocratic, in the sense proposed by the idea of the democratic deficit. In this respect, the results of the essay raise the question of whose opinions really matter. If the public at large perceive the EU as undemocratic, what is then the importance of the statements by scholars criticising the concept of a democratic deficit? Answering such questions could be a task for future research.

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