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Media Effects on Support for European Integration in Old and New EU Member States

Abstract: The study measures the strength of media effects on attitudes to EU integration. Media exposure is the independent variable; support for European integration is the dependent variable; socio-economic conditions and cognitive-cultural variables are contextual variables. The analysis covers 27 EU member states at the time of 2009 EP election. Both micro-level variables and country-level effects were taken into consideration in hierarchical linear models. Data from the PIREDEU study was used. Analyses document weak influence of media exposure on attitudes. The overall positive effect is mostly concentrated in stable democracies with well-developed media systems.

Keywords: international public opinion, attitude to European Union integration, media effects

The European Union in the post-crisis era is experiencing a crisis of legitimacy. The tide of enthusiasm which preceded and accompanied the 2004 accession waned, and European integration is a contentious issue in many member states, even traditionally federalist ones. The threshold of this process were the lost EU constitution referenda in France and the Netherlands, countries which long counted among the staunch supporters of strong European institutions. The attempts at establishing European-level supranational political and economic order meet with calls for re-nationalisation of policies and re-thinking of integration. Such calls can be heard both from the core north-western states and from the periphery.

The legitimacy of the European project depends on the societal support. Many different factors predict the support for European integration. They are both economic and cultural/ideological; they operate both to the individual and to the country level. Some of the important factors operating throughout the EU include: position in the social structure, national identification, balance of EU costs-and-benefits for the country of residence. Moreover, there are factors associated with the East-West and North-South divisions within the EU. In particular, the 2004 and 2007 accession waves redefined the internal structure of the EU and stood as an important factor in the dynamic of public opinion within member states. The emergence of common European public opinion is an indispensable for the formation of a common European democracy.

This article is not about the public opinion *per se*, but about its formation. The broad question is: do the media matter for democracy? Do they have a role in changing citizens' minds, influencing their cognitive processes and, ultimately, decisions?

The specific question is, whether opinions about integration are shaped by the media coverage of the European affairs. Different media outlets may set agenda in a manner that skews the attitudes in a more euro-enthusiastic or sceptic direction. These effects operate independently of the socio-economic and cultural variables; or, more precisely, they act as an intervening variable between the conditions and consciousness.

This analysis seeks to measure the strength of media effects on attitudes to EU integration. Media exposure is the independent variable; support for European integration is the dependent variable; socio-economic conditions and cognitive-cultural variables are contextual variables. The analysis is broad in scope, since it covers all 27 countries of the European Union. The purpose of the present study is to draw a picture of the media influence on attitudes in both 'old' and 'new' EU member states, in which being a new member state is an important explanatory variable. Both micro-level variables and country-level effects are taken into consideration in hierarchical linear models. Data from the PIREDEU project[1] is used. Within this study, both content analysis of the media (press and TV) and individual-level attitudes are measured. This enables me to trace the net influence of the media on attitudes.

Attitudes, Attitude Formation and Sources of Media Effects

Formation of Attitudes

The dependent variable is attitudinal: it measures the strength of respondents' support for European integration. The conceptualisation uses Allport's (1935: 310) classic definition of attitude as "a mental and neural state of readiness, organized through experience, exerting a directive and dynamic influence upon the individual's response to all objects and situations to which it is related." Attitudes are a cognitive process containing axiological and emotional elements as well as a behavioural dimension: they result in actions.

Measuring attitudes, however, is a contentious issue. Not only the validity and reliability of measurement, but the very existence of attitudes themselves are questioned. Responses to attitudinal questions are unstable and inconsistent. At one extreme, it can be claimed that political attitudes are non-existent for large portions of populations, even in the well-educated societies of old democracies. In his paper on The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics, Converse (1964) argues that opinion instability is due mainly to individuals who lack strong feelings on a given issue, but choose available responses randomly because of conversational requirements: "large portions of an electorate simply do not have meaningful beliefs, even on issues that have formed the basis for intense political controversy among elites for substantial periods of time" (Converse 1964: 245). Later work allowed for a refined conceptual-

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ization of attitude formation and measurement that takes into account the availability of attitudes for the purpose of the survey question: an attitude may rest in mind in a quasi-formed state and the validity of a question in a survey rests on its potential for retrieving this. According to Tourengau et al. (2000), formulating a response to any survey question typically involves four component processes—interpreting the question, retrieving relevant information from memory, integrating that information into a judgement, and reporting the result. The key element of this process is thus the information retrieval: the degree of availability of an opinion is crucial in producing an answer. According to Fazio (1990), an attitude is a structure consisting of an attitude object, an evaluation and the link between these. A key property of an attitude is the strength of the object-evaluation link, which determines its accessibility: the stronger the link, the more likely that the evaluation will be activated (come to mind) when the object of the attitude is encountered. With highly accessible attitudes, the evaluation will come to mind automatically. If there are weak links between object and evaluation, evaluation will be constructed on the spot on the basis of information salient at that moment.

A widely used theory of this link was conceptualised by John Zaller (1992). He designed the so-called *RAS* (*Receive-Accept-Sample*) model that describes how people receive new information, decide whether to accept it, and sample at the moment of answering questions. It is based on 4 axioms: 1. Reception axiom, which states that the greater a person's level of cognitive engagement with an issue, the more likely he or she is to be exposed to and comprehend political terms concerning that issue; 2. Resistance axiom, which states that people tend to resist arguments that are inconsistent with their political predispositions, but they do so only to the extent that they possess the contextual information necessary to perceive a relationship between the message and their predispositions; 3. Accessibility axiom, which posits that the more recently a consideration has been called to mind or thought about, the less time it takes to retrieve that consideration or related considerations from memory and bring them to the top of the head for use, and 4. Response axiom: individuals answer survey questions by averaging across the considerations that are immediately salient or accessible to them. It follows that respondents do not normally search through their minds for all considerations relevant to a given issue but answer the question on the basis of whatever considerations are accessible "at top of the head" (Zaller 1992: 43–51).

Role of the Media in Attitude Formation

In this study, I highlight the role of the media in forging the link between latent attitudes and responses to survey questions. It is clear that individuals react differently to the same media message, and that their level of political sophistication (knowledge of and interest in public affairs) may moderate its effects on individual's opinions. In Zaller's view, the moderately aware are most susceptible to media influence: they pay enough attention to be exposed to the content, but lack the resources to resist the persuasive message (Zaller 1992: 19).

Moreover, the actual content of the information flow may affect the activation of attitudes. If the media messages are one-sided, this signifies a political consensus on the issue. Therefore, there is no basis for rejection of the content on the grounds that it is incompatible with the value-system of a respondent. In such a situation the contact with the media should be a predictor of strength of attitude. This is the *mainstream effect*.

On the other hand, if the information is mixed (several points of view presented in an adversarial manner), there is no political consensus on an issue. In such a situation, the level of political sophistication plays a role. Individuals with a low interest in politics do not usually come into contact with the information. People with high competence process information selectively, matching the input with their pre-existing beliefs. However, the people in the middle of the scale of competence (not sophisticated, but reading or watching news) tend to be affected the most. This is the *polarization effect*, defined by Zaller (1992: 100): "in the case of an evenly divided partisan elite and a balanced flow of partisan communication, the effect of political awareness is to promote the polarization of attitude reports." The more balanced the information to which individuals are exposed, the less likely a media effect is, since opposite effects may cancel each other out.

A polarization effect is possible in cross-cutting media exposure, which means that people must be exposed to political perspectives that they do not find agreeable. The opposite is selective exposure: people expose themselves to like-minded media whenever possible. The latter type of exposure results in the 'friendly media phenomenon' of citizens selecting contact with like-minded media. This is "the best overall description of the way in which citizens relate to the partisanship of their news sources outside of experimental settings" (Goldman and Mutz 2011: 42). Evidence of selective exposure to the media has been found in studies involving laboratory experiments and the findings of these may not be generalizable to "naturalistic settings where people may or may not have choices that reflect a range of political views, and where media choices may be largely habitual and long term, rather than on a story-by-story or day-by-day basis." (Goldman and Mutz 2011: 44–45).

Researchers studying the phenomenon have found partial evidence confirming the existence of polarisation effect. De Vreese and Boomgarden (2006: 20–22) found that "the condition under which news media are least likely to have an effect is if the public is exposed to both sides of an issue. The effects of exposure to mixed evaluative content are likely to cancel each other out. This condition is dubbed the *two-sided information flow.*... Moderately aware individuals are most likely to be both exposed to and affected by new information. However, the least aware persons are most susceptible to influence in which the information flow is very intense."

The media presentation of an issue is understood through the use of the concept of framing. Frames can be defined as patterns of interpretation through which information is classified in order to handle it efficiently, based on (but not identical with) cognitive schemata (Entman 1993: 52), which have a persuasion effect (Matthes and Schemer 2012). Frames contain axiological and psychological components: media presentation elicits emotions by presenting reality in black-and-white terms, by nam-

ing and shaming and creating good and bad characters. Such a construction enables the reader/viewer/listener to fit the content more easily into his or her own value structure, without, however, altering it (de Vreese et al. 2011). Metaphorically, the belief structure is a frame and media fill it with the picture; they do not create the frame, though.

The framing of topics in mass media may be related to the process of *agenda-setting*: rank-ordering set of issues perceived [by the media] to be most important at a given point in time. Media draw attention to the issues on their agenda by *priming*: highlighting some issues while ignoring others, and thereby influencing the standard by which the public judges political figures and issues. Priming is a trigger releasing the latent information into the "top of the mind," where it is accessible for response to a survey question (Roessler 2008). The balance of messages to which individuals are exposed, and their own selectivity in internalizing some while rejecting others, systematically determine the mix of considerations in their heads, and this, in turn, affects the likelihood that one rather than another survey answer will be made. Thus, individuals vacillate in their responses, but only within a certain, systematically determined range (Zaller 1992: 266). This is the theory.

The actual effects of news frames on individual beliefs appear dubious at best, if the natural environment is studied. Chong and Druckman (2007) distinguish three categories of framing effects: first, one-sided framing effects in which individuals are exposed to a non-competitive frame; second, dual-framing studies in which individuals are exposed to opposing frames in equal quantities; third, unequal two-sided framing studies in which individuals receive opposing frames in different quantities. They conclude that almost all studies use one-sided frames and that there is little knowledge of how individuals respond to competitive frames.

Attitudes to the European Union as a Research Topic

Factors influencing support for the EU integration include economic concerns, domestic government approval, identity and immigration attitudes and values. EU citizens in different socio-economic circumstances experience differing costs and benefits from EU integration, which can cause variations in support. This implies that, depending on individual resources such as income, education, occupational skills and proximity to border regions, support for EU integration can vary (Vliegenthart et al. 2008: 416–417). Previous studies show that identity-related factors are the strongest predictors of support for EU enlargement (McLaren 2002).

In this context, it is crucial to verify the media influence, since "EU citizens consistently identify newspapers and television news as their most important sources of information about the EU" (Vliegenthart et al. 2008: 415). The theoretical insight and empirical research gathered to date indicate that the relation between media content and attitudes is complicated and mediated by a number of variables, and that there is no direct correspondence between media content and opinions. One of the key intervening variables is the existing cognitive structure. It is worth noting that attitudes to the European Union are not very deeply rooted in many societies (although generaliza-

tions across 27 countries are difficult) and that they can change rapidly. For instance, de Vreese et al. (2011: 180) found that "public opinion on complex issues is volatile, and opinions on EU are not stable and are easily influenced by new information."

There have been studies of media effects on EU attitudes (e.g. de Vreese et al. 2011; Semetko et al. 2003; Vliegenthart et al. 2008). However, most of these are either experimental or quasi-experimental, or restricted in scope (covering West European societies only). A number of experimental studies (de Vreese and Boomgarden 2003; Maier and Rittberger 2008) demonstrate that subjects exposed to news articles in which enlargement of the EU is negatively evaluated show lower support for it. The problem with the experimental studies is their ecological validity: their generalizability to a natural environment is questionable. On the other hand, results obtained in North-Western Europe may scarcely be applicable to less consolidated political and media systems.

My hypotheses predict the salience of 'new membership' as a factor mediating media effect on attitudes to the European project. European Union membership is a relatively new experience in CEE societies and, following the model I am using, it is not yet a part of the worldview of citizens. People have not fitted it into their attitude structures: they may look at some aspects with a fresh eye, without rejecting signals inconsistent with their existing opinions. However, instability of attitudes has also been noted in the 'old' EU (see Eurobarometer, for instance). In these countries the status of EU attitudes is different: opinions are well-grounded in long-term everyday experience. Analysis should account for such 'old-vs. new-Europe' differences in explaining of media effects.

Hypotheses and Data Analysis

Here are the hypotheses:

H1: Exposure to positive or negative news frames does not significantly influence support for EU integration. Most research in natural settings has failed to detect such a direct influence on the individual level and there is no reason why this study should prove anything different.

Several aspects of exposure have to be verified at this stage. Classical research has indicated that negative information has a stronger influence than positive (Campbell et al. 1960). Moreover, it is assumed that the volume of material may be a significant factor: it is not framing per se, but the quantity of information that plays an educational role. Here is a sub-hypothesis:

H1a: Exposure to news, rather than positive or negative framing, is a significant predictor of attitudes to the EU integration

H2: Unsophisticated individuals under strong exposure to one-sided information flow are influenced by news content. This hypothesis is somewhat contradictory to H1, or rather presents a special case. It follows Zaller's RAS theory.

H3: 'New membership' (being a CEE country of the 2004 or 2007 EU intake) is a factor influencing the relation between media exposure and support for EU integration.

West European media systems are well-developed, news outlets have stable readership bases and audiences, and I expect these links to translate into media effect. If the 'friendly media' phenomenon does operate, receiving information from a trusted source should reinforce a viewpoint. Inasmuch as the media effects are expected to occur, they are expected in developed democracies/media systems.

H4. 'European integration is for the cosmopolitan rich': regardless of any media effects, the support is expected to be positively related to a position in the social structure and to mixed (or foreign) national identity. Structural factors are predictors of many different attitudes and some of them correlate with general political competence and with media exposure. These factors are separate. Structural predictors are expected to be significant regardless of competence or contact with the media.

The main dependent variable in the models is the answer to a question on whether European integration has gone too far, or Europe should integrate further. This answer was given on an 11-point scale and is treated as a continuous variable.

The main explanatory variable is exposure to news stories. In each country, the EU-related content of the main TV stations, broadsheet newspapers and tabloid dailies was recorded in the period of three weeks preceding elections to the European Parliament. The exact dates varied across countries, as the elections were not held on the same day throughout the EU. In most of the countries, two TV stations, two broadsheets and one tabloid were used.[2] All stories about the EU and EP elections in newspapers and in the main news broadcast on TV were coded in detail. In order to be classified as EU story, the EU or any sort of EU institution, policy or synonym had to mentioned at least once. In order to be classified as EU election story, the election or the campaign had to be mentioned explicitly at least once in the story. The unit of observation in this study is the news story.

The data from the content analysis is merged with the data from the survey. For each respondent, there is information on the degree of exposure to the media outlets coded: how many days per week he/she watches the news or reads the newspapers. This translates into probabilities of being exposed to news stories, i.e. if someone reads newspaper X on one day a week, the probability of exposure to a story in this medium is 0.14; if they do so daily the probability is 1. Only news stories with either a positive or a negative framing of EU affairs are selected. The variables 'balance of exposure' (BE) 'positive exposure' (PE) and 'Negative exposure' (NE) can be expressed thus:

$$BE = PE - NE$$

$$PE = \sum_{x=1}^{n} Px \times Npx$$

$$NE = \sum_{x=1}^{n} Px \times Nnx$$

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[2] For details, see Schuck et al. 2010.

PE = Positive exposure to EU; *Px* = Probability of contact with medium x; *Npx* = Number of positive stories about EU in medium x
NE = Negative exposure to EU; *Px* = Probability of contact with medium x; *Nnx,* = Number of negative stories about EU in medium x
The analysis also uses the variable "all news" (*AN*), defined as contact with all news outlets, which sums the probabilities of contact:

$$AN = \sum_{x=1}^{n} Px$$

AN = Total exposure to news outlets; *Px* = Probability of contact with medium x.

The other explanatory variables are the interaction terms between incompetence and exposure to positive/negative frames. Incompetence is calculated as the reverse of educational attainment. The inclusion of this variables in models tests H2 for the significance of exposure in the case of respondents with low cognitive abilities.

The contextual variables are structural: age, gender, material standard of living, education (age respondent finished education), place of residence (urban v. rural). Additionally, religiosity and national identity are controlled for. The degree of correlation between exposure to the media content framing the EU in a positive or negative context and the strength of corresponding attitudes are measured.

In short, I measure the degree of correlation between the exposure to the media content framing the EU in a positive or negative context and the strength of corresponding attitudes.

Analysis

The first step is determining the type of information flow: whether it is one-sided or two sided (cross-cutting). The analysis seeks to establish whether (and in which countries) individuals absorb both positive and negative news, and where they are able and willing to select the axiological dimension of exposure and receive mostly positive or negative information.

Correlation coefficients are calculated for the variables 'positive exposure' and 'negative exposure'. The Pearson correlation coefficient for the whole data set of 27 countries is very high at 0.465, and obviously significant. In all the countries,[3] the correlation between negative and positive exposure is significant at $p < 0.001$, with r above 0.9 in some countries (Belgium, Czech Republic, Latvia, Greece, Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia, Sweden, Finland, Bulgaria). On the country level there is no evidence of selectivity in news consumption in terms of framing of the EU. More exposure means more of both positive and negative messages. Therefore, it is assumed that a two-sided (cross-cutting) information flow operates in all the countries studied.

However, I am interested in effects on the individual level: no matter how small the number of individuals affected by a one-way information flow, these are indicative

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[3] With the exception of Estonia, where no negative stories were recorded.

of cognitive processes occurring in such conditions. Therefore, respondents affected by an unusually one-way (relative to country mean) information flow are separated. For each country, variables of 'positive one-way flow' are calculated for individuals for whom the balance of exposure (BE) is at the level of country mean+1 standard deviation and 'negative one-way flow' for individuals for whom the balance takes the value of country mean-1 standard deviation.

Presentation of the EU

The visibility of EU or EP elections in newspapers and TV programmes, understood as the proportion of stories mentioning these topics in all materials, is highest in Greece and Malta, followed by Poland, Slovenia, Austria and Cyprus: these countries rank at the top of the hierarchy of EU visibility for both TV and newspapers (table 1). Clearly, "differences in visibility appear to be more country-specific than indicative of any East-West or North-South divide" (Schuck et al. 2011: 46–47).

In this study the focus is on stories which have an axiological dimension to the presentation of EU, i.e. show it in a positive or negative context. TV and newspaper stories are treated equally. In such a ranking, the highest number of materials is obtained in Malta, followed by Latvia, Austria, Cyprus, Bulgaria, Poland, France and Portugal. The lowest is in Flanders (Belgium was treated in the PIREDEU study as two media systems), Estonia, Italy, Czech Republic, Luxembourg and Lithuania. There is no geographical key to these hierarchies.

Attitudes to EU integration

Attitudes to EU integration are best in two new member states, Romania and Poland (table 2). These are followed by Greece, Lithuania, Malta and Bulgaria. The lowest support is noted in Latvia, the UK, Austria and Finland. Comparing descriptive statistics of media presentation and attitude indicates that there seems to be some correlation between media presence and attitude to the EU. Some of those countries with the most positive media presentation of the EU count among the most Euro-enthusiastic societies (Malta, Bulgaria, Poland, Romania), while some countries with Euro-sceptic media have populations which are negative towards the EU (UK and Austria). However, this relation does not appear to be true everywhere. The two Baltic states of Latvia and Lithuania, in particular, seem to defy this rule: Latvia's media are positive and the population negative towards the EU, while in Lithuania the opposite holds, with favourable societal attitudes and indifferent media.

Hierarchical Linear Model Analysis

In order to verify the hypotheses, hierarchical (multilevel) models are constructed (see table 3). The rationale for such a model is non-independence of observations in the pooled sample. The study includes 27 samples conducted at country level. It is expected that both individual-level and country-level variables are significant predictors.

Table 1

Framing of the EU

	Total number of materials concerning EU with positive/negative framing	Positive	Negative	Balance (positive–negative)
Malta	311	274	37	237
Latvia	178	154	24	130
Bulgaria	141	126	15	111
Poland	123	106	17	89
Cyprus	145	101	44	57
France	122	75	47	28
Portugal	110	69	41	28
The Netherlands	68	47	21	26
Romania	38	30	8	22
Germany	41	31	10	21
Spain	45	33	12	21
Sweden	55	37	18	19
Belgium—Wallonia	52	35	17	18
Slovakia	24	20	4	16
Ireland	35	24	11	13
Hungary	44	28	16	12
Estonia	10	10	0	10
Luxembourg	16	13	3	10
Greece	79	43	36	7
Italy	11	8	3	5
Czech Republic	15	9	6	3
Lithuania	19	11	8	3
Belgium—Flanders	6	3	3	0
Denmark	24	12	12	0
Finland	58	29	29	0
Slovenia	97	47	50	−3
Austria	154	65	89	−24
United Kingdom	66	15	51	−36

The dependent variable is the attitude to EU integration. The analysis is not concerned with its variance or level per se, since the hypotheses concern predictors.

In order to test the hypotheses, several groups of variables are used. The basic indicator is the 'balance of exposure' (BE), used to test H1. The second one is the interaction between the BE and education (inverted). Higher values for this variable indicate a high degree of positive exposure coupled with incompetence in public affairs. This variable serves as a test of H2. Thirdly, the interaction is calculated between BE and the country-level variable of being a new member state. This variable is used to test H3 with regard to the significance of being a new member state for the relation between media exposure and support for the EU integration. The inclusion of variables AN, PE and NE serves to determine whether exposure to news or framing has the decisive effect. The other variables serve as controls. They include the most important socio-demographics (gender, age, education, place of residence, standard

Table 2

Attitudes to EU integration

Country	Attitude to EU integration (mean)
Romania	7.05
Poland	6.58
Greece	6.43
Lithuania	5.90
Malta	5.89
Bulgaria	5.86
Slovakia	5.69
Slovenia	5.63
Netherlands	5.55
Italy	5.47
Denmark	5.36
Czech Republic	5.31
Ireland	5.31
Sweden	5.28
Germany	5.24
Cyprus	5.22
Belgium	5.15
Portugal	5.08
Hungary	5.04
Luxembourg	4.88
Spain	4.77
France	4.77
Estonia	4.64
Finland	4.37
Austria	4.32
United Kingdom	3.74
Latvia	3.49

of living), as well as two factors related to value orientation and identity: national identity and religiosity. Moreover, they serve to test H4.

Model 1 is empty (intercept-only). The interclass correlation coefficient in the empty model is equal to $0.603366/(0.603366 + 9.055210) = 0.06$, meaning that 6% of variance is attributable to country traits. This serves as a reference point for subsequent analyses.

Model 2 includes two individual-level variables: the balance of exposure (BE) and the interaction between BE and incompetence. BE is significant ($p < 0.05$), while the interaction term is not.

Model 3 tests the hypotheses by including both hypothesised predictors and controls. Since the interaction term between BE and incompetence is insignificant, it is omitted in this model. On the other hand, it includes the interaction between BE and 'new membership'. Further, socio-demographic variables are included, as well as national identification and religiosity. It appears that being a new member state does have a significant effect: the negative sign indicates that new membership decreases the predicted effect of media exposure. Several socio-demographic variables have

Table 3

Media effects on EU attitudes

Fixed effects	Model 1 estimate	Model 2 estimate	Model 3 estimate	Model 4 estimate
Intercept	5.28 (0.15)	5.19 (0.15)	−0.29 (2.59)	−2.18 (2.67)
Balance of exposure (BE)		0.04 (0.01)*	0.04 (0.003)**	
BE*Incompetence		−0.0004 (0.0003)		
BE*New membership (0—old; 1—new)			−0.03 (0.004)**	
Exposure to all news (AN)				0.11 (0.03)**
Exposure to positive frames (PE)				0.01 (0.001)**
Exposure to negative frames (NE)				−0.02 (0.003)**
Education (age finished)			0.03 (0.004)**	0.03 (0.003)**
Gender (1—M; 2—F)			−0.15 (0.04)**	−0.15 (0.04)**
Year of birth			0.002 (0.001)	0.003 (0.001)
Religiosity			0.02 (0.007)**	0.023 (0.007)**
Standard of living			0.22 (0.02)**	0.213 (0.02)**
Urban (1—rural; 2—urban)			0.12 (0.05)**	0.13 (0.05)**
National identity (1—native; 2—mixed/non-native)			0.23 (0.07)**	0.25 (0.07)**
Random effects				
Intercept	0.603366	0.618081	0.606843	0.611194
Residual				
(subject = country)	9.055210	9.083071	8.925462	8.946858
Model fit statistics				
AIC	124599.025	117216.748	110676.017	110124.853
BIC	124615.253	117232.852	110692.012	110140.837

*$p < 0.05$;   **$p < 0.01$.

a significant effect on EU support when media effects are controlled for. Support increases strongly with material standard of living and education. The positive effect associated with living in an urban area is significant, but smaller. Women are significantly less supportive of EU integration. As expected, mixed or non-native national identity increase support for integration.

The analyses indicate that H1 and H2 are both wrong, i.e. the relation is opposite from that postulated. Media exposure does have a significant, albeit slight, effect on attitudes to EU integration. This effect holds when controlling variables are introduced. On the other hand, the combined effect of strong exposure and incompetence does not appear to have any role in predicting attitudes. In the analyses, incompetence is operationalized in several different ways (results not shown here) and there is no significant effect of the interaction, regardless of the operationalization of incompetence.

H1a is tested by Model 4. The results indicate that both exposure to frames and news consumption (regardless of content) are significant predictors of EU attitudes. When controls are introduced, including the control for framing, people who watch

more TV and read more newspapers appear to be slightly more positive towards EU integration. It is worth noting, however, that the effects are small.

H3 is correct. As expected, the effects of exposure are stronger in the old member states than in the new. In the countries of the 2004 and 2007 intake exposure to positive media coverage has less effect on attitudes.

H4 also proves to be correct. Regardless of any media effects, socio-demographic factors have a strong and significant effect on EU attitudes. The most important among these are material standard of living and education. People with a higher position in the social structure have a much stronger preference for a common Europe. This squares with previous research and is easily explainable through a cost-benefit analysis: threats related to integration are perceived more strongly by those lower on the social ladder, while benefits accrue to elites, at least subjectively. As expected, not having a strong national identity predisposes respondents to support EU integration.

Country-level Analysis

The final step in the analysis is identifying the countries where media exposure has a significant effect on EU attitudes. In order to do this, OLS regression is applied to each country dataset (see table 4). The explanatory variables in the multiple regression are: BE and the controlling variables, i.e. education, gender, year of birth, religiosity, standard of living and national id. In the table below, the *R sq*. is for the models which contain all these variables, and the *B* coefficient is for the variable BE.

It is clear why the interaction with the variable 'new membership' is significant for BE in predicting EU attitude in the multilevel models: most countries in which BE influences attitudes significantly are in the 'old' EU. These are: Denmark, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Austria, Portugal, Sweden. In the 'new' EU, only Cyprus and Slovakia display such a relation. The table shows a negative relation in Finland, i.e. high relative positive exposure results in worse attitudes. This is the result of the omission of the variable 'exposure to all news' (AN) in the models. Finland is one of the countries with the highest level of correlation between positive and negative exposure, i.e. a strong two-way information flow.

While the strength of media effects is greater overall in the 'old' Europe, there is only one discernible geographical pattern: it appears that Nordic countries all show significant values.

Discussion of the Results

The analyses have only partially confirmed the initial expectations. Research on media effects in a natural environment shows at best a weak influence of media exposure on attitudes, and this study confirms the regularity. The overall positive effect is mostly concentrated in stable democracies with well-developed media systems, while in most CEE countries (but also in several countries of the 'old' Europe, such as France, Germany, Belgium, Spain and others) there is no independent significant influence.

Table 4

Country-level analysis

	R sq.	B (balance of exposure)	Std. error	Sig.
Netherlands	6%	.095	.019	.000
Austria	13%	.033	.004	.000
Sweden	4%	.091	.022	.000
Finland	7%	−.171	.050	.001
Cyprus	3%	.024	.008	.003
Slovakia	2%	.067	.024	.006
Italy	3%	.227	.097	.020
Denmark	3%	.136	.060	.022
UK	7%	.038	.017	.025
Ireland	2%	.064	.031	.041
Portugal	4%	.047	.023	.044
Latvia	5%	.009	.005	.086
Hungary	1%	.083	.050	.098
Poland	2%	.015	.009	.109
Malta	5%	.003	.003	.222
Germany	2%	.054	.046	.244
Spain	1%	.023	.025	.361
Czech Rep.	3%	−.129	.142	.367
Bulgaria	1%	.004	.006	.491
Slovenia	2%	.019	.032	.541
Belgium	2%	−.033	.058	.566
Luxemburg	2%	.016	.029	.591
France	2%	.015	.030	.615
Greece	1%	−.047	.112	.673
Romania	2%	.011	.027	.681
Lithuania	6%	−.013	.055	.815
Estonia	2%	.000	.036	.998

On the broadest level, the conclusion would be: the traditional media do not matter much for attitude formation, especially in 'new' member states.

The expectation that high exposure coupled with low cognitive competence would lead to strong susceptibility to media influence is not confirmed. In fact, this finding is not inconsistent with the RAS model. All the countries studied are, to a great extent, characterized by a two-way information flow. Put another way, even uneducated individuals tend to be familiar with diverse viewpoints and the sterile environment postulated in the model does not occur. A realistic situation in a pluralistic media system is one of informational abundance, rather than of a carefully selected, one-way information stream. The latter conditions are possible only in an experimental situation, or in an authoritarian/totalitarian system with tight controls.

It is worth noting that, independently of framing effects and position in the social structure, media consumption improves attitudes to the EU integration. Perhaps this is a slightly far-fetched conclusion, but one way to interpret this finding would be to conclude that more information about the world, not about the EU only, leads to more openness to integration. Perhaps it eases fears, or allows for a better cost-

benefit analysis, by providing more complete information about the consequences of complex socio-political processes. It is true that EU integration is supported more by better-off, more highly educated people, and by men rather than women. However, the educational effect of reading newspapers and watching TV news affects all strata.

It is possible that some forms of media exposure which influence attitudes are not captured in the study. The research concerns a topic that tends to have relatively minor importance for many citizens. Even when the EU is discussed in the media, this is usually in the national context, rather than from a European perspective (see, for example, Schuck et al. 2011). The media were coded for a short period of time, and it is likely that attitude formation in the case of a topic that does not have direct relevance for a respondent's everyday experience is spread over a long time. The contact with the media during the EP election campaign may not have had much influence on attitudes because these had already been constructed, over a long period of time. This, however, does not preclude the media from being a direct or indirect source of these attitudes.

Finally, it is important to stress that the study involves traditional media only. However, the internet can be as important as TV and newspapers as a source of information about politics for some people, or even more important (Wenzel and Feliksiak 2012). At present, in almost all EU countries, the majority of adults use the internet regularly (data from European Social Survey). It is possible that there are significant media effects, but that these are exerted via the web. These could involve the impact of content originating from newspapers and TV, but distributed online, of news and commentary from web-exclusive blogs and media, or they could be a product of the interaction between users, however imperfect this interaction may be (cf. Jankowski and van Selm 2000; Shah et al. 2005). A broader study, taking into account web-based content in addition to the print and broadcast media, may detect a stronger relation between attitude formation and the information flow.

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