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# Brexit and the imaginary of 'crisis': a discourse-conceptual analysis of European news media

Michał Krzyżanowski<sup>a,b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>School of Humanities, Education & Social Science, Örebro University, Örebro, Sweden; <sup>b</sup>Department of Communication and Media, School of the Arts, University of Liverpool, Liverpool, UK

## ABSTRACT

This article explores the discourse-conceptual linkages between 'Brexit' and 'crisis' in European news media reporting about the UK referendum on leaving the European Union of 23 June 2016. The study examines media discourse about the Brexit vote in Austria, Germany, Poland and Sweden at the transformative moment in between the pre/after vote period. The conceptually-oriented critical discourse analysis shows how Brexit was not only constructed as an imaginary or a future crisis but also how its mediated visions were made real by recontextualising elements of various past social/political/economic crises. As is shown, such a strategy of discursively amalgamating the real and the imaginary, as well as the experienced/past and the expected/future, often allowed constructing Brexit as one of the most significant, critical occurrences of post-War Europe. Through the analysis, the article aims to show how wide and diverse the importance of 'Brexit as crisis' has been for European news media discourse. It also emphasises that while in the UK itself – including huge part of the UK traditional media – the critical nature of Brexit was often strategically downplayed, the wider European discourse would see it as a multifaceted 'crisis' of huge significance to both the present and the future of the EU, wider Europe and the world.

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Discourse-conceptual analysis; news media; recontextualisation; imaginary; Brexit; crisis

## 1. Introduction

'How Project Fear's dire warnings about the dangers of Brexit HAVEN'T come true two years on from the referendum' was the title of an article by Hugo Gye in the UK tabloid *The Sun* published on 27 June 2018. The article criticised Brexit opponents in the UK and wider Europe by listing several areas where it has been – according to the article incorrectly – widely predicted that Brexit would end up in crisis. The article focused specifically on issues such as, inter alia, the potential crisis of UK unemployment, increase in taxes, budget crisis of the National Health service (NHS), general national and international economic recession, or the widely discussed UK constitutional crisis. Not only did it actually disclaim all these as evidently not happening but also, typically for the UK pro-Brexit press/

**CONTACT** Michał Krzyżanowski  [michal.krzyzanowski@oru.se](mailto:michal.krzyzanowski@oru.se), [michal.krzyzanowski@liverpool.ac.uk](mailto:michal.krzyzanowski@liverpool.ac.uk)

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media and UK right-wing populist and nationalist voices, the article generally denied as well as trivialised the rather obvious 'Brexit' and 'crisis' connection. This was done unlike in, e.g. the UK liberal quality press (e.g. the Guardian) and in the wider European and international media which widely engaged with discourses of national and pan-European socio-economic and political crisis in relation to 'Brexit'.

Departing from the above, this article aims to explore how the variety of mediated imaginaries at the 'Brexit' and 'crisis' intersection were found in the European media discourse. The paper does so in order to show that it was not only Brexit itself which has remained an evidently elusive concept – not to say an outright 'empty signifier' – but that the national as well as the international debates surrounding United Kingdom's leaving the European Union to large extent boiled down to a presentation of, and competition between, various imaginaries. Within the latter, various areas of political, social and economic reality were thematised and called into question as well as more or less explicitly linked to the future/imagined crisis caused by the UK Brexit vote and Britain's eventual departure from the EU. At the same time, as the analysis aims to show, various patterns of domestication of UK events could be observed in the European press with different types of Brexit-induced current/future crises put to the fore as a token of interpretation of the local/national impact of the largely-unexpected UK 2016 referendum results.

The article explores European news media discourse about Brexit at the time of, and immediately after, the UK Brexit referendum of 23 June 2016. It specifically looks at the transformative moment in between the pre/after vote period in order to capture the wide array of international crisis imaginaries often rooted in scenarios of future course of actions and events. At the centre of the analysis here is the critical discourse analysis of media in selected 'prototypical' EU countries including, in alphabetical order, Austria, Germany, Poland and Sweden. Hence, the paper looks at discourses in countries characterised by significantly varied length of EU membership, by different relationships with the 'core' EU project and by differentiated levels of social, political and economic ties to the UK. The focus is on how such a sample of national press in the studied countries covered Brexit and, in particular, what were their interpretations thereof immediately after the pro-Brexit results of the UK 2016 referendum came to be known.

This study joins the existent body of analyses of Brexit as a populist and nationalist project (Evans & Menon, 2017; O'Toole, 2018) as well as the growing body of work on UK and international media and political conceptualisations of, and discourses about, Brexit (see articles in this Special Issue as well as, in particular, Adler-Nissen, Galpin, & Rosamond, 2017; Koller, Kopf, & Miglbauer, 2019; Ridge-Newman, Leon-Solis, & O'Donnell, 2018). The article focuses on the discursive logic of various, crisis-driven Brexit imaginaries as expressed across the studied 'prototypical' national contexts and national public spheres in Europe. The main aim is, thereby, to conduct a discourse-conceptual analysis at the intersection of constructions of the 'imagined' and the 'real'. This is done in order to highlight how the discursive conceptualisation of Brexit was not only geared towards constructing an imaginary crisis but also how it was effectively made real by recontextualising various social/political/economic crises thus allowing for the de facto description of Brexit as one of the most significant critical occurrences in post-War Europe. By the same token, the study highlights the predominance of the past/present-to-future dimension of discourse which served as a tool in connecting the 'imaginary' and the 'real' by allowing the discursive linkage of lived collective experiences with various scenarios and projections for the common UK, European or international future.

The starting point for such a cross-national analysis is the assumption that while in the UK itself the ‘Brexiters’ and other supporters of Brexit – including, unfortunately, a significant part of the UK media – were strategically downplaying the critical nature of UK’s eventual decision to leave the EU (see above), the wider European discourse would see it as predominantly – and rightly – a ‘crisis’ of varied nature, and as a generally very negative development for both the present and the future of the EU and wider Europe. The article therefore aims to show how wide and diverse the importance of Brexit has been in European news media and how diversified was its meaning as a ‘crisis’ across the studied European public spheres.

## 2. Crisis imaginaries, media and cross-national perceptions

### 2.1. Experienced/expected crises and the ideological nature of the imaginary

Crisis is perhaps one of the most widely debated concepts in social and political sciences which over the course of history has not only been defined by intellectual ideas but also often served as a tool in mobilising social and political action. Reinhart Koselleck, who is among the key modern thinkers to have looked at how the nature and meaning of crisis has evolved historically, points out that crisis – as well as ideas thereof – have almost always been related to the significant moments of social and political transformation when their use significantly increased. Traditionally, the increased use of ideas and imaginaries of crisis have denoted an abrupt and highly transformative moments of vital ‘epochal change’ (Koselleck, 2006, p. 358) or signalled ‘a critical transition period after which – if not everything, then much – will be different’ (Koselleck, 2006, p. 358). In late modernity, however, crisis has increasingly come to denote ‘a state of greater or lesser permanence, as in a longer or shorter transition towards something better or worse or towards something altogether different’ (Koselleck, 2006, p. 358).

Yet while crisis as well as its use as a socially- and politically-mobilising concept/idea has surely been entangled within the said path-dependencies, its discursive construction has traditionally relied on a specific placement at the historical past-to-future axis. Crisis hence often allowed projection of past into the future and vice versa, including as a token of ideologically relating historical/past experience to the thinking about and predicting the future. Crisis has, differently put, been very strongly entangled in the famous Koselleckian dichotomy between ‘*scope of experience*’ and ‘*horizon of expectations*’ (Koselleck, 1979) which effectively intertwined socially-shared experience of the past with collectively-fuelled ideas and predictions or expectations towards the future. Therein, crisis has often been shown as directly linked to experience of the past ‘whose events have been incorporated and can be remembered’ (Koselleck, 2004, p. 259) as well as to the projection of the future via ‘hope and fear, wishes and desires, cares and rational analysis, receptive display and curiosity’ (Koselleck, 2004, p. 259).

The past-to-future thinking about crisis to large extent makes it into a peculiar form an *imaginary* (see, inter alia, Taylor, 2004) that not only serves past/present-related description but also, or perhaps in particular, a powerful ideological future projection (Wolin, 1989). Within such an imaginary, the combination of the ‘known’ (or the experienced) and the ‘unknown’ (the expected) still remains central while

what is conceived by the imagination is not a mere improvement but a quantum leap that nonetheless preserves elements of the familiar (...) while a strong element of fantasy may figure the imaginary, there is likely to be a significant 'real', verifiable element as well. (Wolin, 2008, p. 18; see also Wolin, 2004)

Accordingly, discourses on crisis have traditionally relied on a combination of the 'real' and the 'projected' while often forming a peculiar form of a socially constructed utopia i.e. 'not just a dream to be enjoyed but a vision to be pursued' (Levitas, 2011, p. 1; see also Graham, 2019). This has opened crisis to a strongly ideological use in particular as part of top-down projections of various formats of social and political action that could/should result in a change – and hopefully an improvement – of the social reality. Within such discourse, crisis has, however, often effectively ceased to be a description of the 'real' and became to large extent an idea invented for 'political' motives (Sum & Jessop, 2013, p. 396). Yet, driven ideologically, crisis could well also be placed in a reverse discursive trajectory: it could be ignored and disclaimed even if it existed with the thus constructed discourse of disregarding the crisis symptomatic for the populist politics of post-truth and denial.

## ***2.2. Crisis and mediated cross-national perceptions, and the European public sphere***

Debating and communicating crises relies very strongly on their discursive construction in the public sphere and, in particular, the media. The latter allows articulating crises by emphasising the role of certain ideas, actions or of (courses of) events as critical. Media thus largely carry the task of constructing crisis/es as events/occurrences that 'disrupt accepted views of the world and how to "go on" within it and also call established theoretical and policy paradigms into question' (Sum & Jessop, 2013, p. 358). Though often doing so out of their own ideological and/or politico-economic interests, media also often undertake a far-reaching critique of not only the ideas of crises – or interpretation of events/actions as such – but also of various scenarios of how they should be 'tackled' or otherwise averted or addressed. They do so while, in particular, building a stance towards politics and the political.

The connection between 'media' and 'crisis' has traditionally been very strong in the context of the mass media (Raboy & Dagenais, 1992; Street, 2011) but probably especially at the politics-media intersection that remains pivotal within, in particular, discourses of the national public spheres. As many classic studies over the years have shown (see, in particular, Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke, & Roberts, 1978; Schlesinger, 1991), media have played a pivotal part in not only representing but also developing interpretation of national (political, economic, or social) crises. They have also played a crucial role in forging and mediating connections between crises and the wider social phenomena and attitudes as is evident with regard to such central issues as e.g. immigration or social class (see Krzyżanowski, 2009, 2018; Krzyżanowska & Krzyżanowski, 2018; see also Krzyżanowski, Triandafyllidou, & Wodak, 2018).

But crisis-driven discourses have, in particular, been a central feature of the cross-national perception-building by the media as element of 'foreign news' (Hannerz, 2004). Therein, 'foreign' crises have traditionally been among the key triggers for media reporting and media interpretations of foreign events (see, in particular, Galtung & Ruge, 1965). The

widely disputed media processes of 'domestication' of foreign news (Gurevitch & Levy, 1990) have also, very prominently, focussed on various types of crises which have not only been discursively represented in the news but were also framed – i.e. interpreted – by means of various nationally-specific i.e. domestic frames (Alasuutari, Qadir, & Creutz, 2013; Clausen, 2004).

In the post-War European context, mediated foreign (national) 'crises' have also been the key triggers of debates that brought contestation of the present and the future of intra-European relations (Triandafyllidou, Wodak, & Krzyżanowski, 2009). However, even some of the significant post-war European events of transnational resonance – such as, e.g. the 1968 student revolt – have not been able to break the strongly domestically-bound tendencies of European news media. The latter, namely, clearly preferred to apply various types of 'national filters' (Krzyżanowski, 2009) in their discursive representations of crises. By doing so, they have often disallowed the development of any wider, cross-national or outright 'European' patterns of interpretation of crises and instead strongly favoured to see reported/mediated events/occurrences through the lens of national interests and ideologies.

The said tendency was not broken even in the more recent media discourses and despite the repeated calls for a more transnational and/or global outlook in the news (Bromley & Slavtcheva-Petkova, 2019; Cottle, 2009) substantiated in the European context by, in particular, the extensive political as well as academic discourse on the 'European Public Sphere' (Koopmans & Statham, 2009; Krzyżanowski, Triandafyllidou, & Wodak, 2009). Therein, many calls have been made to break with the traditional national media tendencies harmful to post-national European thinking and to look for not only representations but also common, transnational patterns of interpretation – including of crises – as profoundly European in nature (Koopmans & Erbe, 2004; Krzyżanowski, 2012).

Yet, while the strictly-national interpretation of foreign/European crises remains the key pattern of interpreting both national and transnational critical occurrences and events, recent years have brought a vital change in the perception and discursive construction of crisis. First, with the arrival of, in particular, the 'economic crisis' as well as its national, European and global variants in the first decade of 2000s, 'crisis' has yet again become one of the central concepts in the wider public European – including media and political – discourse (see e.g. Jessop, 2015; Wodak & Angouri, 2014). Secondly, and even more importantly, crisis has since become a concept that is widely used in political and media discourse to predict *future* trajectories of political and social dynamics often while, paradoxically, being deployed as a description of the changing *current* political, economic or social conditions. Thereby, crisis has become a peculiar tool of discursive '*pre-legitimation*' (Krzyżanowski, 2014) of the present and the future and of, especially, political actions which, while often purely imaginary, are put forward to avert various real and imagined 'crises'. This tendency has, importantly, allowed huge openness and ambivalence as to the definition of what 'crisis' actually is, or what essentially makes one. It enabled 'crisis' to become an element of utopian visions of an '*imaginary reconstitution of society*' (Levitas, 2014) that can easily be re-defined, re-appropriated and claimed/disclaimed by various political and actors, often in a populist and politically-opportunistic fashion (Krzyżanowski, 2018; Wodak & Krzyżanowski, 2017).

### 3. Brexit and 'crisis' imaginary in European news media: analysis

#### 3.1. Aims and methods of analysis

In its critical discourse analysis of the Brexit and crisis connection in European news media, the present study utilises the methodological pathway of the so-called 'discourse-conceptual analysis' (Krzyżanowski, 2010, 2016; Krzyżanowski & Wodak, 2011). The latter combines key insights from, on the one hand, the Discourse-Historical Approach in Critical Discourse Studies (Krzyżanowski, 2010; Wodak, 2001) and, on the other hand, the so-called conceptual history – or *Begriffsgeschichte* – of Reinhart Koselleck (1979, 2002, 2004 and above) and his followers.

Drawing on such a methodological combination, the analysis presented below aims to examine how the social and political concept of 'Brexit' is constructed in the analysed media discourses on the back of reporting about the results and implications of UK 2016 Referendum on Leaving the EU. The analysis is event-specific and comparative i.e. it looks at various nationally-specific discourses about the UK Brexit referendum as well as points to similarities and/or differences between the studied nationally-specific discursive representations and interpretations of Brexit in the context of mediated reporting.

Specifically, the conducted critical discourse analysis is argumentation-oriented (Krzyżanowski, 2010) i.e. it is deployed in order to discover the key arguments that are used to frame the discursive Brexit-crisis connection in the analysed media. Therein, the central aim is to explore in-depth the key argumentative frames – or *topoi* – that summarise arguments which are constructed for/against the key debated ideas and views.

Further to a close look into *argumentation* including deployment of context-specific (i.e. content-driven) as well as classic (i.e. structure-driven) *topoi* and fallacies (Krzyżanowski, 2010; Reisigl & Wodak, 2001), other/investigated discursive strategies included (a) *representation of social actors along with construction (or denial) of their agency* or their pivotal role (or lack thereof) in undertaking/driving or undergoing the described social and political action (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001; van Leeuwen, 2008) and (b) *presupposition* i.e. 'taken-for granted, implicit claim embedded within the explicit meaning of a text' (Richardson, 2007, p. 63). These strategies were often used within a further strategy of (c) *pre-legitimation of practice* (Krzyżanowski, 2014) which showed future/projected events as prototypically(possibly) following the known and established course of events and thus being legitimised by way of 'usual' patterns and path-dependencies of social and political action (van Leeuwen, 2007).

While the in-depth look at these and other discursive strategies has allowed discovering the key in-depth features of the analysed media discourses and arguments, at a more abstract level the analysis has also aimed at establishing the aforementioned discourse-conceptual connection. The latter is displayed by, inter alia, the overall 'semantic field' of the 'Brexit' concept (see Figure 2) that provides a generalised representation of the key crisis-related ideas attached to the central concept. This also serves as a map of key argumentative lines (*topoi*) through which the 'Brexit' concept was constructed (i.e. argued for/against) and thereby particularised in/via crisis-oriented discourse along both nationally-specific or ideological (liberal vs. conservative) lines.



### 3.2. Research design and empirical material

The study covers media representations in four European countries which are viewed as prototypical for various ideas/visions of European politics and carrying different types and length of experience of EU membership:

- (a) *Austria* – a central-European country which became EU member in 1995 and is also one of the members of the Eurozone. While Austria has traditionally had high levels of support for European integration and has also been crucial in EU-coordinated actions (e.g. such as those with regard to the recent 2015–16 European ‘refugee crisis’), the growing insurgence of right-wing populist politics in the country since early 2000s has spread a number of Eurosceptic ideas and tendencies that increasingly penetrate into the country’s mainstream politics and mainstream media. The latter remain, however, largely pro-European with liberal Austrian newspapers in favour of EU and the conservative ones remaining of moderate yet still pro-European stance.
- (b) *Germany* – one of the Western-European founding states of the European integration project and its key driving force since the 1950s. Germany has traditionally had high levels of support for EU across the political spectrum and in both liberal and conservative media. While the long-term rule of the Christian-Democratic German Chancellor Angela Merkel (in office since 2005) assures continuity of the country’s strongly pro-European politics – and its de-facto and symbolic leadership of the EU bloc and the Eurozone – the growing criticism of the chancellor (e.g. in the Conservative media) often brings more ‘realistic’ (i.e. moderately-critical) approach to European politics often tied to personalisation of EU failures – such as e.g. Brexit – as Merkel’s own political mistakes.
- (c) *Poland* – a central/eastern European country which was the leader of the ‘big bang’ 2004 EU enlargement. Poland has traditionally had strong pro-European views which have been further sustained by the country’s significant economic and infrastructural development since becoming EU member. Polish pro-European stance has, however, been very strongly contested with the arrival of new right-wing populist parties – most notably Law and Justice or PiS – that have been in power since 2015 and often aimed to align Polish politics with that of such Eurosceptic and EU-defiant CEE states as e.g. Hungary. Despite that, in recent years Poland’s liberal (commercial) media have remained very strongly pro-European while right-wing as well as state-controlled public media have at the same time become increasingly Eurosceptic often acquiring radical features and/or openly questioning Poland’s EU membership or the plausibility of the EU project as such.
- (d) *Sweden* – a northern-European state which, just like Austria, joined the EU in 1995 yet, similarly to other Scandinavian EU members (e.g. Denmark) decided to remain outside the Eurozone. Sweden has traditionally good levels of support for the EU in line with its pro-European social-democratic as well as moderate-conservative politics. However, Sweden perceives its EU membership as far more pragmatic and less organic than e.g. that of such countries as Germany or France, as is also symbolised by its decision not to adopt the Euro. Sweden’s mainstream media – esp. broadsheets – are traditionally pro-European though with a clearly critical stance sometimes presented in the



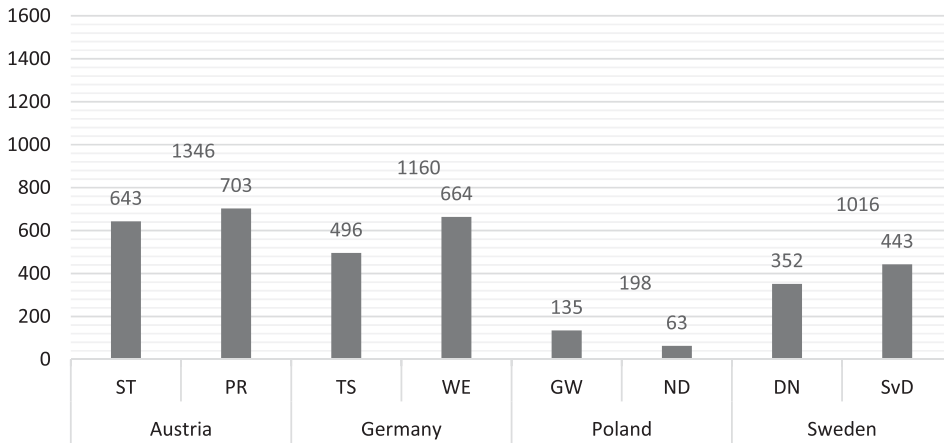
conservative press and a growing criticism of the EU increasingly originating in country's online media and uncivil society or right-wing populist politics.

Within the four studied countries, the article looks at quality and quality-like newspapers in order to capture a spectrum of opinion-making voices within the studied national contexts as well as sample a variety of Europe-related views. In most cases, the ideological polarisation of views is moderate and oscillates between a liberal and openly pro-European newspaper and a conservative or moderately pro-European – or 'Euro-realistic' – one. This logic is, however, different in one case – of Poland – where the polarisation between a strongly pro-European liberal newspaper and an overtly Eurosceptic radical-conservative counterpart is evident.

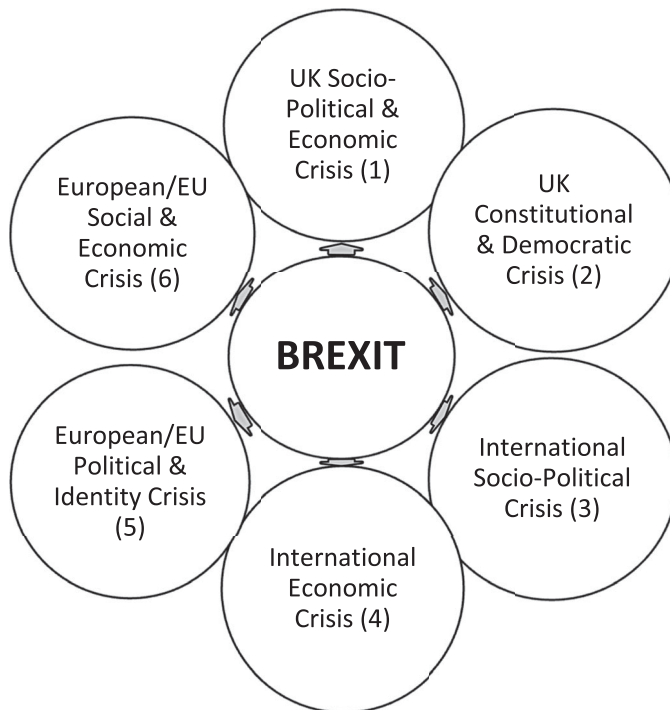
The material for the analysis was collected from databases run by the newspapers themselves (in Poland) or from nationally-specific press archives (*Wiso-Press* for Austria and Germany, and *Mediearkivet* for Sweden). The analysis was limited to press texts with images generally not included. The analysed material was collected by way of a database keyword search focussing on 'Brexit' (or 'brexit') and excluding much wider and highly polysemous keywords like the 'UK' or 'United Kingdom' (and their equivalents in German, Polish or Swedish). The material was collected and analysed in the original languages i.e. German, Polish and Swedish. The material was not collected in a genre specific way and hence it included both news-reporting and opinion/editorial genres. However, as a result of the keyword-driven search a clear preference for the opinion-making commentaries/editorials and related genres could be observed across all studied countries and newspapers.

The empirical material was collected within the scope of, altogether, 4 months (ca. 16 weeks) i.e. between 1 May and 31 August 2016. The aim was for the empirical material to encompass ca. 8 weeks before and 8 weeks after the UK Brexit referendum of 23 June 2016 in order to observe the key tendencies along the growing or falling frequency/volume of reporting which, expectedly, was the most sizeable in late June and early July 2016 i.e. in the immediate aftermath of the UK referendum. While the empirical material created a corpus of 3720 articles, the eventual in-depth, qualitative analysis presented below was undertaken on a much smaller sample of ca. 200 articles published on the day of the UK Brexit referendum (23 June 2016) and in the immediately following 6 days (thus forming the so-called sample reporting week; depending on the existence of weekend/Sunday editions etc.).

As [Figure 1](#) indicates, in all analysed countries except Poland there was (a) a generally very large interest in the UK Brexit referendum and (b) in all studied countries the conservative press reported UK referendum more extensively than its liberal counterparts. Interestingly, the most sizeable nationally-specific corpus was that of Austria (1346 articles altogether) with the conservative *Die Presse* (PR) yielding 703 articles and liberal *Der Standard* (ST) publishing 643 pieces. The German corpus was the second largest and yielded 1160 articles with conservative/nationwide *Die Welt* (WE, 664 articles) outnumbering its liberal counterpart i.e. Berlin-based *Tagesspiegel* (TS, 496 articles). The Swedish corpus came third with 1016 articles and a similar discrepancy between the conservative *Svenska Dagbladet* (SvD, 443 articles) and the liberal *Dagens Nyheter* (DN, 352 articles). Finally, the Polish corpus clearly stood out from all other corpora having yielded only 198 articles altogether (i.e. only ca. 15% of the German or 20% of the Austrian corpus). In the Polish corpus, liberal and pro-European *Gazeta Wyborcza* (GW, 135 articles)



**Figure 1.** Analysed newspaper corpora per newspaper/country.



**Figure 2.** Semantic field of 'Brexit' concept in the analysed media discourse.

catered for almost 70% of all articles with the radical-conservative and Eurosceptic *Nasz Dziennik* (ND) yielding altogether only 63 articles.

### **3.3. Overview of key *topoi* at the Brexit/crisis intersection**

Figure 2, which summarises the core arguments in all of the analysed countries, presents the semantic field of the 'Brexit' concept along with the key crisis-related *topoi* that were

deployed in the analysed media reporting (see below for examples). As the figure suggests, 'Brexit' was extensively related to crisis in a discourse which run along three main dimensions that were, respectively, UK-, internationally- and Europe/EU-specific. Each of those dimensions further comprised two topoi including looking at Brexit as: *UK Socio-Political and Economic Crisis* (Topos 1), *UK Constitutional and Democratic Crisis* (Topos 2), *International Socio-Political Crisis* (Topos 3), *International Economic Crisis* (Topos 4) and *European/EU Political and Identity Crisis* (Topos 5) or *European/EU Social & Economic Crisis* (Topos 6).

The first topos – of *Brexit as UK Socio-Political and Economic Crisis* – was probably the widest of all deployed in the analysed discourse. It argued that Brexit is, first and foremost, a result of ongoing divisions and malaise in the UK society and economy and that it will further solidify the ongoing crisis in UK's 'broken' and divided society. The discursive constructions of this topos often entailed various 'on the ground' looks at the current/future implications of Brexit – including via 'vox-pops' and other quotes from the general UK public (often in a form of so-called straw-man fallacies) – and boiled down to social actor representation of the British public by via e.g. classification of social actors as different kinds of 'people'. Some aspects of argumentation embedded within this topos were also about the deceitful nature of the 'Leave' campaign in the UK which could eventually lead to a crisis of UK public life as well as the eventual future 'Bregret' of the British public (see nationally-specific findings in 2.2, below, for examples).

Often connected to the latter, the second topos of *Brexit as a UK Constitutional & Democratic Crisis* focussed specifically on long-term UK-internal democratic implications of the referendum. Realisations of this topos often departed from presupposition of UK as profoundly divided country – as evidenced through, in particular, the varied nationally-specific outcomes of the Brexit vote in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Through these, it was also often presupposed that the UK is an artificial state construct. Here, references to, in particular, Scotland were central including arguments that, since it overwhelmingly voted to remain in the EU, Scotland might acquire the right to yet another independence referendum now that the rest of the UK has decided to leave the EU. However, the main gist of the second topos remained future oriented: it was encompassed by the argument that Brexit would, effectively, contribute to the crisis of UK as a 'Union' as well as profoundly undermine the current format of British state system as a constitutional/parliamentary monarchy. Brexit, hence, would eventually be the foundation of, it was often predicted, the future end of UK's 'union' in the current form.

Opening the international dimension of the analysed transnational discourse, the third topos – of *Brexit as an International Socio-Political Crisis* – drew on the premise that Brexit is not only a foundation of UK-specific or European current/future crisis but that its future implications would be strongly international if not outright global in nature. Often drawing on extensive presuppositions, this topos was the main vehicle of the 'domestication' of Brexit in/into the various analysed national contexts. There, it was often implied that various societies internationally, as well as their constituent social groups and social actors (e.g. Polish workers as migrants, including in the UK), will be profoundly affected by the Brexit process. Brexit hence was seen as thus contributing to international socio-political crisis which may not only be limited to the explicitly-related national

contexts (e.g. Poland and the UK, Sweden and the UK etc.) but may have cross-national implications and result in, inter alia, solidification of not only social malaise but also of related types of political change (e.g. further rise of xenophobia or right-wing populist tendencies, etc).

The fourth topos of *Brexit as International Economic Crisis* followed the usual pattern of debating global economic implications of a political crisis. Brexit vote was hence seen as having profound implications for the future shape of European as well as wider world economy while many scenarios of economic uncertainty and recession also being provided. This strongly future-oriented topos was driven by a peculiar uncertainty about economic implications of Brexit in view of the fact that, as such, it has no actual precedence and hence many key economic actors – in UK, Europe and beyond – remained uncertain about the possibility of future economic ties to the UK or of the impact of Brexit on the wider stability of Europe's cross-national economic ties. The topos also operated along a peculiar macro-micro logic: while macro-level global implications were often considered across the studied material so was also the impact of Brexit on small and mid-size enterprises whose ability to work and collaborate cross-nationally is strongly dependent on the EU frameworks.

The topos of *Brexit as European/EU Political and Identity Crisis* – listed as fifth above and probably the most frequent in the analysed corpus – opened up the EU/Europe-specific dimension of the analysed cross-national media discourse. This topos showed Brexit as a symptom of an ongoing crisis of the European integration project and, while allowing for the fact that the UK has traditionally been an 'awkward partner' in the EU and its predecessors, it saw Brexit as having profound impact on the future of the EU now put into question and thrown into further crisis. This topos included traditional aspects of internationally-oriented media discourse like, e.g. the overview of different countries and political actor's 'reactions' to the Brexit vote often tied with predictions about EU and Europe's future. It also presented social, political as well as economic sources of the current EU/European crisis among which the upsurge of Eurosceptic right-wing populism was almost always put to the foreground. Since, in line with the topos, it was argued that right-wing populist politics – along with its ongoing attempts to, allegedly, 'reform' but effectively undermine the EU – would, it was expected, prevail in Europe in the foreseeable future, it should also be expected that the crisis of the EU symptomatized and emphasised by Brexit was set to continue well into the future.

Finally, the sixth topos – of *Brexit as European/EU Social and Economic Crisis* – allowed media writers to skilfully connect the national and the cross-national plains to argue that, while a political move in itself, Brexit would have a profound impact on the wider European society and economy. The topos relied on various strategies – of e.g. collectivised or individualised representation of social actors etc. – aimed to portray wider sections of society and social groups as currently and potentially affected by Brexit and UK's leaving the EU. The topos was also one that nested the various references to intra-European migration while pointing that various migrant groups (e.g. various EU citizens in the UK) will bear the brunt of Brexit decisions 'on the ground'. Brexit, it was predicted by means of the topos, could also lead to a wider European 'social' crisis as well as a far-reaching change of mood in social and intergroup relations and attitudes towards, in particular, immigration.

### 3.4. Country-specific deployment of key topoi at the Brexit/crisis intersection

#### 3.4.1. Austria

The peculiarity of the analysed Austrian liberal media discourse was that, contrary to the other studied outlets/countries, it very strongly focussed on the UK-internal dimensions and ontologies of Brexit as a crisis. The main line of argumentation in the Austrian *Der Standard* (ST) was therefore one aligned with Topos 2 which focussed on the UK Constitutional and Democratic Crisis. This topos allowed the authors to not only claim that, as such, the UK constitutional system was heavily strained and flawed, but that Brexit as such was symptomatic for a rather certain, forthcoming ‘falling into pieces’ of the EU (see Example 1). As the example also emphasises, the Brexit thinking in the UK was driven by mainly flawed and wrong ideas which might have lead to the fact that as a result of the Brexit process the UK would eventually end up in a much less favourable political/economic position than as an EU member. It is also mentioned metaphorically that the ‘most bitter irony of history’ (*die bitterste Ironie der Geschichte*) would be a situation whereby the Brexit process would contribute to the fall of the UK with, inter alia, Scottish independence or reunification of Ireland.

##### EXAMPLE 1:

*Das Vereinigte Königreich wird möglicherweise zerfallen. Was übrig bleibt, wäre Kleinbritannien, bestehend aus England und Wales. Das Brexit-Lager wollte Großbritannien wieder unabhängig machen. Das wird sich als Illusion herausstellen, wenn am Schluss der Austrittsverhandlungen ein assoziierter Status herauskommt, bei dem die Briten die Regeln der EU übernehmen müssen, ohne sie mitgestalten zu können. Aber die bitterste Ironie der Geschichte wäre es, wenn die britischen Nationalisten zu Geburtshelfern der Unabhängigkeit Schottlands und der Wiedervereinigung Irlands würden. ST 25/06/2016, p. 43*

The United Kingdom could well fall into pieces. What could be left is a ‘Small Britain’ consisting of England and Wales. The Brexit camp wanted to make Great Britain sovereign again. This will prove to be an illusion if the exit negotiations end up in an associated status in which the British have to accept the EU rules without the possibility of creating them. But the most bitter irony of history would be such if the British nationalists assisted the birth of the independence of Scotland or of the reunification of Ireland.

The strongly UK-internal focus in the studied Austrian liberal press was also displayed in the use of Topos 1 (UK Socio-Political and Economic Crisis) which allowed overtly describing Brexit as a potential ‘disaster’ (*‘Desaster’*, see Example 2) whose roots were mainly economic and politico-economic in nature. Brexit, it was argued, would be a direct reason for UK entering into (yet another) recession with obvious economic and wider social implications.

##### EXAMPLE 2:

*Für Großbritannien wird der Austritt ein ökonomisches Desaster. Die Verlagerung von Produktionsstandorten und die Einbußen im internationalen Handel werden das Königreich laut Experten in eine tiefe Rezession stürzen. ST 25/06/2016, p. 44*

The exit will be an economic disaster for Great Britain. According to the experts, the moving of manufacturing sites and the losses in international trade will throw the UK into a deep recession.

Finally, in addition to the UK-internal foci, the Austrian liberal discourse also focussed on the EU/Europe dimension by specifically addressing Brexit in the context of the European/

EU Political and Identity Crisis (Topos 5). Unlike in many instances of the conservative media discourses, the focus here was not, however, on the mistakes/flaws of the EU but on the pan-European pandemic of right-wing populism and Euroscepticism – very poignantly nominated/predicated as ‘pan-European nationalistic revisionism’ (*‘gesamteuropäische nationalistische Revisionismus’*, see Example 3) – that holds the main responsibility for creating a crisis of the European integration project symptomized by Brexit. The ontology of that crisis was pointed to explicitly within a combination of, on the one hand, the (tabloid) media power, and, on the other, the revival of the still unbroken historical nationalism across the EU. All of these were coined/nominated as a peculiar ideological ‘mixture’ (*‘Mixtur’*) that fuelled Brexit and undermined the EU while repeatedly putting forward the image of ‘Europe as the enemy’ (*‘Feindbild Europa’*).

EXAMPLE 3:

*Der Ausgang des Referendums bedroht die Integration Europas. Das Votum des britischen Wahlvolks stärkt die radikale Rechte und die Nationalismen in nahezu allen Mitgliedsstaaten. Der gesamteuropäische nationalistische Revisionismus hat sich bereits in Position gebracht. Eine brennende, vom Boulevard geschürte Mixtur aus ungebrochenen nationalistischen Mentalitäten, Provinzialismen und Globalisierungängsten hat den Rechtspopulismus hier wie dort, Hofer und Brexit, groß und salonfähig gemacht. Seine Identität bezieht er, übrigens ganz logisch, aus dem Feindbild Europa. ST 25/06/2016, p. 43*

The outcome of the referendum endangers the European integration. The vote of the British electorate strengthens the radical right and nationalisms in almost every [EU] member state. The pan-European nationalistic revisionism is now well in place. It is fuelled by the boulevard [press], by explosive mixture of continued nationalistic mentalities, by provincialisms and by fears of globalisation all making right wing-populism here and there, Hofer and Brexit, big and socially acceptable. Its identity rests, in fact quite logically, on the image of Europe as the enemy.

While the Austrian liberal press focused explicitly on various ontologies of Brexit as a national/European crisis, its conservative counterparts mainly constructed their discourse around future crisis scenarios epitomised by the Brexit vote. Here, the focus of the Austrian *Die Presse* (PR) revolved mainly around the economic crisis (to be) ignited by the Brexit vote as encompassed by, in particular, Topos 4 on International Economic Crisis. What is emphasised in Example 4, is the fact that the international markets were negatively surprised, or ‘caught cold’ (*‘kalt erwischt’*), with, inter alia, the banking sector largely unprepared for the market lows caused by the Brexit vote. The general danger pointed to was that of the ‘insecurity’ (*‘Unsicherheit’*) or lack of clarity which, known to be decisive for market volatility etc., symbolised the vision of the crisis period that will come in the aftermath, and as a result of, the UK referendum. In a similar vein jobs that would ‘depart’ (*‘abwandern’*) from the UK were constructed as a symbol of ‘crisis’ and ‘loss’ that would be a result of Brexit.

EXAMPLE 4:

*Der Brexit hat die Märkte am Freitag wirklich kalt erwischt. Nach den Umfragen der vergangenen Woche war die Angst vor einem Austritts-Votum am Donnerstag verpufft. Es folgte, wovon der Währungsspekulant George Soros gewarnt hatte: ein schwarzer Freitag an den Börsen. Am schlimmsten hat es die Banken erwischt. Was in diesem Sektor geschehen wird, ist nach dem Brexit-Votum völlig unklar. In der City of London arbeiten rund 700.000 Menschen im Finanzsektor. Ein Teil dieser Jobs wird wohl abwandern - etwa nach Dublin oder Frankfurt. Die Unsicherheit machte sich am Freitag auch in den Aktienkursen bemerkbar. PR 25/06/2016, pp. 10–11.*

Brexit caught the markets cold on Friday. Polls last week still maintained that the fear of the [UK] exit vote on Thursday largely evaporated. But what followed was, just as the currency trader George Soros warned, a black Friday on the stock exchanges. What will happen in the sector after the Brexit vote remains unclear. Around 700.000 people work in the financial sector in the City of London. A large part of those jobs could well depart – possibly for Dublin or Frankfurt. The uncertainty could also be noted in the stock indices on Friday.

Another set of future predictions of crisis in the Austrian conservative press were framed by Topos 5 (EU Political/Identity Crisis) where the main tone of the reporting was characterised by a peculiar ‘Schadenfreude’ i.e. the fact that Brexit was to large extent an expectable symptom of some long-standing, and long unaddressed, EU-political and -institutional mistakes and errors. Brexit was thereby shown as just one in a series of EU crises – ‘for years one crisis haunts the next in the EU’ (*‘Seit Jahren jagt in der Union eine Krise die nächste’*) – which, however, may eventually lead to a ‘dissolution’ (*‘Auflösung’*) or to ‘the fall of the EU’ (*‘EU-Zerfall’*) and to the subsequent ‘exits’ by further EU member states. Here, however, the past-to-future connection was established by foregrounding the aforementioned rise of right-wing populism and nationalism as well as by arguing that the European citizenry has long lost touch with the European project while civic ‘trust’ (*‘Vertrauen’*) in the EU project has also gradually evaporated (see Example 5).

#### EXAMPLE 5:

*Seit Jahren jagt in der Union eine Krise die nächste - und selbst für die größten Optimisten fällt auch eine Auflösung der europäischen Staatengemeinschaft längst nicht mehr in den Bereich des Unmöglichen. Austrittstendenzen gibt es in mehreren Mitgliedstaaten, EU-kritische Parteien sind europaweit im Aufwind. Der Grund: Vielerorts haben die Bürger das Vertrauen in den Mehrwert einer EU-Mitgliedschaft verloren. (...). Die Stimmung im eigenen Land ist für viele Staats- und Regierungschefs der wichtigste Gradmesser, an dem sie ihr Tun und Handeln ausrichten. Kein Wunder also, dass europäische Entscheidungsträger seit Langem darauf hinweisen, dass die Gefahr eines EU-Zerfalls real sei.* PR 24/06/2016, p. 1

For years one crisis haunts the next in the EU, and even the biggest optimists have long not thought of the dissolution of the European community as utterly impossible. Tendencies to leave are now present in several member states while the EU-critical political parties are on the rise. The reason: in many places the citizens have lost their trust in the added value of the EU community. (...). The mood in one’s own country is for many heads of state and government still the key indicator for how to act. It is not surprising therefore that European decision-makers have long been pointing to the fact that the fall of the EU is realistic.

### 3.4.2. Germany

The liberal discourse of the German *Tagesspiegel* (TS) largely continued the argumentation encompassed by the aforementioned EU-oriented Topos 5. As Example 6 shows, the said topos allows to call Brexit very explicitly a crisis and even as the EU’s ‘biggest crisis of its history’ (*‘die schwerste Krise ihrer Geschichte’*).

#### EXAMPLE 6:

*Großbritannien hat die Europäische Union mit seiner Entscheidung zum Austritt aus der Gemeinschaft in die schwerste Krise ihrer Geschichte gestürzt. Bei dem Volksentscheid am Donnerstag sprachen sich 51,9 Prozent für einen Brexit aus.* TS 25/06/2016, p. 1



Great Britain has put the European Union in the biggest crisis of its history. In the referendum on Thursday, 51.9 percent voted in favour of a Brexit.

Indeed, the same line of arguing was continued even further when, as shown in Example 7, Brexit was called a ‘crisis of all crises’ (*Die Krise aller Krisen*) with the crisis-related metaphors not only epitomised by mentioning of a ‘Brexit-Schock’ but also continued explicitly in the discourse via e.g. predicating EU gathering as a ‘European crisis-meeting’ (*ein europäisches Krisentreffen*) or via the recontextualisation of militarising metaphors of agreeing same ‘common line’ (*eine gemeinsame Linie*) etc.

EXAMPLE 7:

*Die Krise aller Krisen (...) Nach dem Brexit-Schock haben zunächst einmal Politiker der europäischen Gründerstaaten das Wort. (...) Nach dem Treffen der Außenminister steht am Montag in Berlin ein europäisches Krisentreffen in Berlin mit Kanzlerin Angela Merkel (CDU), EU-Ratschef Donald Tusk, Italiens Regierungschef Matteo Renzi und Frankreichs Präsident François Hollande auf dem Programm. Bei der Begegnung wollen die EU-Spitzen eine gemeinsame Linie für den Gipfel der 28 Staats- und Regierungschefs festzurren, der am Dienstag in Brüssel beginnt. Auch der EU-Gipfel wird ganz im Zeichen des Brexit stehen.* TS 25/06/2016, p. 4

The crisis of all crises (...) After the Brexit-shock, politicians of the European founding states take the stand (...). After the meeting of foreign ministers now comes the European crisis meeting in Berlin with Chancellor Angela Merkel (CDU), EU Council President Donald Tusk, Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi and the French President François Hollande. At the meeting, the EU leaders will set the common line for the summit of 28 heads of state and government beginning next Thursday in Brussels. Brexit will be the key issue at the EU summit.

But, unlike in the e.g. the Austrian discourse which was relatively ‘fixed’ within specific argument topoi, the German liberal discourse also introduced a combination of arguments as in Example 8 where the central EU-Topos 5 (above) was combined with Topos 3 (International Socio-Political Crisis) enabling a more ‘ontological’ thinking about the roots of crisis embodied by Brexit. Here, the ‘international’ crisis was that of rising right-wing populism and nationalism (previously mainly treated as a European problem, see above) seen as a source of crises by, in particular, promoting anew the nationalist and isolationist tendencies. Interestingly, that argument also allowed for the domestication of the argumentation by means of a strategy or perspectivisation while e.g. using a quote from the deputy leader of the right-wing populist German AfD who openly criticised Angela Merkel – seen both nationally and internationally as a symbolic leader of the EU – for ‘her open borders’ in the course of the Refugee Crisis which, as such, have ‘driven the British out of the European Union’ (*die Briten aus der Europäischen Union vertrieben*).

EXAMPLE 8:

*Die AfD macht zudem Bundeskanzlerin Angela Merkel (CDU) und ihre Flüchtlingspolitik für den EU-Austritt Großbritanniens verantwortlich. “Ich glaube, Frau Merkel hat mit ihren offenen Grenzen die Briten aus der Europäischen Union vertrieben”, sagte Parteivize Alexander Gauland am Freitag in Berlin.* TS, 25/06/2016, p. 5

The AfD is making the Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel (CDU) and her refugee policy responsible for Great Britain’s leaving of the EU. “I believe that with her open borders Ms Merkel has driven the British out of the European Union” said deputy [AfD] leader Alexander Gauland on Friday in Berlin.

But such a combination of arguments – e.g. encompassed by UK-internal Topoi 1 (UK socio-economic crisis) and 2 (UK constitutional/democratic crisis) as in Example 9 – was also used outside of the domesticating tendencies whenever the German liberal media discourse wanted to portray the UK context as a divided kingdom' (*'das gespaltene Königreich'*) both prior to and as a result of the vote on Brexit. The UK was here constructed as driven by an array of long-standing social dichotomies incl. 'the poor against the rich' (*'Arm gegen Reich'*), 'the young against the old' (*'Jung gegen Alt'*), or of 'cities versus countryside' (*'Stadt versus Land'*) which are set to deepen even further as a result of the Brexit vote.

EXAMPLE 9:

*Das gespaltene Königreich - Arm gegen Reich, Jung gegen Alt, Stadt versus Land: Nach dem Referendum droht Großbritannien entlang demografischer Linien zu zerbrechen. Nirgendwo wird das zurzeit deutlicher als in der Hauptstadt. TS 27/06/2016, p. 3*

The divided kingdom – the poor against the rich, the young against the old, and cities versus countryside: after the referendum there Great Britain is in danger of breaking along demographic lines. Nowhere is it as evident right now as in the [UK] capital.

The argumentative compounds/combinations mentioned above were also specific for the conservative discourse of the German *Die Welt* (WE) which, however, combined different sets of arguments embodied by, in particular, Topoi 4 (International Economic Crisis) and 6 (European social and economic crisis). Here (see Example 10), the discourse was dominated by future scenarios of various dimensions of forthcoming economic recession/crisis including 'Recession in Great Britain, Chaos in the EU, billions lost in Germany too' (*'Rezession in Großbritannien, Chaos in der EU, Milliardenverluste auch für Deutschland'-*). But, on the other hand, the issue of 'costs' and, specifically, of defining the economic burden of the UK Brexit decision on remaining European states and their citizens was put to the fore. Strategies of analogy abode in this context when, e.g. the actual costs of Brexit – widely seen as economic crisis – were explicitly set/calculated at 13k Euro per each EU citizen with the metaphorical analogy made to a cost of 'a Volkswagen Polo, 60 hp, Basic trim' (*'ein VW-Polo, 60 PS, Basis-Variante'*).

EXAMPLE 10:

*Kurzfristig würde ein Brexit zu heftigen Turbulenzen an den Finanzmärkten führen. Die Börsen würden einbrechen, Pfund und Euro abwerten. Schon in den ersten Stunden könnten Billionen vernichtet werden. Später würde es noch verheerender: Rezession in Großbritannien, Chaos in der EU, Milliardenverluste auch für Deutschland. Der Brexit würde das gesamte ökonomische Gefüge Europas durcheinanderbringen. Das Wachstum des Kontinents würde auf Jahre hinaus gemindert. Bricht man all das herunter, rechnet Europas Wohlstandsverluste nach einem Brexit auf die Bürger um, stehen am Ende fast 13.000 Euro. Oder ein VW-Polo, 60 PS, Basis-Variante. WE 23/06/2016, p. 13*

In a short run Brexit will lead to heavy turbulences in the financial markets. Stock markets will fall, and the Pound and Euro lose value. Even in the very first hours, millions could be lost. But it would be even more devastating later: recession in Great Britain, chaos in the EU, billions lost in Germany too. Brexit would bring the entire European architecture into disarray. Any growth at the continent would be curbed for years. All this considered, the loss of wealth in Europe would come to almost 13000 Euro per citizen. Or a VW-Polo, 60 hp, Basic trim.

The argumentative compounds mentioned above also served a somewhat different aim of domesticating the Brexit-related crisis developments by showing them as rooted in the

actions of German politicians. Here, Angela Merkel was often discursively foregrounded when, somewhat unexpectedly for a German conservative press, she was criticised as standing at the roots of the wider European crisis embodied by the UK Brexit referendum result. Via combination of Topoi 5 (European/EU Political and Identity Crisis) and 3 (International Socio-Political Crisis) it was hence shown that Merkel's and Germany's immigration policy considered in the context of the recent European 'refugee crisis' – all contributed to the 'European disaster in Great Britain' (*Das europäische Desaster in Großbritannien*). As Example 11 shows, Merkel was thus also criticised for intervening in domestic issues of other European countries – specifically Greece – while unnecessarily making these into 'Berlin's key issue' (*Berliner Chefsache*).

#### EXAMPLE 11

*Das europäische Desaster in Großbritannien, das bei allem bitteren Beigeschmack eben auch einen Feiertag der Volkssouveränität bedeutet, rückt jetzt die eigentliche, von Medien und Eliten hochgelobte Frau ins Zentrum, die vielen bereits als inoffizielle Kanzlerin von Europa galt. Angela Merkel machte die Euro-Krise in Griechenland im Doppelpass mit ihrem Finanzminister zur Berliner Chefsache. WE, 25/06/2016, p. 1.*

The European disaster in Great Britain, which even with all the bitter taste means a celebration of popular sovereignty, now puts into the spotlight a woman praised by media and elites and many other as Europe's Chancellor. Together with her finance ministers, Angel Merkel made the Euro-crisis in Greece into Berlin's key issue.

### 3.4.3. Poland

Though least sizeable of all, the liberal discourse of the Polish daily *Gazeta Wyborcza* (GW) probably remained the richest in terms of the array of arguments and topoi used to frame its reporting and interpretations of the Brexit referendum. While the majority of the individual and compounded arguments here were strongly domesticated in the Polish discourse – as in Example 12 – they relatively unanimously showed that Brexit was set to become a crisis in all areas of life ranging from everyday, social and family life (Topos 3; e.g. via growing interest rates or mortgage costs) to wider international economy (Topos 4) and international as well as European geopolitics (Topos 5). There, it was argued, Brexit would be a metaphorical 'shock' to the Union, Poland and the entire world' (*byłby wstrząsem dla Unii, Polski i całego świata*).

#### EXAMPLE 12:

*Dla Polaków wyższe raty kredytów we frankach i euro oraz droższe tegoroczne wakacje. W przyszłości: zamknięcie dla nas brytyjskiego rynku pracy. Brexit byłby wstrząsem dla Unii, Polski i całego świata, dotknąłby każdej sfery naszego życia. GW 27/06/2016, p. 6.*

Higher interest rate for Swiss-Franc credits and more expensive holidays for the Poles. In the future: closure of the British job market for us. Brexit would be a shock to the Union, Poland and the entire world, and it would affect each possible sphere of our lives.

In both the example above and in the majority of the GW liberal corpus, Polish migrants in the UK were often highlighted/foregrounded – though not always activated – as a group that symbolises the eventual repercussions of Brexit. Within realisation of Topos 6 (European/EU Social and Economic Crisis) related to the European identity topoi 4, Polish

migrants in the UK were seen as a group of those bearing 'on the ground' the brunt of UK nationalism and anti-immigration ideology embodied by the Brexit decisions. Within this chain of argumentation, individual life stories and narratives of (non) belonging by Polish migrants 'caught' in the Brexit predicament were often quoted. In Example 13, using a *pars pro toto* argumentation, a Polish resident in the UK was quoted saying that 'by voting to leave the EU, the British voted against me' (*'Brytyjczycy, głosując za opuszczeniem UE, zagłosowali przeciwko mnie'*).

EXAMPLE 13:

*Po raz pierwszy, odkąd jestem w Anglii, czuję się tu niechciana. Brytyjczycy, głosując za opuszczeniem UE, zagłosowali przeciwko mnie - mówi Maria. Ma 27 lat. Studiowała na Wyspach, a od trzech lat mieszka i pracuje w Bristolu. GW 25/06/2016 p. 8*

It is for the first time since I have been in England that I feel so unwanted here. By voting to leave the EU, the British voted against me – says Maria. She is 27. She studied in the UK and has now been living and working in Bristol for three years.

But Polish liberal GW also provided wider, macro-political lines of thinking (see Example 14), in particular by constructing Brexit as the historically most significant crisis of recent years. Remaining with the Topos 5 (European EU/Identity Crisis), the discourse allowed the Polish liberal daily to construct it – by means of multiple predicates enclosed in extended nominal clause – as 'an event carrying the most repercussions since the Fall of the Berlin Wall' (*'wydarzeniem najbardziej brzemiennym w skutki od zburzenia muru berlińskiego'*) which would also bring long-term negative implications to European politics, especially by the further rise of right-wing populism and anti-immigration attitudes (including, notably, against the Polish migrants).

EXAMPLE 14:

*Brexit będzie dla Europy wydarzeniem najbardziej brzemiennym w skutki od zburzenia muru berlińskiego. Oczywiście, kierunek trudnych do precyzyjnego prognozowania wydarzeń byłby przeciwny do pełnych proeuropejskiego entuzjazmu decyzji po upadku żelaznej kurtyny. Wygrana Brexitu dodałaby siły eurosceptykom i przeciwnikom UE w innych krajach Unii, m.in. Holandii. Możliwe, że szantażując referendum o wyjściu z UE, zaczęliby jeszcze głośniejsze żądać wyłączeń ze wspólnych unijnych reguł. A jedną z najbardziej niepopularnych jest swoboda przepływu, czyli prawo m.in. Polaków do osiedlania się i pracy na Zachodzie. GW 27/06/2016, p. 6*

For Europe, Brexit will be an event carrying the most repercussions since the Fall of the Berlin Wall. The future direction of events which are now hard to define will largely contradict decisions fuelled by pro-European enthusiasm taken since the fall of the iron curtain. A vote for Brexit would strengthen Eurosceptics and EU opponents in many countries, including e.g. the Netherlands. While blackmailing with referenda on leaving the EU, they would very likely become even more vocal in calls for exemptions from the common EU rules. And one of the most unpopular of those rules is still the freedom of movement one i.e. the right to, among others, the Poles to settle and work in the West.

While the aforementioned Polish liberal discourse remained indeed very broad in terms of deployed arguments and strategies – or combinations thereof – its conservative counterpart seemed particularly limited to one strategy i.e. domesticating Brexit as a logical result of, according to the conservative *Nasz Dziennik* (ND), the anyway profoundly flawed EU project. The thus constructed strongly Eurosceptic discourse of the ND relied in particular

on Topos 5 and did so while claiming – somewhat similarly to German conservative discourse about Angela Merkel (above) – that Polish political actors were crucial in causing as well as not avoiding Brexit.

As example 15 shows, the above strategy was achieved via, inter alia, perspectivation achieved through quotes from statements by Jarosław Kaczyński (chairman of the Polish governmental right-wing populist party PiS) expressing usual criticism of his long-term political enemy i.e. the EU council president Donald Tusk. As Kaczyński claimed, Tusk was personally responsible for the EU crisis epitomised by Brexit by having, according to the quote, never offered the British ‘anything’ and thus driving them out of the EU and causing the current crisis. However, while Tusk was referred to here strictly by means of his name/surname, not functionalising him (i.e. not mentioning his function/role in the EU) was strategic and aimed at degrading him in the statement and in the wider public eye.

EXAMPLE 15:

*Prezes PiS stwierdził, że szczególnie ponurą rolę odegrał Donald Tusk, który prowadził rokowania z Brytyjczykami. – W gruncie rzeczy niczego nie otrzymali (...) Ponosi bezpośrednią odpowiedzialność za Brexit i powinien zniknąć z Europejskiej polityki. ND 28/06/2016, p. 6.*

PiS Chairman claims that a particularly sombre role has been played by Donald Tusk who led the negotiations with the British. – They essentially have not received anything (...) He is therefore directly responsible for Brexit and should disappear from European politics altogether.

Further to the strategies above, ND discourse also deployed some usual lines of thinking specific for Polish Eurosceptics. While drawing yet again on Topos 5 (European/EU Political and Identity Crisis) in Example 16 it, for example, deployed anti-German arguments – otherwise well-known from the political discourse of the governing PiS – when claiming that the ongoing crisis in the EU was caused by Germany’s divisive politics of building a ‘hard EU core’ (*twardego jądra UE*). As it was argued, such strategy had to fail and would not work as many countries – including France, Benelux countries, or countries from southern and northern EU – allegedly opposed such and other Germany-led EU projects thus avoiding Germany’s dominance and its alleged EU-hegemony by Germany.

EXAMPLE 16:

*Integracja wokół twardego jądra UE zwyczajnie się nie uda. Z dwóch powodów. Po pierwsze kraje Beneluksu, Francja, Południa i kraje skandynawskie nie są gotowe oddać swojego politycznego losu politykom z Berlina. Ze względu na własną siłę ekonomiczną Niemcy stworzyłyby wtedy otulinę wokół siebie, która byłaby silnie z nimi zintegrowana. ND 26/06/2016, p. 4.*

The integration around the core EU will not work for two reasons. The first of them is that the Benelux countries, France, southern states and the Scandinavian ones are not ready to put their political fate into the hands of politicians from Berlin. Due to its sheer economic power, Germany would then create around itself a strongly integrated buffer zone.

Continuing within the argumentation framed by Topos 5, Polish conservative ND also used further domestication moves by, inter alia, providing criticism of the EU that recontextualised Polish pre-1989 public discourse. As Example 17 shows, the EU was metaphorically compared therein to a ‘central committee’ (*Komitet Centralny*) – à la those known from

pre-1989 Central and Eastern European ruling communist parties – whereby the EU was historically presupposed to be undemocratic and ‘dictating’ its member states what to do. The EU was hence shown as allegedly acting against its member states in what was predicated as ‘a dangerous way’ as was the case with, e.g. the EU refugee quotas during the recent ‘refugee crisis’. At the same time, the EU was also criticised for dealing ‘with millions of petty things while being unable to deal with the really important ones’ (*‘zajmuje się milionami nieistotnych spraw a nie potrafi załatwić tych naprawdę ważnych’*) thus constructing EU politics as mistaken and trivial.

EXAMPLE 17:

*Bruksela wyobraża sobie, że jest takim Komitetem Centralnym, który rozsyła do wszystkich europejskich stolic dyrektywy i polecenia. Są to czasami tak śmieszne kwestie jak – już legendarna – krzywizna banana ale również tak groźne i nieprzemyślane jak przymusowa relokacja imigrantów (...). Bruksela zajmuje się milionami nieistotnych spraw a nie potrafi załatwić tych naprawdę ważnych.* ND 28/06/2016, p. 15.

Brussels sees itself as a Central Committee of sorts – such that sends out directives and marching orders to all European capitals. These often concern as ridiculous issues as the by now legendary banana curve but also as dangerous and inconsiderate issues as the forceful relocation of immigrants (...) Brussels deals with millions of petty things while effectively being unable to deal with the really important ones.

### 3.4.4. Sweden

Finally, though quite unusually for a liberal outlet, Swedish daily *Dagens Nyheter* (DN) focused to large extent on arguments constructed within Topos 4 looking into national and especially international economic crisis already/potentially caused by the Brexit vote. DN opted to consider various options and scenarios for the future while often listing/enumerating either geographical or economic areas (to be) profoundly affected by Brexit. Here, the focus was specifically on the geographical scope of the Brexit-induced crisis with Example 18 enumerating various parts of the globe wherein relevant stock market (*‘Tokyo, Paris, Frankfurt, London, New York’*) served metonymically as examples of wider economic areas to be affected. By the same token, the example also coined a metaphor that, as a direct repercussion of Brexit, ‘the British pound fell through the floor’ (*‘det brittiska pundet föll igenom golvet’*) with overtly nominated economic and market ‘fear/anxiety’ (*‘oro’*) also being pointed to as stemming from the Brexit vote and remaining around in a longer run.

EXAMPLE 18:

*Britternas nej till EU utlöste chockvågor på världens marknader: Tokyo, Paris, Frankfurt, London, New York. Överallt pekade pilarna nedåt samtidigt som det brittiska pundet föll igenom golvet. Oro finns nu för vad Brexit innebär för Europas ekonomi på längre sikt.* DN 25/06/2016, p. 15.

British no to the EU caused a number of shock waves on the world markets: in Tokyo, Paris, Frankfurt, London and New York. Indices fell down overall and the British pound fell through the floor. There is an anxiety as to what Brexit means for European economy in a longer run.

Further to its eagerness towards the economic framing, the Swedish liberal discourse also tended to provide – indeed typically for Swedish press traditional interest in democracy – a

relatively extensive look 'on the ground' at the ontology of the Brexit decision in the UK and more specifically within the British constitutional and political as well as democratic crisis (Topos 2). As Example 19 shows, the focus of the foregrounding and activation strategy herewas specifically on the 'British people' (*'Brittiska folket'*) who were presupposed to act disruptively for the EU as well as blamed for, as is metaphorically suggested, breaking or causing fracture (*'spräckt'*) in the Union. But it is also suggested that such disruptive actions could backfire causing 'fractures in Great Britain' itself via e.g. repercussions of the renewed Scottish claims for independence or Irish claims for reunification.

EXAMPLE 19:

*Brittiska folket har spräckt EU. Resultatet av folkomröstningen kan även spräcka Storbritannien. Irländska Sinn Féin vill ha ett enat Irland. I Skottland väcks åter självständighetsfrågan eftersom landet vill stanna i EU. DN 25/06/2016, pp. 8–9.*

The British people have now broken the EU. But the result of referendum can also cause a fracture in Great Britain. The Irish Sinn Féin would like to see a unified Ireland. And the independence issue is now again awakened in Scotland which wants to remain in the EU.

However, the democracy focus in the DN was not only achieved via the aforementioned UK-internal perspective but also through a somewhat EU-external one considered from the point of view of the crisis of the EU, its politics and identity (Topos 4; Example 20). Here, however, the foregrounding also eventually turned towards the 'people' while equating the Brexit-supporting 'British' (*'britterna'*) with all other 'citizens' (*'medborgarna'*) who have lost their trust in the EU. Here, a differentiation strategy was also achieved with the nominated 'elites in Brussels' (*'elit i Bryssel'*) clearly juxtaposed with the people/citizens.

EXAMPLE 20:

*Många menar dock att britternas nej till EU visar att unionen behöver arbeta för att återupprätta förtroendet bland medborgarna. Ekonomisk kris och arbetslöshet har fått allt fler att skylla på en "elit" i Bryssel som saknar kontakt med folket. DN 25/06/2016, p. 7.*

But many think that the British no to the EU shows that the Union needs to work on re-establishing trust among the citizens. The economic crisis and unemployment have caused many to accuse the 'elite' in Brussels of losing touch with the people.

Yet the EU-focussed Topos 4 was not only considered in the Swedish liberal press from the point of view of the current crisis of EU democracy. It was, namely, also used to frame extensive debates about various future scenarios of political action that may help avert, or at least minimise, the more major crisis of European politics. Those scenarios to be taken after Brexit – see Example 21 – were approached metaphorically as different 'ways' (*'vägar'*) that the EU could/should be taking within its own realm (e.g. by means of deepening integration) in relations to member states and by means of e.g. responding to the encroaching 'renationalisation' (*'åternationalisering'*) taking place in Europe/EU.

EXAMPLE 21:

*Tre vägar efter Brexit. Ett alternativ är att fördjupa EU med en klarare befogenhetsfördelning mellan överstaten och medlemsstaterna. Ett andra är att EU blir avsevärt mindre omfattande och att en åternationalisering sker. Det tredje alternativet är att fortsätta att hanka sig fram på inslagen väg DN 26/06/2016, p. 6.*



There are three ways after Brexit. One alternative is to deepen the EU with a clear division of power between core and other member states. The other is to make the EU considerably less all-embracing while enabling re-nationalisation. The third one is to continue muddling through on the current path.

On the other hand, the Swedish conservative discourse of the *Svenska Dagbladet* (SvD) followed the pattern of the majority of conservative European press while focusing on, in particular, the economic implications of the UK Brexit referendum. SvD, however, chose to be at least initially less alarmistic and did not, for example, speak of a market or a financial crisis but chose to provide various quasi-anecdotal descriptions of smaller-scale economic implications such as e.g. the so-called ‘prosecco panic’ that would erupt among Italian winegrowers once the UK market leaves the EU. As was suggested metaphorically/polysemously in Example 22, ‘no corks will be popped in Italy if the British vote to leave the EU’ (*Inga korkar kommer smälla i Italien om briterna väljer att lämna EU*).

EXAMPLE 22:

*Inga korkar kommer smälla i Italien om briterna väljer att lämna EU. Vinproducenter säger att brexit skulle spricka som en prosecco-bubbla på deras främsta exportmarknad. SvD 24/06/2016, p. 7.*

No corks will be popped in Italy if the British choose to leave the EU. Winemakers say that Brexit would make its biggest market burst just like a prosecco-bubble.

But such quasi-anecdotal language – indeed also typical for conservative dailies in other studied countries (see above) – was not the only tone of the Swedish conservative press. Indeed, the SvD also chose to domesticate the Brexit developments very strongly and did so while considering Brexit from the point of view of international economic crisis (Topos 4) that would, it was presupposed, in an obvious way profoundly impact several economies including, very prominently, the Swedish one. Here (see Example 23), argumentation through numbers/examples became prominent as element of, e.g. building analogy that ‘66000 Swedish jobs are linked to the export to the UK’ (*66 000 svenska jobb är kopplade till exporten till Storbritannien*) and that those jobs are now ‘put in danger’ (*står i fara*) as a result of the Brexit vote.

EXAMPLE 23:

*Kommerskollegium räknade inför folkomröstningen ut att 66 000 svenska jobb är kopplade till exporten till Storbritannien.- Nu får sysselsättningen definitivt ingen skjuts. Hur stor den negativa effekten blir är svårt att säga. De här 66 000 jobben står i fara SvD 25/06/2016, pp. 6–8.*

The National Swedish Board of Trade has counted before the referendum that 66000 Swedish jobs are linked to exports to Great Britain. And now employment certainly gets no boost. It is also difficult to say how big the negative effects will be. But those 66000 jobs are now in danger.

The strong focus on domestication in the conservative Swedish press discourse was also realised by the SvD whenever it chose to build future scenarios of crisis by asking rhetorical questions whether the anti-EU ghosts awakened by the Brexit vote would not gain wider potency beyond just the UK. As was suggested (see Example 24 introduced with an English ‘Well ...’), there were many analogies between the UK and Sweden as countries that previously allegedly ‘chose to put a brake on the more federalist development of

the EU' (*velat bromsa en mer federalistisk utveckling av EU*) including by, inter alia, staying out of the Euro area. It was hence suggested that also other EU countries that were not part of the Eurozone – such as Sweden but also, by means of aggregation, other Scandinavian countries like Denmark – could eventually 'disappear' (*försvinner*) from the Union or at least have a much 'weaker political influence' (*få ett svagare politiskt inflytande*) in the future.

EXAMPLE 24:

*Well - både Sverige och Storbritannien har ju också gemensamt velat bromsa en mer federalistisk utveckling av EU. Ett exempel på detta är att båda länderna har stått utanför eurosamarbetet. Och när det mäktiga Storbritannien försvinner är det möjligt att EU-länder utan den gemensamma valutan - som Sverige och Danmark - kommer att få ett svagare politiskt inflytande i unionen. SvD 26/06/2016, pp. 14–15.*

Well – both Sweden and Great Britain have chosen to stop a more federalist development of the EU. One example is that both countries have remained outside the Euro collaboration. But when the powerful Great Britain disappears, it is likely that the EU countries outside the common currency – such as Sweden or Denmark – will have a much weaker political influence in the EU.

#### 4. Conclusions

The above analysis shows clearly that the UK 2016 vote to leave the European Union was – contrary to the UK public sphere which largely undermined the critical tones – perceived across the European public sphere as both a current and a future crisis. As has been shown in the course of examination of the Austrian, German, Polish and Swedish media, both liberal and conservative European press recognised a far-reaching, negative and indeed critical impact of the Brexit vote and considered its importance as crisis within an array of dimensions that were UK-specific, international and European (see [Figure 2](#)). Those dimensions also nested the key argumentative resources – i.e. *topoi* – which allowed, albeit in an often-differentiated manner, to construct the arguments about, inter alia, economic, social and political/democratic implications of Brexit along with its relevance to the UK, EU and indeed internationally/globally. They all formed a specific semantic field of the 'Brexit' concept as attached to various formats and dimensions of 'crisis' in the studied discourses nested within both wider and nationally-specific tendencies in reporting crisis and its implications for politics, society and the economy.

As the analysis indicates, the imaginary of crisis was very strongly attached to the European media representations and interpretations of the UK Brexit vote. The key aspect of such discursive constructions of 'Brexit as crisis' imaginary was, as was hypothesised above, in building a very peculiar past-to-future connection. Hence, practically irrespective of the fact whether provided by the liberal or conservative media, the analysed discourse not only pointed to the past/current ontologies of the British decision to vote in favour of Brexit but also painted a vast array of scenarios of future crises (soon to be) caused by UK decision to leave the EU. The very powerful aspect of building that link resided in the fact that it connected the experience – or any otherwise understood 'real' and lived facts about EU, European politics, etc – with expectations about its future developments that will be profoundly distorted, if not altogether averted, by the Brexit vote. The crisis

scenario-building was, as was expected above, also made real by recontextualising the experience of various social/political/economic crises and projecting (aspects of) those on the de facto description of Brexit which was thus *pre-legitimised* as one of the most significant critical occurrences in the post-War European history.

Further to the above, the other key transversal aspect of the analysed media discourse was also that, again irrespectively of their liberal or conservative provenance, the analysed discursive representations showed a strong tendency to domesticate the Brexit debates and to consider the latter's critical implications in particular from the point of view of studied national public spheres and politics/societies. While such a domestication occurred at various levels – ranging from international economy, through European and national politics/society to specific 'people' and social groups or even individuals affected by the Brexit in the UK and elsewhere – it very clearly showed that the focal 'Brexit as crisis' connection was in most cases debated in terms of its implication for specific national public spheres including their own perceptions of both national and transnational spaces such as, e.g. the European politics.

However, as has been shown in the course of the above analysis, several tendencies could be observed that were cross-national rather than just nationally-specific in nature and often constituted a relative novelty given traditional interests of the liberal or conservative media. These included, inter alia, the very strong tendency of the liberal press to remain pro-European as well as consider the Brexit vote from a variety of (national incl. UK and international or European) perspectives and lines of interpretation (via different topoi). The liberal press also in most cases focussed on political and social dimensions and implications of the UK referendum rather than on its economic repercussions. On the other hand, it could be seen that the conservative press displayed some rather unanimous tendency to focus on the market/economic implications of the UK referendum and of the eventual Brexit. It did so while very often avoiding discussing social and political implications of the UK vote and while increasingly recontextualising both cross-national and domestic 'quasi-realistic' Eurosceptic tones epitomised by e.g. the peculiar '*Schadenfreude*' discourse in relation to the alleged failures of the EU-ropean project.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## Notes on contributor

*Michał Krzyżanowski* holds a Chair in Media and Communication Studies at Örebro University, Sweden as well as a research appointment as a Chair in Communication & Media at the University of Liverpool, UK. In 2018–19 he is also Albert Bonnier Jr. Guest Professor in Media Studies at the Department of Journalism, Media & Communication, Stockholm University, Sweden. He is one of the leading international experts in critical discourse studies of media and political communication. His key research interests are in dynamics of right-wing populist discourse, normalisation of racism and politics of exclusion as well as in diachronic analyses of politicisation and mediation of crisis in European and transnational media. He is the Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of Language and Politics* and a co-editor of the *Bloomsbury Advances in Critical Discourse Studies* book series. More information: [https://www.oru.se/english/employee/michal\\_krzyzanowski](https://www.oru.se/english/employee/michal_krzyzanowski) and <https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/communication-and-media/staff/michal-krzyzanowski>

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