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## **Abstract** <sup>1</sup>

In this article we study the discursive construction of the EU managerial role in four Spanish newspapers: two published in mainland Spain - El Mundo and El País - and two published in Catalonia - La Vanguardia and ARA. By doing a qualitative study of newspapers, this article aims to identify which discourse strategies are used when informing about the actions and decisions taken in European political and economic fora. The analysis identifies the three main generic frames which are used in news pieces: the call for solidarity, the possibility of having negative economic consequences, and the existence of a conflict within (EU)rope. The activation of these frames in the news pieces contribute to an implicit legitimization of the existence of (EU)rope as based on two core values – solidarity and cooperation – together with a delegitimation of the actions performed by some European institutions.

## **Keywords**

Covid-19, Critical Discourse Studies, European identities, European Union, media discourse, newspapers

## **1. Introduction**

Following the trend started by Brexit and a possible disengagement with the current European identity, it could be argued the Covid-19 crisis has affected people's perception of the European Union (EU), which do not only show a North-South divide in public opinion across the European states, but also differences in trust across countries in the EU (Sabat et al. 2020). Although the effect of Brexit was not particularly felt in most European countries (European Parliament 2018) and people still saw being part of the EU as a positive thing, media representations of the EU and the economic management of the consequences of coronavirus show a different trend, with some media critically reflecting on the role of the EU, particularly in southern European countries, as will be shown in the analysis. This perception is consistent with findings about EU perceptions after the Covid-19 crisis. These show that although in most European countries people still believe in the value of European cooperation, this is accompanied by a perceived lack of help by EU institutions during this crisis (Dennison and Zerka 2020). As will be shown below, the first few weeks in this health crisis revolve around two values: cooperation and solidarity (Goldberg et al. 2021).

Spain was one of European countries most widely affected by Covid-19, and it had a very high death toll (Sabat et al. 2020; Dennison and Zerka 2020). The Spanish coalition government tried to solve the crisis in the midst of a strong political opposition, with social and health services stretched to the limit. The public opinion was (and still is) widely polarized, and opposed views

could be seen about the lockdown and the national de-escalation plan, which was perceived by some regions, like Catalonia and the Basque Country, as an attempt to hold national power. This explains the constant call for national unity by the Spanish government (Castillo-Esparcia et al. 2020). In the midst of this context the media portrayed the EU as another political and economic actor, unable to lead the way in solving the crisis and lacking solidarity among its Member States. This lack of solidarity is also brandished by the Spanish media as the reason justifying a perceived North-South divide within Europe, and it seems to underlie an implicit delegitimation of some of the EU policies in response to the pandemic.

Previous research on the construction of European identities has focused on either discursive re-conceptualisations of identities to changing European contexts or discursive attempts to legitimate the existence, political or institutional role of the EU in different crises (Krzyżanowski 2010; 2014). This article thus seeks to contribute to understanding national media constructions of the role of the EU in the crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, and how the resulting transnational European identity encompasses and accommodates existing regional tensions within Spain or national tensions between the different Member States (Krzyżanowski, Triandafyllidou and Wodak 2009; Krzyżanowski 2010; Zappettini 2019). We have analysed journalistic articles about the EU actions published during the Covid-19 crisis in two national newspapers with a different editorial line, *El País* and *El Mundo*, and two Catalan newspapers, *ARA* and *La Vanguardia*. The paper will seek to answer one main research question: How is the EU (de)legitimated? To answer this question, a number of specific questions will be also considered. The overarching specific question is which are the main frames that are activated to explain the role of the EU. Subordinated to this, two other questions will be answered: i. Who is the EU and how is (EU)rope (in its multiple shapes) constructed by different newspapers? and ii. which are the main conflicts that underlie the explanation of the role of the EU during the Covid-19 crisis, and how are these related to values within the EU?

## **2.Context and theoretical framework**

The unexpected and worldwide outbreak of Covid-19 meant not only a substantial burden for health systems, but it also had social and economic consequences which were felt in the international stock markets and national economies (Pak et al. 2020). Some studies on how the pandemic has affected public attitudes in Europe show that there was a decrease of trust in supranational political and managerial entities, an allegiance to national identities, and wider citizen support towards policies and leaders who are focused on “the health, social, and national-unity dimensions of the crisis” (Daniele et al. 2020). This decline in citizen trust of EU institutions is the continuation of a process which had already started after a decade of government spending curtailments and austerity measures (Eichengreen 2021; Daniele et al. 2020).

While this growing disillusion with supranational institutions has been found in different EU countries, in Spain trust of politicians and managerial figures has been also lost after it was found that not only politicians, but also senior figures in monarchy had been involved in corruption cases (Jiménez Sánchez 2017, 10). In addition, the last ten years of Spanish political life have been influenced by growing conflict between Catalonia and Spain, with the evolution of the so-called

*Procés català* (Catalan independence process) and the growing debate on how to conflate the position and power of historical regions with the other autonomous regions in Spain (Domínguez 2006). This nationalist identity conflict was also of particular importance once the Spanish government directly assumed control of the Covid-19 health crisis.

The political role of the mass media in shaping public attitudes and collective identities (Perales 2014) and in increasing or downplaying conflictual views (Berger and Luckmann 1968) has been widely observed in the current Covid-19 crisis, with increasing interest in credible information (Casero-Ripollés 2020, 10). The role of the media in creating a European Public Sphere (EPS) has been also acknowledged by previous studies, which have not only focused on media responses to different crises within Europe (Strath and Wodak 2009), but also to diachronic variation in the national and supranational construction(s) of the European identity by the media (Krzyżanowski, Triandafyllidou and Wodak 2009). Crises imply a call for leadership of the main social, political, and economic actors of society, involving also truthful and efficient communication (Peytibí 2020, 10; Solanilla 2020). In spite of the increasing importance of communication and conventional mass media being the most-widely used source of information (Besalú 2020; Casero-Ripollés 2020), several problems have been identified in the media coverage of the pandemic, infodemic being one of them.<sup>2</sup> As a result, the credibility of managers and politicians has been somehow undermined (Aleixandre-Benavent et al. 2020; OMS 2020).

Several studies have looked at the creation of an EPS and the discursive construction of (EU)rope, European identities and/or European values throughout time (Tryandafyllidou et al. 2009; Krzyżanowski 2010; 2014; 2018; Koopmans and Statham 2010; Musolff 2000; 2004; Strath 2001). This EPS is only European if “conceived in a trivial way”, as Europeanness is defined by “the reporting national media” being “located in Europe” (Krzyżanowski 2019, 30). Two main trends can be identified in the construction of Europe: one focused on the discursive adaptation of narratives and identity to changing contexts, which are particularly prominent when dealing with successive EU enlargements (Tryandafyllidou et al. 2009; Krzyżanowski 2010; Strath 2001), and another focused on media reports of successive crises in the existence of the EU and the legitimation of the political and/or institutional role of those involved in creating (EU)rope (Tryandafyllidou et al. 2009; Strath and Wodak 2009). Discursive constructions of the EPS seem to be characterised by changes and renegotiations of understandings of Europe in times of crisis (Strath and Wodak 2009, 17), and the flexible adaptation of metaphors and associated (shared and European) values (Musolff 2000; Strath and Wodak 2009). Findings also suggest an increasing “ethical conceptualisation” of Europe (Krzyżanowski et al. 2009, 261; Krzyżanowski 2014, 354; Krzyżanowski 2009) whose legitimacy is based on its being a community of common values which are opposed to non-European ones. What Europe means is not clear, and “European identity is usually seen in relation to national identity”, which it may either replace or supplement (Strath 2001, 13). This prominence of values is common in media portrayals of EU crises (Krzyżanowski et al. 2009, 263) and can be explained as it being an attempt to foreground shared beliefs whose conceptualisation may be adapted to different national concepts while backgrounding potentially controversial policies. The prominence and legitimacy of those values thus allows for the implicit legitimation of the policies implemented by the institution (cf. Filardo-Llamas 2013; Van Leeuwen 2008, 105-106, 110-112; Krzyżanowski 2014, 354; Bennett 2019).

Several authors in media and Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) have focused how and why language is used by the media to understand how the latter represents society and which socio-political (transformative) effect those representations may have (Hjarvard 2008; Hepp 2009; Castelló 2012; Fairclough and Wodak 1997; Wodak 1989, 14). Thus, in this paper we do not only aim at identifying how newspapers construct European values and institutions during the Covid-19 crisis, but also at explaining the active role of those newspapers in the spread of public attitudes towards (EU)rope. Following CDS, three main issues can be considered when explaining how society is discursively conceptualized: personal identity (i.e. discourse participants), social representations, and relations established between participants (Fairclough 1989). The analysis of these three elements plays a key role in understanding news discourse, as they may help in explaining why a news item may adopt a particular position towards reality (Richardson 2007; Krzyżanowski 2014; 2019; Krzyżanowski et al. 2009; Phelan 2018; Oberhuber et al. 2005). As will be explained below, these positions -and resulting (de)legitimisations (Cap 2008) – can stem from the activation of particular generic frames – or interpretive mechanisms (Entman 1993), which are mostly based on conflictual relations between participants, economic consequences, and moral values (cf. Semetko and Valkenburg 2000).

### 3. Data and Method

In this article we focus on constructions of (EU)rope in newspapers during the first two weeks after the declaration of a State of Alarm in Spain in March 2020. To this end, a corpus of news articles has been manually compiled, including a total number of 117 pieces which were stored in an Excel database. Several criteria have been followed for compiling the corpus. First, two Spanish newspapers were selected because of their wide readership:<sup>3</sup> *El Mundo*, which belongs to the publishing group Unidad Editorial and which has been traditionally described as sharing a right-wing ideology, and *El País*, belonging to Group Prisa and which has been traditionally described as currently leaning towards a centre-based ideological stance. Because of ongoing nationalist struggles between Catalonia and Spain and with the aim of showing variation in appeals to European values between national and peripheral newspapers, two news outlets published in Catalonia were also considered<sup>4</sup>. The first one, *La Vanguardia*, is published by Group Godó in Barcelona, but it reaches a national scope and may be read in the whole of Spain. It is associated to a right-wing ideology and with an at least subtle support for Catalan nationalism (Gonzalo 2016). The second one, *ARA*, is written in Catalan and hence addressed and published for what are known as the *Països Catalans* (i.e. the Catalan-speaking regions in Spain: the Balearic Island, the Valencian region and Catalonia. It is also read in Andorra). *ARA* is the only newspaper which is associated with an independentist and Catalanist ideology.

Two other criteria were considered when compiling the corpus. On the one hand, a temporal criterion was followed: only news pieces and editorials published since March 14, two days before the declaration of the State of Alarm, were included. This focus on the early stages of the first wave of the pandemic and how the response by the EU was framed in the media can help us understand how individual national responses to the pandemic were (de)legitimated in the midst

of a global struggle that required a collective response (Daniele et al. 2020). On the other hand, genre was also a selection criterion and both news pieces and editorials were included, as they are both permeated by mechanisms of framing, understood as “a way for understanding an event or issue” which is based on the emphasis of some elements of a topic over others (De Vreese 2005). Frames in this article are not only understood as summaries of the main argument (Krzyżanowski 2014, 354) but are also considered cognitive structures which may guide the audience’s interpretation of news pieces and editorials (De Vreese 2005). Given that framing strategies can be found in both news pieces and editorials, it can be argued that both genres contribute to creating a discursive construction of (EU)rope at a time of crisis which may attract the readers’ attention to the role - and subsequent evaluation - of particular actors and actions (Strath & Wodak 2009, 30). This construction, and its associated discursive choices, may be influenced not only by national or transnational views of the EU, but also by the editorial line of the media outlet (Borrat 1989, 138; Gomis 1989, 171).

Thematically, the corpus was based on the goal of showing how the EU and European identities were constructed. Hence, pieces where the words “Europe” or “European Union” appeared were included. Because the main emphasis was on the construction of the European identity and on the (de)legitimation of European institutions with respect to Spain, articles dealing with the development of the virus or specific measures taken in different European countries were discarded.

The analysis follows a qualitative method which is driven by the data in the corpus, and which is mostly aimed at the identification of framing mechanisms used by the media. Following Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) and De Vreese (2005), generic frames – understood as those mechanisms of interpretation which may be activated in different contexts – were identified. Generic frames are considered to be the dominant frames in a news piece. Generic frames can be found in news dealing with any kind of topic and they mainly focus on three aspects: providing a definition of an existing problem, explaining the cause/effect of this problem, and evaluating the problem and possible solutions along a particular moral dimension. Focusing on generic frames allows us to explain how a particular view of reality is constructed by the media. The analysis of generic frames in this paper has been organised along three main dimensions: conflict(s) between discourse participants, economic consequences, and morality and responsibility. Once the main generic frames in each news piece were uncovered, both content and the linguistic strategies used in each frame were identified. In the case of content, the analysis focused on three main categories: discourse participants, relations between them, and associated social representations, following Fairclough (1989). The analysis of linguistic strategies is mostly based on tools based on cognitive linguistics, including mostly the activation of metaphorical and non-metaphorical cognitive domains (cf. Langacker 2008; Hart 2014). The focus on the three main generic frames mentioned above is consistent with previous studies on the (de)legitimation of (EU)rope: conflict frames are consistent with the perceived North-South divide in the bloc (Krzyżanowski 2010; 2014), the frame of economic consequences – particularly when they are harmful – has permeated discourses of the German far-right (Forchtner & Özvatan 2019, this issue, 2021) – and the frame of moral values and responsibility has been found in the recent trend

towards the ethicalisation of the European identity (Krzyżanowski et al. 2009, 261; Krzyżanowski 2014, 354; Krzyżanowski 2009; also in Bennett, this issue, 2021).

## 4. Analysis

### 4.1. *Morality and responsibility frame: the call for solidarity*

The call for solidarity between Member States in the EU is the most common frame that can be found in the analysed newspapers. Small differences, however, can be seen between newspapers. A cautionary tale (Van Leeuwen 2008, 131) is constructed in *El País* where the negative consequences of the lack of solidarity are stressed. This is presented as a real “danger” (EP-022) for the EU.<sup>5</sup> A different form of legitimation is found in *El Mundo*, where the negative evaluation of the EU relies on a moral judgement (Entman 1993; Van Leeuwen 2008, 119) of the negatively perceived individualistic behaviour of Member States. Example 1 shows how the appeal for solidarity between Member States is based on the widely used EUROPE IS A BODY metaphor (Musolff 2004), which also allows for the construction of a shared European identity. Actions of the Member States are framed as part of a JOURNEY (Charteris-Black 2005), which triggers different evaluations depending not only on the choices made by each country but also on other contextual variables.

- (1) The president of the Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, warned [...] of the need of solidarity between the leaders of the EU so that Europe does “what is right” and acts “with a big heart and not with 27 small ones” in front of the “crossroads” meant by the coronavirus crisis (EP-022)

Another common metaphor in the construction (EU)rope is found in both Spanish and Catalan newspapers, and particularly in those with a right-wing ideology: *La Vanguardia* and *El Mundo*. In them, the EU is conceptualised as a BODY or a HOUSE. The activation of this metaphor allows for the emphasis to be placed on the harmful consequences of an incorrect management of the crisis, amongst them the continued “fester[ing]” of “injuries” and division between countries, or the closing of border in member states (EM-02, EM-04, EM-05, EM-06, EM-08) - or the USA (EM-03) - as an attack on the [house] foundations of the EU, which are metonymically equated to Schengen (LV-009): “The closing for borders for fear of the virus make Schengen rock” (EM-02). The Schengen area, which is defined in *El Mundo* as the “area of free movement” (EM-02) is positively evaluated as “one of the greatest achievements in the history of the EU” (EM-02), which is implicitly conceptualised as a big CONTAINER within which smaller unbounded and connected units (the member states) are included. This conceptualisation allows for an equal and solidarity relation to be established between them as none of the Member States is presented as occupying an elite position over the others (see Krzyżanowski 2018, 19). The closing of borders by Member States (and its preventing the free movement of persons within Europe in the early stages of the pandemic) is thus delegitimised as it is contrary to the European value of solidarity. Some countries are singled out for their individualistic behaviour, although variation can be seen between newspapers: Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Denmark (EM-02); France and Germany (EP-02). It should be noted that lexical choices – both activating metaphors and/or

positive/negative evaluation – contribute to delegitimising the individual and “unilateral” reactions (LV-009) by Member States, and a clear link can be seen with the conflict frame (see section 4.3).

This appeal to solidarity results in the legitimisation of a supranational project which could help in solving and managing the Covid-19 crisis. The implicitly “prescriptive” nature of this solidarity frame (Semetko and Valkenburg 2000) can be seen in the use of both epistemic and deontic modality when mentioning the required coordination (LV-010) and the “multiplying probability” for a new economic crisis to develop (ARA-001) in the absence of a coordinated response. Health, economic and political solidarity and cooperation are thus desired (ARA-012). The (lack of) actions performed by the EU (example 2) or Europe (example 3) are negatively evaluated, and the EU is presented as an institution which “lacks preparation” or “leadership” (LV-020). Construal strategies can be noted in those two examples (and examples 5 and 6 in section 4.2) with a strategy of spatialisation (Van Leeuwen 2008) when referring to social actors. Through a metonymic reference to the locations where high political and managerial activity takes place in Europe, the collective nature of the decision is emphasised while at the same time diluting individual or national responsibility.

(2) The EU reacts late and partially (LV-014)

(3) In Europe, there has neither been unity of action faced with the lack of leadership of the EU (LV-020)

While the call for solidarity is mostly framed as taking place between European nations, two other elements are stressed by Catalan newspaper *ARA*. On the one hand, solidarity is constitutive of European identity. This should be taken into account when looking at the “already insalubrious conditions” people are living in refugee camps, as they are a consequence of the “restrictions applied by states and also by the EU” (ARA-024). This vulnerates human rights “in the European borders” (ARA-023), and it is intertextually framed as part of the second global crisis lived by the EU: the humanitarian refugee crisis of 2015 (LV-009). On the other hand, Catalonia – as a political space – is presented as being equivalent to Europe and Spain: “an extraordinary European, Spanish and Catalan action plan is required” (ARA-012). By coordinating references to the three spaces and presenting them as classifying post-modifiers (pre-modifiers in the English translation provided), an intertextual reference is made to the request that the Catalan government had made to the Spanish government to close the Catalan region. This was denied on the grounds that those were parts of the centralised competences of the government. *ARA* reproduces the letters sent by the Catalan president, Quim Torra, to several European institutions asking them to override the decision of the Spanish government and foregrounding the negative consequences of those decisions for the expansion of the virus in Catalonia (ARA-033). Although the Catalan nationalist conflict is mentioned in the newspaper, this is mainly used as a mechanism for criticising the Spanish government and “accusing it of spreading the virus” (ARA-033). Unlike in previous examples, the call for solidarity in this example is based on a particular CONTAINER – Catalonia – being closed. This shows how given frames are particularly adapted to reflect the different crises about and within (EU)rope.

#### **4.2. Economic frame: a call for economic collaboration to prevent economic harm**

The economic frame is also pervasive on the newspapers analysed and is highly dependent on the framing of solidarity as constitutive of the European identity. This is mostly found in the newspapers' appeal for political and economic collaboration between the EU Member States, and it is frequently invoked when talking about the economic crisis that experts have already predicted will be caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. This crisis is presented as being equivalent to the 2008 financial crisis (LV-009), which was not successfully dealt with by European institutions. Solidarity is thus required to prevent economic harm within (Eu)rope (see also Forchtner & Özvatan, this issue, 2021).

This potential economic harm lies at the core of the delegitimisation of specific economic institutions, particularly the European Central Bank (ECB), because of its suggestion that countries turn to the ESM Euro rescue fund. This fund is not only textually mentioned but also co-textually found together with an intertextual reference to the 2008 financial crisis and the "dangerous stigma" that it triggered for "rescued countries during the financial crisis" (EP-017). References to the past as a delegitimising strategy can be also found in the comparison between the current president of the ECB, Christine Lagarde (EP-003, EP-008, ARA-027, ARA-002, LV-016) and former ECB president Mario Draghi (EP-008, ARA-027, LV-016), who is "longed for" (EP-003). The nomination strategy followed by pointing at specific individuals allows for the blame of the potential economic harm of current responses of the ECB to the coronavirus crisis to be framed as Lagarde's "(initial) hesitation" (LV-016, ARA-030), her lack experience in monetary politics (ARA-027) and her not making "a lot of efforts to prevent hysteria in the [stock] markets" (ARA-002), and her "false step" in managing the crisis (EP-003). This last lexical choice construes Lagarde's action as being a specific moment (STEP) in the European history (JOURNEY), which would not necessarily diminish the legitimacy of European institutions. The social "consensus" on the need for EU institutions to do something can be seen in calls for collaboration within (EU)rope (EM-013) to avoid a "brutal" "legitimacy crisis" (EP-014). The lexical choices when expressing the "need [for] more and a better Europe" (EM-013) shall be noted, as collaboration is not presented as being necessarily related to the powerful elites. By using the name of the continent, both the people and European institutions are indexed, hence implicitly presenting cooperation as one of the core European values (Stråth 2001; Oberhuber et al. 2005).

The reference to harmful economic consequence is not only metaphorically activated, but also evaluated through lexical choices. Examples include references to a potential "disappoint[ment of] stock markets" because they were expecting the ECB would take "more convincing measures" (EP-003). The feeble role of the EU is also criticised through references to the constant "back-and-forth" in the economic discussions between the Eurogroup (made up of the Finance and Economic Ministers of Member States) and country leaders. Likewise, the behaviour of European leaders is delegitimised by metaphorically conceptualising metaphors as a theatrical play (example 4), the bad performance of politicians is foregrounded and their actions during the Covid-19 crisis, which are mostly of a semiotic (and almost symbolic) nature (Van Leeuwen 2008), are delegitimated. This metaphor is consistent with previous studies that have identified a criticism of the behaviour of elites and their lack of desire to connect with the wider European citizenry (Krzyżanowski 2018, 19)



- (4) The play is widely known. The actors, the script, the stage design. A coordinated answer is talked about, a coordinated answer is expected, a coordinated answer is needed, but it does not really arrive. As the division between subordinates is very strong - on Tuesday they were not even able to agree on one of their vague statements full of good words - it is the leaders that have to take a decision now. (EM-011)

While most nomination strategies focus on Christine Lagarde, in the Catalan newspaper *ARA*, the socio-economic responsibility is also attributed to Ursula von der Leyen, whose authority is delegitimised, and failures in solving the crisis are attributed to her lack of leadership. Likewise, criticism of European measures can be seen in personifications of “Brussels” (examples 4 and 5), where the name of the city is metonymically used to refer to the government. This is a common strategy in discourses about Europe (see also Szabó and Szabó, this issue, 2021), and in the analysed sources it results in a delegitimation of the actions of EU institutions: either because they affect European unity (example 6) or could be economically harmful (example 5). The lexical verbs which accompany “Brussels” in the examples below shall be noted, as they mainly involve cognitive (“try”) and affective (“resigns”) reactions to the material or verbal actions of others, who are usually Member States.

- (5) Brussels has just tried to lay down a calmness message promising an economic injection and turning a blind eye on deficit. (LV-010)
- (6) Brussels resigns to accepting the stream of European States who are introducing border controls (ARA-020)

The frame of potentially harmful economic consequences is very clearly seen in the desire of the EU to “prevent the fragmentation of the single market” (ARA-016). It is also common for this economic frame to be combined with the conflict frame, in the implicit opposition between Member States, and the morality frame which advocates a call for solidarity (see section 4.3). Thus, in example 4, the use of the word “resign” delegitimises those political actions by EU countries which reflect the imposition of individual needs that are contrary to the at least one of the shared values upon which the EU was founded: solidarity. This activates an opposition between friends – that should provide other Member States with medical supplies, particularly in the very early days of the pandemic (ARA-028) – and foes that implicitly oppose the “intraeuropean solidarity” framework (ARA-028) upon which the existence of the EU is based (see also Szabó and Szabó, this issue, 2021).

#### **4.3. The conflict frame: Divides within (EU)rope**

Combined with the solidarity frame is the need to oppose a conflict frame, which is mostly related to the construction of a discursive opposition between “us” and “them,” particularly when activated by the media to delegitimise the actions of the EU or particular nations or groups of people within Europe. This delegitimation mostly stems from the discursive representation of the negative actions done by the other and the resulting negative consequences. The findings show that opposition tends to be aligned on two different schemes: a geographical division and hierarchical

institutionally-based one while reflect the following oppositions: i. us – Spain/the South of Europe vs them – the North of Europe, and ii. us – the people vs they - the EU elite.

Unlike other studies where the Eastern-Western divide seems to characterise Europe (Krzyżanowski 2010, 15; Szabó and Szabó, this issue, 2021), the Spanish media focuses on the North-South divide, which is metaphorically presented as a “ferocious fight” (EM-012) between countries, a sports “match” which could have a “second round” (EP-019), or a dialectical fencing fight (EP-019). Activating the WAR metaphor, and its nested combination with other OPPOSITION schemas like the one between animals in any kind of ecosystem, contributes to construing political and economic relations within Europe as being based on a clear opposition between two groups (Flusberg et al. 2018), and hence delegitimising through moral evaluation (Van Leeuwen 2007, 92; Forchtner & Özvatan, this issue, 2021) the existence of those whose action could be harmful for the self. This opposition also underlies the characterisation of countries in the North as “hawks” (EM-011, EM-012), hence activating the “hawk-dove” frame for referring to the different positions in economic policies (Toback et al. 2017). The hawks are equated in the texts to the Dutch (EM-011, EM-012) and their economic proposals are presented as being in contrast to those of Spain and Italy, who are metonymically referred via the nomination of their Finance Ministers (“Neither Nadia Calviño nor the Italian Gualterry are ready for the common form” (EM-011) or spatialisation-based references to the capital cities of these countries: Madrid and Roma (EM-012).

While the North-South divide underlies media representation in Spanish newspapers, there is variation in those countries which are singled by each newspaper. *El Mundo* explicitly refers to the harmful effect that not having a unitary response could have for Italy or Spain; *El País* – metonymically presenting itself as speaking for the whole of Italy and France – demands a “stronger action to the European Institutions” (EP-011); *ARA* criticizes the individualistic behaviour of countries like Germany and other unnamed states for “not listening” to the desire of (EU)rope to “prevent the fragmentation of the single market” (ARA-016). As can be seen in those references, the underlying opposition is not only based on the geographical North-South divide, but also on the delegitimation of authorities (Van Leeuwen 2007, 92) which represent the EU elite and the larger European population (Krzyżanowski 2018, 19). The Northern countries to be blamed for the slowness in solving the Covid-19 crisis are mostly Germany and Holland for *El País* and Germany for *La Vanguardia*. These represent “the orthodoxy of the North of the Union and apply[ing] the brakes and ask[ing] for caution before loosening up” (EP-011). The delegitimation of particular countries is combined with *mythopoesis*, as Spain, via the Prime Minister (Pedro Sánchez) is sending an “ambitious message: Europe needs a Marshall plan” (EP-016). That intertextual reference to the reconstruction of Europe after WWII is discursively presented as Spain’s (mostly Sanchez’s) proposal (EP-013, EP-015; EP-017) aimed at “the reconstruction of Europe after the pandemic” (EP-015). By recalling the past and establishing a parallelism between the metaphorically-recalled present “war” and WWII (cf. Filardo-Llamas 2021; Bennett, this issue, 2021), the urgency and desirability of new (EU)ropean political measures is emphasised, and the political roles of those countries and elites which prevent them are delegitimised.

References to the (EU)ropean elites can not only be found in the explicit mentioning of particular countries, but also via nomination strategies which tend to single out Angela Merkel as playing a pivotal role in the dispute (EP-016) over how to solve the covid-19 crisis. Criticism of individualistic national behaviour can be also seen in Catalan newspaper *La Vanguardia*, where references are made the contradiction between German official discourse and the policies implemented by this country. The newspaper delegitimises the behaviour of Germany, which is presented as elitist (see Krzyżanowski 2018, 19), and demands a unitary identification within Europe. This is shown in the criticism of Angela Merkel's words of "sympathy" towards "our Italian friends" (LV-011) as they are not consistent with Germany's initial suspension of the export of medical supplies to Italy (LV-001). The conflict frame is combined here with a morality frame (see section 4.1) in which a solidarity strategy is legitimated by relying on a normative claim based on EU values. This lies at the core of assertions like the following: "countries in Europe should not isolate from each other [...] closing borders is not an appropriate answer to this challenge" (LV-001). Profiling that countries have borders which can be closed allows for a criticism of their being isolated containers (see also Szabó and Szabó, this issue, 2021) while emphasising the need for solidarity. In the previous example about Germany, this country eventually agrees to sending and lending material to Italy – a country in southern Europe. However, this decision is presented as the result of European pressure (example 7). This example is placed in a news piece including an individualisation via nomination of Angela Merkel. She – as the delegitimised representative of the elite – is the one who only performs semiotic actions (Van Leeuwen 2008) mainly related to verbal processes. When material actions such as exporting are taken, these are metonymically attributed to the whole of the country, with the emphasis on the elite being diffused. As in previous references to the EU a clear contrast can be made between semiotic-verbal processes, which are delegitimised, and achieving real action. Some linguistic cues, such as the gradation adverb "just", contribute to emphasising the (former) negative semiotic behaviour of the EU (Hunston and Thompson 1999, 25).

- (7) Germany gives in to EU pressure and will export facemasks to Italy. [...] The Chinese plane with medical supplies to help Italy starkly showed up the EU, which until now had just offered Italy beautiful words. Germany will lift the suspension of exports of health material that it decreed on March 4. (LV-007)

References to Germany are one example of the discursive construction of "two Europes" which are implicitly compared in their economic capacity. The behaviour of the wealthier countries towards other countries like Italy is negatively evaluated as "scandalous" (LV-007), and it triggers a presupposition (Van Dijk 1988, 69) about the existence of poorer countries. While no discursive explanation is provided in *La Vanguardia* for the North-South divide in the EU, it is this schism between countries that is metaphorically presented as the reason that prevents reaching economic solutions. The conflict frame is that related to the (harmful) economic consequences that may result from the behaviour of particular European countries (see section 4.2, see also Forchtner and Özvatan, this issue, 2021). A clear example of how the JOURNEY metaphor (Charteris-Black 2005) is activated can be seen in the use of the word "block" in example 8, where the division within Europe is constructed as the main obstacle to be solved.

- (8) The division between countries in the North and the South of Europe blocked the proposal to issue bonds guaranteed by the EU, already named corona bonds, to finance the extraordinary expenditure caused by the fight against the pandemic. (LV-025)

In *ARA* the North/South divide (ARA-048) is presented as “historically”-grounded and “repeated” periodically (ARA-047), and it is this lack of solidarity (ARA-051) between Member States that is “undermining the credibility of the EU” (ARA-051). A different metaphor is activated in *ARA*, where references to the EU as a HOUSE (Musolff, 2000) implicitly contribute to question its existence because its “fissures” continue to be open (ARA-046). The use of the word “continue” also frames problems within the EU as being part of its history. Division and lack of solidarity are thus two key arguments used by the Spanish media for questioning the legitimacy of the EU. The lack of authority of an institution (the EU) which “can influence but cannot decide” (LV-009) is one more example in which criticism to the ruling European elite can be found.

## 5. Conclusions

The analysis of the news pieces included in this article shows how the appeal to three generic frames – moral responsibility, economic consequences and conflict – contributes to a construction of the European identity in the Spanish media that continues with the ethicalisation trend identified in previous studies (Krzyżanowski et al. 2009, 261; Krzyżanowski 2014, 354; Krzyżanowski 2009). By relying on a strategy of “moral evaluation” (Van Leeuwen 2008, 119), which is mostly exemplified by references to the desired solidarity between Member states, the existence of the EU – and other European institutions such as the ECB, the ESM treaty, or the Eurogroup – is only legitimated inasmuch as it helps in maintaining and sustaining a supranational collectivity which seeks the common good of all Europeans. Negative representations of the individualistic behaviour of certain Member States and the inclusion of cautionary tales which show the possible danger of a collapse of the EU also legitimate the existence of a European supranational identity.

While the collective supranational identity is discursively constructed through an appeal to common values, the policies adopted by certain Member States are negatively evaluated and presented as individualistic. A clear discursive distinction can be found: A positive representation of the supranational European self is opposed to the negative construction of several national others. Two layers of meanings underlie the identification of Van Dijk’s ideological square (1998) in the analysed media: On the one hand, we find a supranational opposition between desired European values, which are based on the solidarity frame, and the European policies implemented by institutions and politicians during the Covid-19 pandemic, as the latter did not contribute to achieving that solidarity. On the other hand, a national opposition which is based on a spatial lens (Krzyżanowski et al. 2009, 262) that filters the readers’ perception of Europe as being divided between wealthy Northern countries and poor Southern ones. While other studies on European identities show not only a North-South divide, but also a West-East one, it is only the vertical dimension that is appealed to in the Spanish media. This foregrounding of the negative behaviour of the Northern countries contributes to a delegitimation of the policies and positions of

those (Northern) Member States who neither approve the new Marshall Plan proposed by Spain nor accept an increase in public expenditure which could ease the (economic) suffering caused by the pandemic to (mostly Southern) countries.

While each of the analysed newspapers present different policies as causing the breach of the common European values of solidarity and cooperation, we can see that a common strategy underlies their discursive construction of the crisis. Given that European policies in response to the pandemic seemed to oppose the national interests of Spain, the existence of an EPS is legitimated by appealing to shared supranational values within which the national (Spanish) interests can be accommodated. When those national interests clash with the regional independentist demands of Catalonia, this national dimension is eroded by ARA, and only two actors are presented as valid interlocutors: the Catalan government and the European institutions. The discursive constructions identified in this article show how the constant appeal to shared values by media discourse can be a mechanism for reaching consensus and solving possible crises within Europe. It is this appeal to values which can accommodate the national interests of the different Member States that allows for all of them to be grouped together under an umbrella supranational collectivity.

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<sup>2</sup> Infodemic is a new term which comes from the combination of “information” and “pandemic”. It has been widely used during the Covid-19 crisis to refer to the rapid spread of misinformation which may be performed by a variety of agents, including social media bots, trolls, fake news outlets, or conspiracy theorists (Carr 2021).

<sup>3</sup> This is based on the information provided by the Spanish Association for Research on Mass Media (AIMC), and their analysis of popularity and readership for the year 2020. This information can be found in <https://reporting.aimc.es/index.html#/main/diarios>

<sup>4</sup> The period prior to the Covid-19 outbreak was characterised by a political confrontation between Spain and Catalonia due to Catalan independentist aspirations. These aspirations are important for understanding Catalan reactions to the national management of the pandemic. This need to acknowledge national and peripheral reactions to the role of (EU)rope justify the inclusion of Catalan newspapers.

<sup>5</sup> For reasons of space, only a translation of the examples is provided. Parenthetical references are the codes that were given to each news piece in the corpus. A list of cited pieces can be found in the appendix.

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