The EU as a 'Framing Actor': Reflections on Media Debates about EU Foreign Policy*

PETR KRATOCHVÍL
Institute of International Relations, Prague and University of Economics, Prague

PETRA CIBULKOVÁ
University of Economics, Prague

MICHAL BENÍK
University of Economics, Prague

Abstract

This article explores the EU's ability to frame the public debates about its external policies. The article begins by broadening the current discussions about the three aspects of actorness – legitimacy, attractiveness and recognition – by introducing the EU's framing power as a fourth aspect of actorness. Then it proceeds to an empirical analysis of framing, which is based on a discourse analysis of the news coverage of Ukraine (2002–07) in print media in the three biggest EU Member States (United Kingdom, Germany and France).

Introduction

The two major weaknesses of the EU's external policies are its apparent inability to define clearly its own interests towards the external environment and the ever-present danger of fragmentation into national positions (see, for example, Gordon, 1997/98, p. 76; Henderson, 1999, p. 46; White, 2001, p. 29). This can certainly be partially justified by the lacking institutional capacity of the EU and by the divergence of national foreign policies, but the EU is also weakened by its strange nature, which does not allow it to rely on traditional, widely understood notions of foreign policy such as 'national interest'. While both the general public and a substantial part of academia do

not doubt the existence of interests of the traditional political units – that is, states – the idea that the EU as a whole would have its own interests is frequently attacked. The reason for this distrust and the unequal status of the EU and the nation-states lies in the different perceptions of the actorness of the states and the EU. As a result, the two key characteristics of actorness – external recognition and internal legitimacy – are rarely questioned in the case of current European nation-states, but the extent to which the EU is recognized by external powers and perceived as a legitimate representative of the Union's citizens is often disputed (as demonstrated by the debates on the pages of this journal: Meyer, 1999; Moravcsik, 2002; Lord and Magnette, 2004; Follesdal and Hix, 2006).

The aim of this article is therefore to explore the actorness of the EU, particularly its power to frame debates about the external action of EU Member States. The key question is whether the Union has the potential to substantially influence debates about foreign policies of the most important Member States, even though there is no clearly identifiable unified EU public space where foreign policy might be publicly and widely discussed and assessed.

Yet any complex analysis of the current discussions about the EU as an actor who can formulate its own interests has to overcome two key limitations of these debates. First, there are three different academic discourses related to EU actorness, which only rarely enter into dialogue. These three discourses ask three different questions about the EU: (1) whether the EU, in its external activities, is recognized as an actor by external powers; (2) whether the EU is perceived as internally legitimate by its citizens; and (3) whether the EU's internal functioning is deemed as an attractive model for emulation by the outsiders. The second limitation is even more pertinent. The existing academic analyses of EU actorness, although theoretically sound and empirically robust, have so far failed to take into account a fourth element of actorness – that is, the question of whether the EU is a relevant *framing* actor in the internal debates about foreign policy choices.

Although the three existing streams of debate about EU actorness, focusing on the EU's recognition, legitimacy and attractiveness, are usually seen as separate research problems, they can be nicely categorized with the focus on actorness. This can be done by dividing these approaches along two major axes: the substantive areas analysed, and the perspectives from which they are discussed. The substantive area may be either the EU internal governance system or EU external policies; and the perspective taken can either reconstruct the view from within the EU (EU institutions, EU Member States, EU citizens, etc.) or the view from the external environment (states outside the EU, candidates for membership, etc.).

Table 1: EU Actorness – Different Foci of Academic Debates

	Seen from inside the EU	Seen from outside the EU
Dealing with EU internal governance	EU as a *legitimate* actor	EU as an *attractive* actor
Dealing with EU external policies	EU as a *framing* actor	EU as a *recognized* actor

Source: Authors' own calculations.

Hence, as seen in Table 1, the analysis of EU governance and the perception of it by EU citizens revolves around legitimacy, while the perception of it from the outside centres upon the attractiveness of the model for outside actors. Regarding the external policies, the obvious research question is whether the EU is seen as a recognized, relevant and unified partner by outsiders or whether it is dealt with on an equal footing as other actors. However, as the table shows, there is a fourth possibility – the focus on the EU's capacity to frame internal debates about external policies. It is this area of actorness that has so far been neglected.

This article will first briefly describe the three elements of EU actorness – legitimacy, attractiveness and recognition – as they have been present in the academic study thereof. It will show that even though they pose seemingly different questions, in the end, all three of them are inexorably circling around the central concept of the EU being an actor with its own interests. In the next step, we will give reasons for why we are convinced that the fourth dimension is vitally important for understanding the role of the EU as an actor, relevant both for its own citizens and for the outside world. Finally, we will present the result of our empirical study, which shows the EU's power to rhetorically frame external policies of its major Member States.

I. The EU as a Legitimate Actor

Even though the debates on all three strands (legitimacy, attractiveness and recognition) are quite lively, it is legitimacy that has been given the most attention. One might argue that the reason for the dominance of the legitimacy debate lies in the political evolution of the integration process, where attempts at further integration have recently suffered several major setbacks (the failure of the Constitutional Treaty, the double rejection of the Lisbon Treaty, etc.). However, there are additional reasons which are linked to the prevailing interpretation of the EU in the academic discourse. First, after the governance turn and the related influx of theoretical concepts from political theory with its focus on the (domestic) decision-making process, the study of political institutions and distributive policies, the legitimacy debate has been their logical offspring since knowing whether the EU can be seen as legitimate is

vital for the decision about its right to carry out the ever-increasing number of policies previously appertaining exclusively to nation-states – that is, about whether it should follow its own interests (Weale and Nentwich, 1998; Moravcsik, 2002). As a consequence, the debate further splits into separate branches dealing with input legitimacy, output legitimacy and so on (Horeth, 1999; Lord and Magnette, 2004). In any case, the analysis of legitimacy has been linked to the *problematique* of the EU as an actor or polity (Banchoff and Smith, 1999).

The question of the EU's legitimacy also lies at the core of the numerous studies on the (non-)existence of a European public space (Koopmans and Erbe, 2004; Habermas, 2006) and the cognate discussions about the democratic deficit (see, for example, Moravcsik, 2002). Seemingly neither the public space nor the democratic deficit is related to the EU's actorness – in fact, the opposite is true. The whole debate focuses on whether we can meaningfully talk about the EU as an actor similar to nation-states since the existence of a demos and a public space are considered vital elements of actorness (Risse and Van de Steeg, 2003). The academic literature is replete with examples of the connection between legitimacy and actorness. To give just one example, Bretherton and Vogler (1999), in their monograph on EU actorness, dedicate a whole chapter to the analysis of legitimacy and authority.

The second reason for the prioritization of legitimacy originates in the understanding, now prevalent in studies dealing with legitimacy, that since the EU's internal legitimacy is a prerequisite for its very existence, the question of its external attractiveness is logically secondary to the domestic concerns. This may be contested on the grounds that, for the EU's actorness, the external recognition by influential international actors is equally important as the domestic constitution (see below). However, while the recognition from outside may increase the Union's authority and room for manoeuvre, it cannot have any straight influence on internal legitimacy and can feed back into the increased legitimacy only indirectly – that is, by citizens realizing the higher appreciation of the Union or increased expectations by outsiders.

II. The EU as an Attractive Actor

The second strand of academic research on the EU's actorness concentrates on the spread of the EU system of governance outside its territory. The unifying theme of this strand is the fact that the adoption of EU norms by outsiders is almost never accompanied by the use of force. Quite to the contrary, the widespread acceptance of the EU's norms is based on the voluntary incorporation of norms of the EU by countries outside of it (Featherstone and Radaelli,

2003, and particularly Grabbe's contribution to the same volume; Bulmer and Radaelli, 2004; Emerson and Noutcheva, 2004). Again, even though the norms may have originally been shaped after German, French or other national legislations, the 'exported' norms are always attributed to the EU as a whole and are thus directly linked to the question of actorness.

The diffusion of EU norms differs in regard to the level of their institutionalization. For instance, in the framework of the European neighbourhood policy, the adoption of *acquis* represents the core of the whole policy, and the policy provides a complex skein of institutional mechanisms for evaluation of the process (cf. Kratochvíl and Tulmets, 2010). This is obviously closely related to the gradual spill over in the literature on Europeanization from the internal Europeanization of EU Member States and their bureaucratic institutions to Europeanization beyond the Union's borders.

On a higher level, the EU is analysed as a power that can spread its norms in a highly effective manner even where thick institutionalization is not available, such as on the global scale. Thus, there is the EU's role in supporting the Kyoto Protocol or more general international regimes in the areas of environmental protection or human rights, and recently also standardization (Alston and Weiler, 1998; Crawford, 1998; Egan, 2002; Falkner, 2007). Two concepts embodying this direction of research are Ian Manners' notion of the EU as a 'normative power' (Manners, 2001) and Smith and Allen's 'presence' (Smith and Allen, 1998). Both of these terms refer to the EU's ability to radiate its norms to the outside environment, even though this normative transformation may not be the result of an intentional action of the Union, but rather an unforeseen consequence of its existence. And again, there can be no doubt that the ability to influence the outside world is directly linked to the EU's actorness. This is confirmed by Manners, who starts his argumentation not by showing how the EU's norms are peacefully spreading around the globe, but rather by quoting Bull's conviction that 'Europe is not an actor in international affairs' (Manners, 2001). Hence, the nature of the EU's power is a question that leads the reader to the key problem of whether the EU can be considered a power at all.

III. The EU as a Recognized Actor

Another widely discussed perspective on the EU's actorness explores the extent to which the EU is recognized as an external actor by outsiders. This topic looms large particularly in studies of the EU's relations with great powers: the recognition and perception of the EU as an independent actor is seen as a prerequisite for a successful external policy of the Union toward

Russia (Hofmann, 2007), China (Möller, 2002) and other great powers. In these kinds of analyses, the internal institutional set-up and the evolution of the EU's internal policies are seen as relevant only as far as they shape the external expectations or influence the Union's capability to 'respond effectively to external expectations and opportunities' (Bretherton and Vogler, 1999, p. 5).

There are two usual tacks to the question of recognition. The most common approach, exemplified by the capabilities–expectations gap debate (Hill, 1993, 1998; Holland, 1995; Ginsberg, 1999), argues that the Union's capabilities are well below the expectations of the outside world and that this imbalance must be redressed. However, the answers do not link the capacity to act with the EU's ability to frame foreign policy issues in domestic debates and instead focus on the need to decrease the expectations of outsiders (cf. Hill, 1993). In other cases, scholars simply understand the internal aspects of actorness – that is, the question of legitimacy and the framing ability – as a consequence of outside developments, hence relegating them to a position of a mere derivative of the EU's external action. As Ginsberg and Eizenstat (2001, p. 45) put it: 'The outside world recognizes the EU's capacity for actor significance, which accelerates demands on the EU to act internationally, and the EU itself builds up the internal confidence required to act in response to external stimuli and in pursuit of its own collective interests'. In either case, foreign policy framing on the domestic political scenes of the Member States is seen as irrelevant.

The second group of scholars claim the opposite – that is, that the EU's capacity exceeds expectations. They typically explore the external perceptions of those partners who, for various reasons, are hesitant to accept the Union as a heavyweight international actor. Most studies of EU–Russia relations come to this conclusion, arguing that Russia prefers attending to bilateral relations with individual EU Member States to attending to bilateral relations with the Union as a whole (Kratochvíl, 2008), even though the Commission can at times be a strong partner in negotiations with Russia (Herrberg, 1998).

IV. The EU as a Framing Actor

While the three above described perspectives have been flourishing, surprisingly little attention has been dedicated to the question of how and whether the EU is able to shape debates about foreign policy in individual Member States. Some studies have already pointed out that the EU and particularly its central institutions such as the European Commission can be very influential. Indeed, they can be key shapers of particular policies (as demonstrated on the above-mentioned case of EU negotiations with Russia (Herrberg, 1998) or in

negotiations about international environmental obligations (Jupille and Caporaso, 1998)). However, these studies argue that the Commission's success is dependent on the prior consensus among the Member States, without which its ability to influence the EU's external policies would be rather limited.

Yet we believe that regardless of whether the Member States' governments agree or not, the EU can have substantial power in *a priori* limiting the choices available to these governments in at least two ways. The Commission can reach this aim either by strategic, 'pre-emptive', action – that is, by publicly present- ing its stance toward a particular issue (such as in the form of the White Papers published by the Commission roughly twice a year)[1] – or, even more impor- tantly, by simply convincing the public and the media in individual Member States that a specific policy is (or should be) handled by the Union. This is not to say that the public in the Member States must agree that the Union is necessarily better at drafting or implementing the policy (in accordance with the subsidiarity principle), but only that the EU is the common locus for handling some issues, such as trade negotiations. Importantly, such a percep- tion in the public space might arise also in connection with those areas where the EU's role is institutionally relatively limited, such as in external relations with the Union's neighbours. In other words, the fourth essential characteristic of the EU's actorness is its ability to convince the national governments and societies that a policy or a relationship with a country is primarily a task for the EU, or – at least – a task in which the EU should be involved. Hence, the question here is not, as in the case of the previous three features, whether the EU is a legitimate, attractive or externally recognized actor, but whether the EU has the power to shape foreign policy, whether it is a *framing* actor.

It would be presumptuous to claim that there is no research on framing in the EU. For instance, Dudley and Richardson (1999) wrote a study on the policy frames in the policies of the EU's steel industry, Kohler-Koch (2000) analysed framing processes in the EU linked to the construction of legitimate institutions, and Van de Steeg *et al*. (2003) focused on the media framing of the 'Haider Debate' and the corollaries thereof for the EU as a political community. However, it is highly telling that virtually all of these studies are centred on internal EU matters – mainly institutions and policies – and ask questions about the EU's internal legitimacy, and not about its ability to act externally in a coherent and efficient way.

What we have in mind when we talk about framing is the important distinction between the EU's internal framing, which is part of the EU's

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[1] White Papers of the European Union. Available at «http://europa.eu/documents/comm/white_papers/index_en.htm».

legitimization (which is the well-researched topic dealt with in section I above), and the EU's framing in external affairs – that is, the ability to influence the Member States in matters of their and the EU's external policies. For the latter kind of framing to be successful, there is no need for a unified EU-wide public sphere. The only important conditions are: (1) that the debates in individual Member States refer predominantly to the EU as the main actor; (2) that the Member States react to the same events; and (3) that they consider the same options, usually inspired (framed) by the EU (typically the European Commission).

The first condition (acknowledgement of the EU's actorness) is the key condition since the other two depend on the first. Once the EU is a major reference point for a policy or for some relation between an EU member and an outside country, it is fairly difficult for the national political elite to pursue a national policy that would starkly contradict the EU's position. Even where the common EU position does not exist, nations may be motivated to present their arguments as compatible with or, indeed, as reinforcing the EU's standing. In other words, it is easier to push through a policy that can be unproblematically interpreted as furthering not only national interests, but also the interests of the whole community of EU Member States.

V. Research Design

Is it really the case that the EU is seen as a major player in the external relations of individual Member States? Since the presentation of the EU as the decisive actor is the main effect of the EU's framing, this research focuses primarily on this point. We tried to answer this question by a detailed analysis of a case study dealing with the relations of the EU and EU Member States with Ukraine. Ukraine was chosen for three reasons: first, it represents a relatively specific, clearly definable topic that may be highly salient for some EU members (new Member States, Germany, etc.) and unimportant for others (Mediterranean Member States). Also, while the EU has created special links with Ukraine (in particular through the European neighbourhood policy and the nascent Eastern Partnership), many EU Member States could be interested in cultivating their own bilateral ties with Ukraine since it remains one of the key countries in the neighbourhood. Third, Ukraine has experienced a quite tumultuous development, and so we can compare the interpretations of the EU's role both in times of crisis and in times of calm.

The framing power of the EU can be analysed either through an exploration of national decision-making processes (thus uncovering, for instance, how far the views of the European Commission or the European Parliament

are taken into account when national policies are formulated). Or it is possible
to carry out a discourse analysis of the major media, hence showing whether
an issue is persistently seen as a matter of the EU in the public discourse or
not and what role the EU plays in the public debates in the chosen countries.
It is the latter approach that we took.

We had two reasons for this choice. First, methodologically, the focus on
the mass media discourse can yield results that are easily comparable across
a number of Member States. Second, while public discourse does not always
reveal all the nuances of the attitude of national policy-makers towards the EU
or particular proposals coming from the European Commission, it certainly
offers a clear picture of the general presence (or absence, for that matter) of
the EU as a relevant actor in the overall national discourse. It is exactly this
presence in a state's public discourse that we believe to be the condition *sine
qua non* for the EU's framing power.

For the analysis, we chose the three biggest EU Member States: Germany,
the United Kingdom and France. Again, the choice was informed by several
factors. First, we wanted to include both countries that should have a special
relationship with Ukraine because they have declared their interest in the
region (Germany) and those that are less inclined to do so (France and to
some extent also the UK). Second, the sample includes both countries that
have a long history of supporting deeper integration (Germany, France) and
those more reserved (the UK). Finally, the three big EU Member States have
a greater administrative and diplomatic capacity for independent external
action, and in this sense they constitute the least likely cases for research on
the EU's framing power. In other words, should the EU's framing prove to be
strongly present here, it would be highly probable that such a framing exists
in the other Member States as well.

In each of the three countries, two newspapers were chosen – *Le Monde*
and *Le Figaro* in France, *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and *Frankfurter Allgemeine
Zeitung* in Germany, and *The Guardian* and the *Daily Telegraph* in the UK.
All of them were chosen because they are leading daily newspapers with a
high circulation – with *Le Figaro*'s daily circulation of 343,000, *Le Monde*'s
345,000, *FAZ*'s 370,000, *SD*'s 450,000, the *Daily Telegraph*'s 871,000
and *The Guardian*'s 350,000 (Eurotopics, 2008) – that offer substantial and
detailed coverage of foreign policy issues. Since I wanted to ensure that the
political bias would be reduced to the minimum, one of the newspapers from
each country represents a more conservative position, whereas the other is
more left- or liberal-oriented.

In terms of time horizon, the analysis covers a period of six years (2002–
07). Hence, it includes the period under Prime Minister Yanukovych (2002–
04), the Orange Revolution (2004), its aftermath (2004–07) and the period of

Table 2: Distribution of Articles across Countries

Country	Number of articles
Germany	945
France	708
United Kingdom	248
Total	1,901

Source: Authors' own calculations.

Table 3: Distribution of Articles across Newspapers

Newspaper	Number of articles
Süddeutsche Zeitung	404
Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung	541
Le Figaro	461
Le Monde	247
The Daily Telegraph	106
The Guardian	142
Total	1,901

Source: Authors' own calculations.

the renewed crisis (2007), thus allowing us to compare the reactions of the selected media to the different developments in the country. The chosen time frame also explains why we have not included any new Member States such as Poland, which obviously is one of the key actors. However, since we analysed a period that preceded the eastern enlargement of 2004 by two-and-a-half years, it would be methodologically incorrect to analyse the discourse of a non-Member.

We analysed altogether 1,901 articles in which Ukraine was the main topic. The distribution of the articles among the three EU Member States, as well as among the individual newspapers, is shown in Tables 2 and 3.

As a first step, all of the articles were divided into two basic categories (Figure 1). The first category contained the purely informative articles with Ukraine as the main subject (analysing Ukraine's political or social landscape, informing about current development in the country, etc.). This category also included those articles where there was only a brief mention of the EU or those in which the EU was listed as one of several organizations without any other further specification of its role or interest.

The second category, which is the most important one for the analysis of EU framing, consisted of articles containing references to the EU or the national state (the United Kingdom, Germany and France) as the main actor

Figure 1: Categorization of the Articles
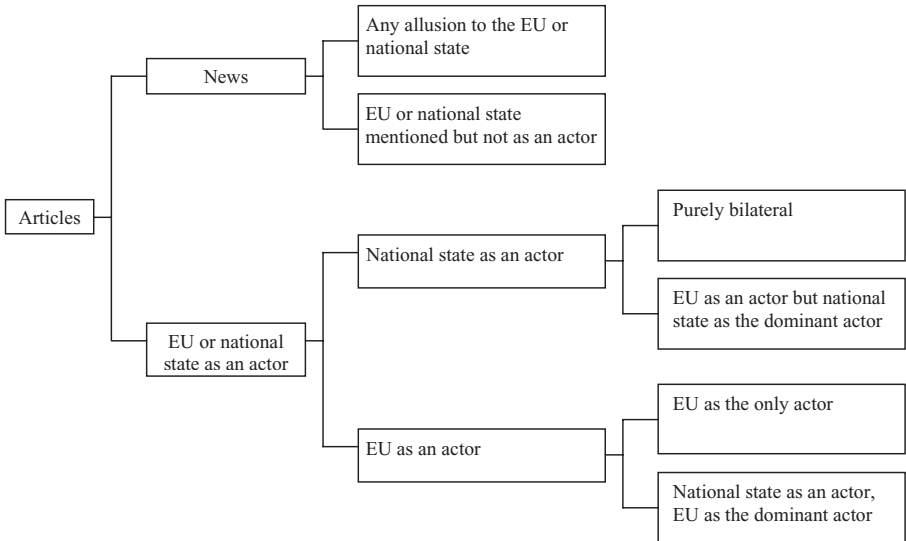
with which Ukraine communicates. This category was subsequently divided into two groups: articles with a purely bilateral focus, and articles with a reference to EU actorness. Frequently, the last-mentioned subcategory dealt with comments on Ukraine by an EU official, the strategies EU institutions would like to adopt, or the EU's criticism of the steps taken by Ukraine's political leaders.

Articles containing both a reference to the EU as an actor and a reference to the national state as an actor were further analysed and filed into one of the above-mentioned subcategories, according to the mutual positions of these two actors. Some typical examples were those articles where national officials of EU Member States met with their Ukrainian counterparts in the context of a meeting strongly related to the EU (for instance, during the EU Presidency).

We started from the assumption that it is sufficient for the EU to be a strong framing actor if such a representation of the EU is prevalent in the analysed media in the three countries. Framing the national policy towards Ukraine in terms of EU-wide interests, compliance with EU requirements or, more specifically, the Commission's leadership forces the national political elite to choose arguments in line with this general background, hence further increasing the EU's role in the national decision-making. Building on this assumption, we worked with three hypotheses:

1. If a country is more interested in a special relationship with Ukraine than other countries are, then it will prefer bilateral relations more strongly than the others.
2. If an extraordinary event (such as the Orange Revolution) takes place in Ukraine, then the proportion of bilateral activities will rise.
3. If a unified policy is created within the EU that targets the outside country (such as the European neighbourhood policy), this will gradually become a major reference point for the national policies as well.

Whereas it is vitally important to find out whether the relations to Ukraine are indeed couched in EU-related rhetoric, since otherwise one could not talk about the EU's framing, the three hypotheses aim at specifications of conditions and ways in which the EU's framing power is limited or related to concrete policies.

VI. Research Findings
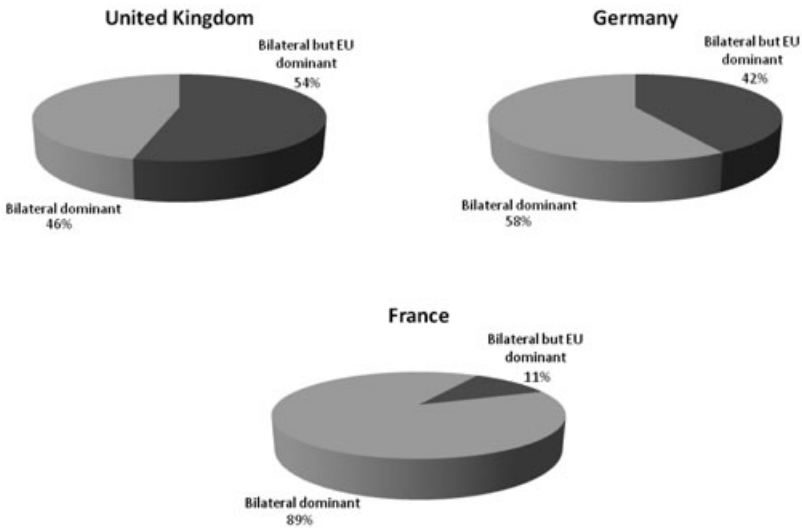
Bilateral or EU-Related Framing?

Most articles (79.8 per cent) in all six newspapers represented general news, describing the latest developments in Ukraine, without mentioning any outside influence, be it national or the European Union's. However, once these were removed from the sample, it turned out that the vast majority of all of the articles dealt primarily with the EU–Ukraine relations (Figure 2). The share of articles on bilateral topics did not exceed 30 per cent in any of the three countries. Surprisingly, the ratio between bilateral and EU-related articles was not the highest in Germany, where it reached only 24 per cent, but in France (29 per cent). Hence, it seems that there is no connection between a Member State's declared interest in Ukraine and the reliance on its own diplomacy. Most of the articles were dedicated to the Orange Revolution,

Figure 2: Share of EU-Framed Articles, 2002–07
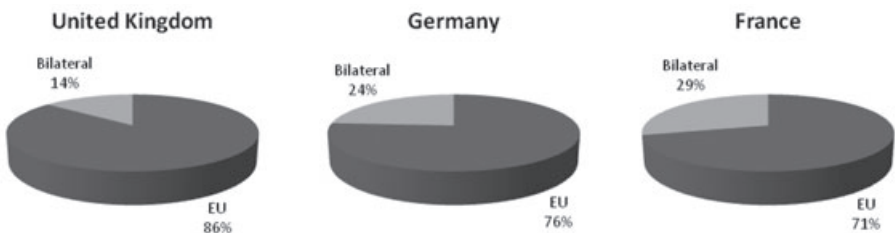
Source: Authors' own calculations.

Figure 3: Bilaterality – Ratio of 'Bilateral Dominant' to 'EU Dominant', 2002–07

United Kingdom

Bilateral but EU
dominant
54%

Bilateral dominant
46%

Germany

Bilateral but EU
dominant
42%

Bilateral dominant
58%

France

Bilateral but EU
dominant
11%

Bilateral dominant
89%

Source: Authors' own calculations.

including the role of the EU as one of the mediators in the crisis and the necessity to accelerate domestic reforms as one of the conditions of further upgrading the EU–Ukraine relationship.

In order to obtain more detailed data on the articles with a bilateral focus, we further analysed these. As already explained in section V, there were some articles that had a bilateral element but where the main actor was not the country, but the Union as a whole. For instance, if a country representative met with Ukraine on behalf of the Union or if (s)he discussed issues related almost exclusively to the EU as a whole (visa policy, energy policy, consequences of the expansion of the Schengen area, etc.), this cannot be counted as news on purely bilateral matters and we have to differentiate further between those articles where bilateral relations are discursively linked to and subsumed under the EU as the key actor and those where this is not the case. As Figure 3 shows, an exclusive stress on bilateral relations was typical for France, whereas in Germany and the UK, around one-half of the articles with a bilateral element in fact referred to the EU as the key actor.

Generally, the coverage of Ukraine in the two British newspapers is rather limited compared to that in the French and German mass media. Statistically, two main issues dominated the five-year period covered by the analysis. First, the Orange Revolution and its aftermath frequently made it to both *The Guardian* and the *Daily Telegraph*, with its peak at the turn of 2004 and 2005.

The second widely discussed matter was the role of Ukraine in energy policies, especially around 2005–06, when the tensions between Ukraine and Russia on energy matters reached a record high. Hence, Ukraine's role as a transit or destination country was explored and often related to both the EU's role and the position of Russia as the main supplier. Interestingly, while in the articles on the Orange Revolution the EU was depicted in more favourable terms, when analyzing energy security the EU was seen as slow and indecisive. The *Daily Telegraph*'s coverage of energy security, including the Russo–Ukrainian energy crisis, proved to be much thinner, and it set the *problematique* in relation to the EU only in rare cases.

Regarding the coverage of Ukraine in the two German newspapers, the official visit of the newly elected President Yushchenko to Germany and the visa affair at the German consulate in Kyiv led to an increase in bilaterality in 2005. Similarly, the gas crisis between Russia and Ukraine at the end of 2005 and the beginning of 2006 caused an increased amount of commentaries reflecting the uncertainty about the stability of gas deliveries to Germany. However, the EU context was often present here too. Another question is whether, in 2007, the German EU Presidency could have led to a weaker emphasis on the bilateral level. This question is methodologically difficult. In this period, Germany was often mentioned as an important partner who could help Ukraine to achieve its desired foreign political aims – namely WTO, Nato and EU membership. Articles where Germany's role was subordinated to the EU's were dedicated to Ukraine's desire to become an EU Member and implement domestic reforms. The bilateral level introduced the specifically German position and German economic interests. However, substantial contradictions between the EU's and Germany's views were not present in the discussions of any of these topics. The same applies to discussions of the gas crisis, where the EU was seen as clearly having the same interests as Germany.

Similar to the media of the United Kingdom and Germany, in the French media an emphasis on the EU's role was to be observed mainly during the peak of the Orange Revolution and then during the gas crisis with its rising uncertainty regarding deliveries of strategic raw materials to Europe. What has been described as indecisiveness on the part of both French diplomacy and the EU has often been criticized by the French media (regarding both of the above-mentioned issues). No significant bilateral issues with influence on mutual relations were to be observed apart from the visit of the by then Minister of State and Interior and the leader of the UMP Party, Nicholas Sarkozy, in February 2005 (the visit being part of Mr Sarkozy's personal political strategy rather than a proof of French diplomatic activity) and a reciprocal visit Mr Yushchenko paid to France later in 2005. Apart from that,

the French media in general traditionally pay quite considerable attention to the legacy of the Chernobyl crisis.

We can conclude that the situation we specified as the key condition for the occurrence of framing is in place. In all the three countries, the EU was perceived as the main actor in the vast majority of all of the analysed articles (ranging from 71 to 86 per cent).

Hypotheses

Having confirmed the starting assumption that the EU serves as a framing actor in external relations, we can continue with an analysis of specifications of the EU's framing power. As already explained in section V, we worked with three hypotheses:

1. If a country is more interested in a special relationship with Ukraine than other countries are, then it will prefer bilateral relations more strongly than the others (Figure 4). If the hypothesis was confirmed, then the media framing would be much more bilateral in nature in the German press than in the presses of the other two countries. However, that was not the case since the share of bilaterally oriented articles was highest in France, which – out of the three countries – we had expected to be the least interested in a special partnership with Ukraine. In other words, no dependence of article framing on the national special interest in Ukraine could be established. So, Hypothesis 1 was falsified: stronger interest does not mean more pronounced national framing.

Figure 4: Share of 'EU-Framed' Articles in France, Germany and the UK
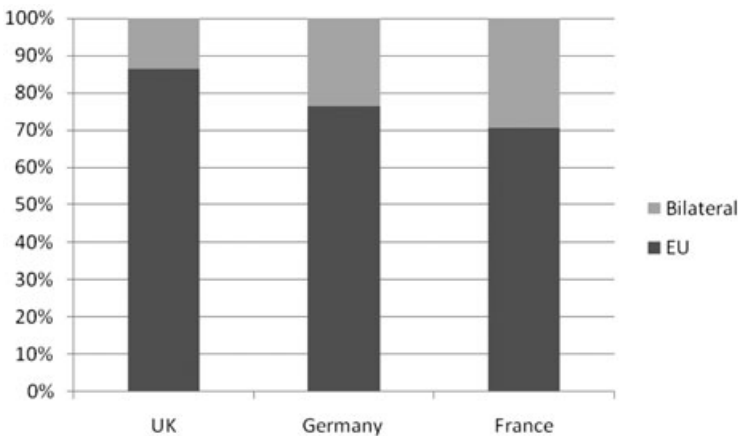
Source: Authors' own calculations.

Figure 5: Share of 'EU-Framed' Reports during the 2004–05 Crisis in Ukraine
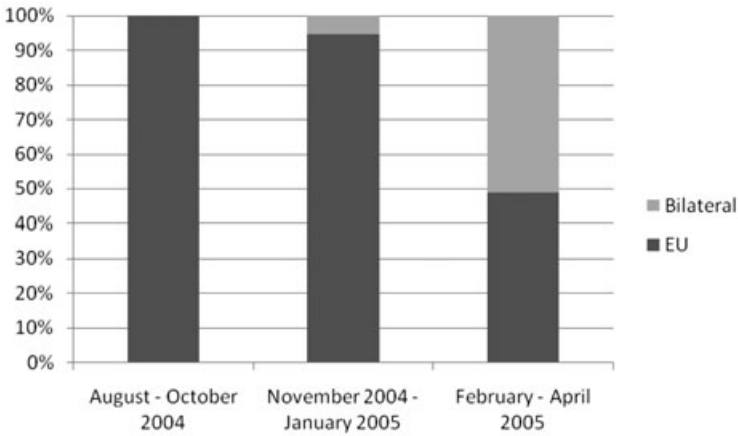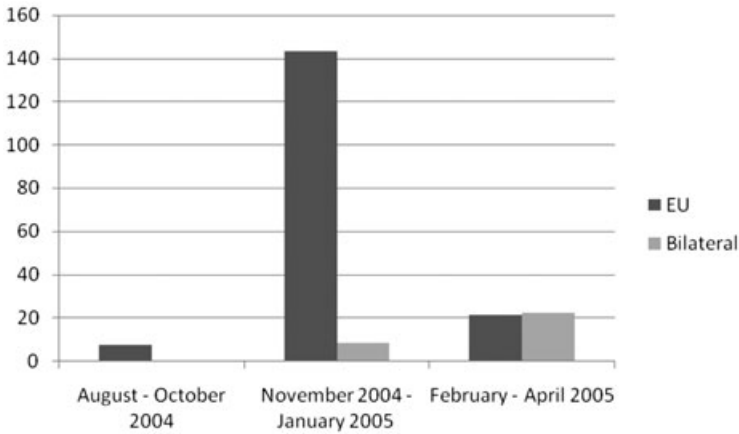

Source: Authors' own calculations.

2. If an extraordinary event (such as the Orange Revolution) takes place in Ukraine, then the proportion of bilateral activities will rise. A more detailed view on the time horizon from August 2004 to April 2005, which covers the political crisis in Ukraine and the short periods of time directly before and after it, shows that there is a substantial increase in the overall attention given to Ukraine. Although the share of bilaterally focused articles was growing (Figure 5), looking at the development in absolute numbers (Figure 6), the increase in bilateral issues in the time of crisis (November 2004 to January 2005) can be considered marginal compared to the number of the EU-framed articles. In the Revolution's aftermath – that is, the three months following it – the bilateral element increased substantially. This was, however, given by three factors: (1) the steep decline in the number of articles dealing with Ukraine in absolute terms; (2) the visit of Sarkozy to Ukraine in February 2005; and (3) the visit of the newly elected Yushchenko to Germany in March 2005. Nevertheless, during both of the visits, the main topic discussed was the possible role of Germany or France, respectively, in assisting Ukraine in the intensification of its ties with the EU. Hence, our results do not confirm Hypothesis 2: although the Orange Revolution led to greater attention to the relationship with Ukraine, it did not cause a bilateralization of the relations. This finding is particularly interesting since it runs counter to the common-sense expectation that at times of crisis, EU external policies fragment into diverging national positions.
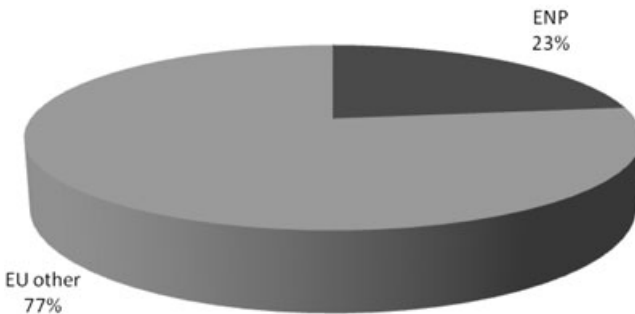
Figure 6: Number of 'EU-Framed' and 'Bilateral' Reports during the 2004–05 Crisis in Ukraine
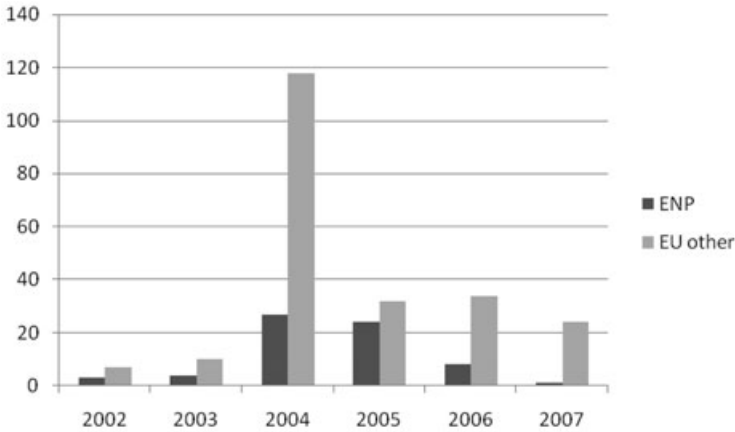

Source: Authors' own calculations.

Figure 7: Share of 'ENP-Framed' Articles within the 'EU-Related' Reports

Source: Authors' own calculations.

3. If a unified policy is created within the EU (such as the European neigh-
   bourhood policy), this will gradually become a major reference point for
   the national policies as well (Figures 7 and 8). Although the ENP gained
   some attention between 2002 and 2005, its share in the EU-related reports
   has been declining ever since. The peak of the attention to the ENP
   corresponded to a general rise in the number of EU-related reports
   connected to the political crisis in Ukraine at the turn of 2004 and 2005,
   but after these events, the ENP has been increasingly marginalized, even

Figure 8: Development in Number of 'ENP-Framed' Reports

Source: Authors' own calculations.

though the policy's *instrumentarium* and legal base have become much stronger. We can conclude that Hypothesis 3 is falsified as well: in the national mass media discourses, the ENP has not become a major reference point as a policy streamlining most EU activities towards Ukraine.

Conclusions

This article has shown that the study of the EU as an actor has so far been limited to the three aspects of actorness (legitimacy, recognition and attractiveness) while omitting to take into account the fourth aspect – that of the EU's framing power, or rather the ability of the EU to influence foreign policy decisions of individual EU Member States. In other words, it is the framing power of the Union that decides its ability to push through its own proposals about the course of action that should be taken and the interests that should be the goals of the Union's policies. This case study on Ukraine, which analysed the references to the EU in the most influential print media of the three biggest EU Member States, confirms that the EU is strongly present in the public discourse on foreign policy of these countries and that it often occupies an even more prominent place than the individual EU Member States. In other words, the framing ability of the EU is considerable since the acceptance of national positions in the national media is dependent on the perceived harmony between the national position and the overarching interests, priorities and directions set by the EU as a whole.

Interestingly, the EU's framing power is not substantially diminished by strong national preferences for Ukraine (as in the case of Germany, in comparison to France). This is quite surprising and may be attributed either – as rationalists would have it – to the fact that the position of the EU as a whole is not so far from that of Germany or – as constructivists would maintain – to Germany's strong link to the integration process, which is also reflected in its acceptance of EU leadership.

The lack of increase in bilateral relations during crisis events is another surprising finding. In particular, the Orange Revolution brought more attention to an EU-wide approach in all three countries. The same, even though to a lesser extent, applies to the Russo–Ukrainian energy crisis a year later. The growth of attention to Ukraine during this period was exponential, but the same cannot be said about articles with a bilateral focus. Hence, although the common-sense understanding is that crises may shatter a common EU position (such as in the Iraq War), it is certainly not universally applicable to all foreign policy situations, which might in fact lead to a more unified position.

Third, although the EU is the prevalent actor in the national media analyses, its influence has a number of limitations. First, there is no clear trend of growth of the EU's share in the articles, with the Member States' bilateral activities occupying the same space throughout the six years. In addition, concrete policies of the EU, such as the ENP, no matter how relevant they may be for Ukraine, drew little attention from national media – most notably from the British newspapers. So, the EU's framing power rests on a rather general understanding of the EU as an important shaper of a policy than on the knowledge of the exact policies and instruments.

This research has indicated some basic directions in which the exploration of the EU's power to define and push through its own interests might proceed in the future. However, this article has left a number of important questions untouched. For instance, further research will be needed to show the precise link between the overwhelming presence of the EU in national media and the argumentation strategies of national policy-makers both in situations where their proposals are in compliance with the EU's stance and in those where their proposals are opposed to it. Also, it might be interesting to find out how national media react to situations where the EU's position remains undefined but individual Member States have strongly conflicting views.

Correspondence:
Petr Kratochvíl
Institute of International Relations, Prague Nerudova 3
11852 Prague 1, Czech Republic
email kratochvil@iir.cz

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