

## ARTICLE

# Critical Discourse Analysis in the Perception of European Union Media Discourse: Representations of Power, Crisis, and Identity

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to investigate how the European Union is represented in selected European media outlets using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a methodological basis. Specifically, the research draws on Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model and the Discursive-Historical Approach (DHA) to reveal how linguistic and discursive techniques contribute to shaping dominant narratives about the EU. Through a qualitative analysis of 30 news articles from five diverse media organizations within the EU, the study highlights that journalistic discourse not only reflects but also actively influences public perceptions of the Union. Three main themes emerge from the analysis: the portrayal of the EU as a fragmented and overly bureaucratic entity, often criticized for its inefficiency and democratic shortcomings; the dominance of a crisis-focused narrative that frames the EU primarily through the lens of political, economic, and social turmoil, reinforcing a sense of instability; and the expression of European identity is mediated through processes of inclusion and exclusion, whereby certain groups, values, or countries are either included in or excluded from the concept of Europeanness. The findings demonstrate how media narratives play a role in (re)creating power dynamics within the EU environment, positioning media outlets not only as passive conduits of information but as active ideological actors. The article highlights how critical discourse analysis reveals power dynamics in political and institutional language. Ultimately, the study offers insights into how discourse shapes and is shaped by larger sociopolitical developments, such as European integration, identity creation, and polarization within the EU.

**Keywords:** European Union; Critical Discourse Analysis; Media Discourse, Ideology; Crisis, Identity; Fairclough; Wodak

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# 1. Introduction

In modern Europe, the media serve a crucial function not only in reporting events but also in shaping the meanings and identities that influence public perceptions of the European Union (EU). As the EU faces ongoing challenges such as Brexit, the migration issue, the ascent of right-wing populism, and continual discussions about integration and sovereignty, the narratives created by media organizations are vital to how citizens view the Union and its policies. Media discourse does not simply mirror reality; it plays an active role in forming it. By strategically employing language, particular ideologies, power dynamics, and cultural beliefs are either reinforced or challenged. In this context, de Vreese explains in his study on EU referenda and public opinion that the portrayal and framing of EU matters by the media significantly shape citizens' political views, particularly due to the limited direct knowledge many have regarding EU institutions<sup>[1]</sup>. Eurobarometer surveys have consistently demonstrated that trust in the EU is linked to how it is represented in national media. Nations with more favorable EU media coverage tend to exhibit greater pro-EU public sentiment, such as Ireland, Portugal, while countries with a more skeptical media perspective show higher levels of mistrust, such as UK, Hungary. For instance, throughout the Brexit discussions, UK tabloids like *The Sun* and *The Daily Mail* regularly depicted the EU as bureaucratic, undemocratic, and intrusive, which helped cultivate a public perception that favored "taking back control"<sup>[2]</sup>. Media does not dictate our thinking but rather influences what we consider important<sup>[3]</sup>. Within the EU framework, media organizations influence what citizens perceive as important about the EU by highlighting topics such as migration or sovereignty. Research by Koopmans and Statham indicates that national media narratives produce different understandings of EU integration<sup>[4]</sup>. In certain countries, like Germany, media presents the EU as a source of economic opportunity, whereas in others, such as the UK, it is framed as a loss of sovereignty. Furthermore, the media strategically employs language to either uphold or contest ideologies, power dynamics, and cultural beliefs. For instance, Norman Fairclough and Teun A. van Dijk assert that language in the media is never neutral; it is influenced by prevailing power relations and ideologies. He explains that the media serves as a platform where dominant narratives can either be supported or challenged. For example, according to

Mixed Migration Review, the phrase "migrant crisis", widely used in European media in 2015–2024, suggests a burden, while alternative terms like "refugee protection" emphasize a moral duty<sup>[5]</sup>. Right-wing populist outlets frequently utilize labels such as "invasion" or "Islamification" to frame migration in cultural and existential terms, thereby reinforcing nationalist ideologies<sup>[5]</sup>.

This investigation employs a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) perspective to explore how selected EU media outlets depict the European Union, its institutions, and the broader concept of "Europeanness". CDA offers methodologies to reveal the ideological foundations of media texts and examine how language is utilized to either reinforce or contest prevailing narratives. By analyzing discursive trends across various prominent European media outlets, this article aims to comprehend the role of language as a mechanism of power in influencing public discussions surrounding the EU.

The analysis will concentrate on three primary research inquiries:

**Q1.** In what manner is the EU represented in the chosen media texts?

**Q2.** Which discursive techniques are used to create narratives about the Union and its principles?

**Q3.** How do these portrayals mirror wider political or ideological viewpoints?

The paper starts by reviewing existing literature on media discourse and the European Union, then shifts to an examination of the theoretical framework and methodology. It subsequently presents the outcomes of the discourse analysis, emphasizing thematic patterns, the representation of societal actors, and rhetorical techniques. The article concludes by considering the implications of these results for understanding the power of media and the construction of EU identity amid political change.

# 2. Literature Review

The link between media discourse and politics within the European Union (EU) has received growing attention from scholars, especially as the EU confronts challenges to its legitimacy, experiences integration crises, and engages in discussions about its identity and position in the global framework. The media play a crucial role in shaping public understanding of EU events, figures, and institutions.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has emerged as a vital theoretical and methodological approach for exploring how these meanings are created, justified, and disputed.

CDA was developed in response to the shortcomings of conventional linguistic analysis, highlighting the connections among discourse, power, and ideology. Prominent scholars such as Norman Fairclough, Teun A. van Dijk and Ruth Wodak have each introduced unique CDA models<sup>[6-8]</sup>. Fairclough's three-dimensional framework—consisting of textual analysis, discourse practice, and sociocultural practice—is frequently employed to examine the interplay between discourse and larger social structures. Van Dijk focuses on the significance of cognition and knowledge control in discourse, particularly within media contexts. Meanwhile, Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) proves particularly useful for analyzing EU-related issues, as it takes into account historical context, intertextuality, and the evolving characteristics of discursive practices<sup>[8]</sup>.

Researchers have demonstrated that media discourse is inherently biased. Van Dijk contends that the process of news production operates within elite frameworks and that media texts frequently reflect prevailing ideological viewpoints, particularly in how they depict political figures, migrants, and EU institutions<sup>[7]</sup>. The manner in which news stories are framed—what is highlighted, excluded, or questioned—can greatly influence how audiences perceive them. Entman describes framing as the method of emphasizing certain elements of a perceived reality to advance a specific problem definition, causal interpretation, or moral judgement<sup>[9]</sup>. In EU media, framing often revolves around dichotomies such as “Brussels elites vs. national sovereignty” or “integration vs. fragmentation”<sup>[9]</sup>.

Fairclough explains CDA is a dialectical-relational framework that merges linguistic scrutiny with social theory<sup>[6]</sup>. It consists of three interconnected levels of examination: Textual Analysis Investigates vocabulary, grammar, cohesion, and structure to reveal how language shapes meaning; Discursive Practice Concentrates on the ways texts are created, shared, and interpreted, including the intertextuality and interdiscursivity present in discourse. In this regard, Social Practice Links discourse to wider sociopolitical and ideological contexts, analyzing how discourse either reinforces or alters power dynamics. This framework facilitates a thorough exploration of how discourses can sustain dom-

inance or foster resistance. When examining power, identity, or crises, Fairclough's CDA aims to unveil ideological foundations, concealed assumptions, and hegemonic tactics within spoken and written communication.

Power, crisis, and identity are intricately linked within discourse. Crises frequently create a chance for discourse to (re)define identities and either reaffirm or challenge power dynamics. By utilizing Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis, scholars can reveal how these negotiations are linguistically represented and carry ideological implications, exposing both the small-scale linguistic mechanisms and larger sociopolitical frameworks involved. Power in discourse pertains to how language is utilized to establish, uphold, or question social authority and hierarchies. Michel Foucault's concept of power being distributed and manifested through discursive practices has greatly impacted contemporary Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)<sup>[10]</sup>. Power is not simply possessed but is performed through language within institutional, media, and daily exchanges. Norman Fairclough builds on this notion by proposing that power functions through both coercive measures and consent, frequently manifested in the regulation of discourse<sup>[11]</sup>. For instance, institutional discourses (including those in media, law, or education) influence how particular social identities and practices are either validated or marginalized. Thus, discourse acts as a battleground where power is both asserted and challenged. A crisis in communication arises when established discursive and social frameworks are unsettled. Economic, political, cultural, or environmental crises frequently spark vigorous discursive engagement aimed at reestablishing stability, rationalizing alterations, or shifting responsibility. Fairclough views crisis discourses as instances where hegemony faces challenges and new ideologies are developed<sup>[12]</sup>. He particularly connects this to neoliberalism, demonstrating how narratives of crisis (such as those during the 2008 financial crisis) are framed by elites to rationalize policy changes or austerity measures. Identity within discourse is not a static concept; it is created, negotiated, and enacted through language. Social agents position themselves and others utilizing discursive tools, with these identities influenced by power dynamics. Fairclough highlights the idea of “discursive identity,” illustrating how individuals and groups are called into specific roles, for example “consumer”, “migrant”, “terrorist” by prevailing discourses. Consequently, the process of identity

construction serves as a crucial means by which ideological control is imposed or challenged<sup>[13]</sup>.

Various studies have utilized Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to investigate how the European Union is represented in public discussions. Wodak and Boukala assess the EU's handling of crises, highlighting the ways in which discourses of fear and solidarity are utilized<sup>[14]</sup>. Triandafyllidou and Wodak analyze how European identity is framed by national media through themes of inclusion and exclusion<sup>[8, 15]</sup>. In a similar vein, Krzyżanowski examines the portrayal of migration in media discourse related to the EU, demonstrating how symbolic divisions are established between 'Europeans' and 'Others'<sup>[16]</sup>.

Throughout the Brexit discourse, CDA revealed significant discursive fractures. Koller, Kopf, and Miglbauer (2019) studied British and European newspapers and discovered differing interpretations of sovereignty, democracy, and identity<sup>[17]</sup>. Their results substantiate the argument that the EU cannot be regarded as a unified discursive entity, as it is perceived differently across various linguistic, national, and ideological frameworks.

Although there is an increasing amount of research, further comparative and multilingual studies are necessary to comprehend how EU discourse differs among member states and various media platforms. Additionally, the influence of digital media and algorithmic filtering on EU discourse is a developing area that still requires more exploration. This article aims to enhance the existing literature by employing critical discourse analysis (CDA) on a multilingual collection of EU media texts, concentrating on the ideologies present in their narratives and the consequences for European identity and democratic legitimacy.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

This research is rooted in the field of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which adopts an interdisciplinary method for examining language to reveal the power dynamics and ideological frameworks present in discourse. CDA perceives language as more than just a neutral communication tool; it perceives language as a social practice that both mirrors and influences power relations within society. This approach is particularly effective for analyzing media texts, where discourse strategies often help to justify political stances,

reinforce social hierarchies, or create collective identities.

Fairclough defines discourse as both a type of social practice and a means through which power, ideology, and social dynamics are formed and challenged<sup>[6]</sup>. He combines linguistic examination with social theory, particularly drawing on Marxist, Gramscian, and Foucauldian concepts, to assert that discourse plays a crucial role in comprehending social transformation. He further emphasizes that

“Discourse is not merely a mirror of social processes and structures, but is also an integral part of those processes and structures.....The critical approach is... interested in how discourse figures within processes of social change, and in how it contributes to the reproduction or transformation of social relations including power relations”<sup>[6]</sup>.

However, the principles of Fairclough's Theory Discourse as Social Practice that mentioned above. He posits that discourse is both Constitutive and Constituted<sup>[6]</sup>. In this context, Constitutive shapes social identities, relations, and systems of knowledge. Constituted is shaped by social structures and contexts. This duality implies that language is not a neutral medium, but a form of social action that reflects and influences the broader sociopolitical landscape. The primary analytical framework employed in this research is Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model of discourse, which consists of: Textual analysis: Analyzing linguistic characteristics such as vocabulary, grammar, cohesion, and rhetorical techniques<sup>[6]</sup>. Discourse practice: Exploring how texts are created, disseminated, and received, including the concepts of intertextuality and interdiscursivity. Sociocultural practice: Examining how larger social, political, and cultural contexts influence and are influenced by discourse. This tripartite model enables a comprehensive examination of both the micro-level use of language and macro-level ideological implications. For instance, the use of passive voice or nominalization in a news article might obscure agency, while its intertextual connections can expose affiliations with specific ideological stances<sup>[6]</sup>.

Van Dijk's methodology, akin to that of Fairclough, seeks to connect the detailed structures of language with the broader structures of society. He argues that there is no straightforward relationship between social structures

and discourse structures, instead focusing primarily on cognition<sup>[18]</sup>. Additionally, he asserts that since discourse is fundamentally linguistic, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) should be based on linguistic and cognitive principles. As a result, Kintsch and Van Dijk have made a distinction between the micro-structure and macro-structure of a text<sup>[19]</sup>. The macro level addresses issues of power, domination, and disparities among social groups, while the micro level pertains to language use, discourse, verbal interaction, and communication<sup>[20]</sup>.

Gunther Kress, while being a trailblazer in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), ultimately separated himself from the field<sup>[8]</sup>. Kress and Van Leeuwen developed the idea of social semiotics as they worked on CDA, recognizing that power and other social dynamics manifest through different semiotic modes, indicating that critical analysis should not be restricted to just verbal language<sup>[21]</sup>. They also made significant contributions to discourse analysis by introducing the notion of multi-modality.

At first, Fairclough described his approach to language study as “critical language study”, but he soon found it to be restrictive<sup>[22]</sup>. To address these constraints, Fairclough redefined his approach to CDA as not simply another method for studying language, but rather as “an alternative orientation,” and “a social theory of discourse,” aimed at merging linguistically-focused discourse analysis with pertinent social and political perspectives on discourse and language<sup>[22]</sup>. Although Fairclough asserted that he did not intend to be prescriptive and was offering a “guide not a blueprint” for conducting CDA<sup>[11]</sup>. He did offer methodological suggestions and a range of “text analytic techniques” that primarily emphasized the methodology and practical application of critical discourse analysis<sup>[23]</sup>. The pioneers illustrated various tools that can be employed in critical discourse analysis (CDA) to scrutinize discourse. Van Dijk presents a compilation that includes aspects such as word arrangement, lexical style, coherence, topic selection, speech acts, rhetorical devices, and grammatical structures. In “Principles of critical discourse analysis,” Van Dijk highlights the connection between power and discourse, a theme also explored by Fairclough, to whom this paper is dedicated. According to Van Dijk, the essential factors for analyzing the relationship between power and discourse are the “patterns of access to the public”<sup>[18]</sup>.

Fairclough presents the notion of *IDFs* (ideological-discursive formations) as a representation of a type of ‘speech community’ characterized by its own discourse rules and ideological norms, linked with groups in an institution that usually hold a dominant position. Following the standards of a specific *IDF* leads to the creation and framing of subjects. The key attribute of dominant ideological discursive formations is their capacity to render ideologies as natural, making it seem as though people view the ideology as intrinsic rather than constructed, representing non-ideological common sense. A notable feature emphasized by Fairclough, an important component of CDA, is that while *IDFs* ‘naturalize’ ideologies, CDA seeks to ‘denaturalize’ them by revealing how social structures influence discourse characteristics<sup>[22]</sup>. This element is also vital in my investigation of migration within the British public sphere, as it may help in identifying discourse traits in the media.

The concept of ideology is fundamental to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)—these are collections of meanings that contribute to the perpetuation of power structures. Drawing upon Antonio Gramsci’s concept of hegemony, experts in CDA argue that power is frequently sustained not through overt coercion but rather through the subtle and often unnoticed functioning of dominant narratives<sup>[24]</sup>. Media discourse acts as an important space for the challenge of hegemonic meanings, where certain perspectives are established as common knowledge while others are marginalized. In the setting of the European Union, media texts may reflect ideological struggles between supranationalism and nationalism, cosmopolitanism and populism, or neoliberalism and social democracy. CDA elucidates these conflicts through specific choices in language, syntactic structures, and thematic elements.

Framing and Representation closely tied to ideology is the notion of framing, which pertains to how issues are constructed both linguistically and symbolically. Frames influence the way audiences perceive events, actors, and processes. As Entman points out, framing involves highlighting certain aspects of a perceived reality to enhance their visibility<sup>[9]</sup>. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) uncovers how particular frames gain prominence in EU media narratives, such as the EU being depicted as a “bureaucratic monster,” migrants as a “threat,” or the nation-state as a “victim of globalization”<sup>[9]</sup>. Representation is another crucial

concept, especially regarding how social actors are included or excluded from discourse. According to van Leeuwen, representation strategies like activation versus passivation, personalization versus impersonalization, and nomination versus categorization reveal how identities and relationships are constructed through discourse<sup>[25]</sup>.

The Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) considering the intricate and historically layered nature of EU discourse, this study also utilizes Ruth Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA). DHA incorporates historical, political, and social contexts into the analysis, making it particularly appropriate for topics related to the EU<sup>[8]</sup>. It focuses on intertextuality, argumentation tactics, and the development of collective memories and identities over time. For instance, DHA helps clarify how mentions of World War II, the fall of communism, or the Eurozone crisis are employed in current media discourse to either legitimize or delegitimize the EU. This theoretical framework offers a solid basis for examining how EU media discourses function at both textual and sociopolitical levels. By integrating Fairclough's structural model with concepts of ideology, framing, and historical context, the study seeks to reveal the concealed power dynamics within public representations of the European Union.

## 4. Methodology

This research utilizes a qualitative Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) methodology to investigate how discourse related to the European Union is shaped across selected media sources. The objective is to uncover the linguistic and discursive techniques employed to depict the EU, its institutions, and significant political issues, particularly during times of increased public and political strain. The analysis is organized as a case-based comparative discourse study, utilizing a small yet varied collection of news articles from notable European media organizations. The emphasis is on news reporting that illustrates broader ideological narratives concerning the EU, including topics like migration policy, Brexit, EU expansion, and economic governance. This CDA methodology is interpretative, allowing for an in-depth examination of language usage while remaining attentive to wider sociopolitical contexts. The study adopts Fairclough's three-dimensional model, combining textual analysis with discourse practices and sociocultural interpretation.

### 4.1. Data Selection and Corpus Description

A targeted sampling approach was employed to gather articles that possess substantial ideological significance and are pertinent to the political dialogue within the EU. The data were obtained from the websites of European Union newspapers, which are available online, and the spoken data is part of them, released between 2022 and 2024, a timeframe characterized by major EU events such as the Ukraine crisis, discussions surrounding strategic autonomy, and adjustments following Brexit. Media outlets selected:

#### 4.1.1. Euronews

1. *"State of the union: Eu struggles for the Right Middle East Policy"*<sup>[26]</sup>.
2. *"Debate on the future of the Green Pact Reignites Deep Divisions"*<sup>[27]</sup>.
3. *"Far-right gains could transform the EU's stance on Global Matters"*<sup>[28]</sup>.
4. *"Europeans want stronger EU in Global Affairs but not a priority: Poll"*<sup>[29]</sup>.
5. *"Von der Leyen: Too right for the left and too left for the right?"*<sup>[30]</sup>.
6. *"Analysis: In Rome, socialists warned of 'real danger' for EU elections, euronews"*<sup>[31]</sup>.

#### 4.1.2. Politico Europe (EN)

1. *"J'accuse: Leftist intellectuals turn right"*<sup>[32]</sup>.
2. *"Europe's far right uses TikTok to win youth vote"*<sup>[33]</sup>.
3. *"How the far right weaponized heat pumps"*<sup>[34]</sup>.
4. *"Ursula von der Leyen's secret climate crusade"*<sup>[35]</sup>.
5. *"The billionaire who wants to make france great again"*<sup>[36]</sup>.
6. *"Getting woke on Smoke"*<sup>[37]</sup>.

#### 4.1.3. Le Monde (FR)

1. *"A Munich, J. D. Vance Déclare Une guerre idéologique à l'Europe"*<sup>[38]</sup>.
2. *"Elections européennes 2024: Les Obsessions antimigrants, antiwoke, anti-écologie des partis d'extrême droite européens"*<sup>[39]</sup>.
3. *"A l'extrême droite, un autre point de Vue Sur l'Europe"*<sup>[40]</sup>.
4. *"Pourquoi Les élections européennes suscitent un in-*

*térêt inattendu chez les Français*”<sup>[41]</sup>.

5. *Les macronistes se ressoudent Autour de la question Ukrainienne*<sup>[42]</sup>.
6. “*‘le défi russe pour l’Europe est aujourd’hui bien moins militaire qu’idéologique*”<sup>[43]</sup>.

#### 4.1.4. Der Spiegel (DE)

1. “(S+) *AFD-Höhenflug: Hilft Jetzt Nur noch ein Parteiverbot?*”<sup>[44]</sup>.
2. “(S+) *per Leo und Daniel-Pascal Zorn: Autoren über diskurs MIT Rechten*”<sup>[45]</sup>.
3. “*Suche, DER SPIEGEL*”<sup>[46]</sup>.
4. “*Der Spiegel zum hören 38/2020 – audioverzeichnis*”<sup>[47]</sup>.
5. “(S+) *AFD: Extrem verharmlost – Neue Machtnetzwerke bei der Extremen Rechten*”<sup>[48]</sup>.
6. “(S+) *meinung: Ein deutscher in Taiwan: Darum Müssen Wir uns China entgegenstellen*”<sup>[49]</sup>.

#### 4.1.5. Rzeczpospolita (PL)

1. “*O Co Chodzi Z tą CAŁĄ IDEOLOGIĄ woke*”<sup>[50]</sup>.
2. “*Koniec Ery Wolnego handlu. Nadchodzi Zielony protekcyjizm I Rywalizacja mocarstw*”<sup>[51]</sup>.
3. “*Nadużywanie Pojęcia populizm Zaciemnia Obraz chorób trapiących liberalną demokrację*”<sup>[52]</sup>.
4. “*A borderless europe under siege, Revista de Prensa*”<sup>[53]</sup>.
5. “*Ojkofofia, Czyli Nić łącząca andrzeja dudę, Szymon Marciniaka i „new york timesa*”<sup>[54]</sup>.
6. “*Jacek Zalesny: Wolne Słowo W Imadle Konieczności*”<sup>[55]</sup>.

These publications were selected to reflect various national contexts, editorial viewpoints, and audience demographics within the European Union.

## 4.2. Analytical Procedures

Each text was analyzed using the following CDA techniques:

### 4.2.1. Textual Analysis

- Lexical choice and connotation (for example, use of

“crisis,” “threat,” “solidarity”).

- Grammar and syntax (for example, use of passive voice, modality, nominalization).
- Metaphors and figurative language (for example, “fortress Europe,” “Brussels bubble”).

### 4.2.2. Discursive Strategies

- Nomination and predication (how actors are named and described).
- Argumentation schemes (use of topoi such as danger, numbers, authority).
- Framing devices (problem definitions, moral evaluations, proposed solutions).

### 4.2.3. Sociocultural Practice

- The wider ideological and institutional frameworks within which the discourse functions.

The aim is to reveal the linguistic and discursive strategies through which the EU is portrayed—whether it is legitimized, delegitimized, or ideologically challenged—through five different European media sources.

The analysis incorporates references to various discourses, such as national politics, historical events, and global conflicts. A thorough examination of historical narratives, political affiliations, and institutional contexts was conducted to ensure analytical precision, with codes and themes continuously refined throughout the analytical process. Emerging trends were evaluated across diverse media and linguistic-cultural contexts to identify similarities and differences in the discursive portrayal of the EU.

All materials utilized in this research are publicly accessible and were chosen for their relevance and significance rather than for sensationalist content. Nevertheless, some limitations should be recognized. The sample size is limited and does not encompass the full spectrum of EU media discourse. Moreover, while Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) prioritizes depth over breadth, it is inherently subjective and may be shaped by the analyst’s viewpoint. This methodology provides a solid framework for exploring the ideological construction of the EU within media discourse. The results from this analysis will be organized thematically in the subsequent section.

## 5. Analysis

The analysis of the selected media texts uncovers multiple consistent themes and discursive tactics in the way the European Union is portrayed. These themes represent not only patterns in language but also underlying ideological stances presented in public narratives concerning the EU. From the analysis, three primary themes emerged: (1) the EU as a disputed political entity, (2) the EU in the context of crisis discourse, and (3) the concept of Europeanness along with the formation of identity and otherness.

The European Union as a disputed political entity, in the context, the European Union is depicted not as a cohesive, authoritarian entity, but rather as a fragmented and bureaucratic organization. Media narratives frequently present the EU as a venue of internal conflict and institutional ineffectiveness. For example, *Der Spiegel* characterized the European Commission's migration reform proposal as

*"a compromise built on diplomatic gymnastics"*<sup>[47]</sup>.

This phrase above indicates a lack of clarity and determination. This is linguistically accomplished through: Passive voice constructions: for instance, "New regulations were proposed", which obscures the agents and accountability. Nominalization: for example, "The failure of coordination", which abstracts the events and disguises political actors. Machinery and stagnation metaphors: for instance, "The EU engine is sputtering," as noted in *Le Monde*<sup>[56]</sup>, are employed to criticize the slow pace of integration. Such linguistic choices foster a depiction of the EU as technocratic, hesitant, and disconnected from its citizens, reinforcing Eurosceptic viewpoints even in media outlets that usually support European ideals.

The discourse of crisis in the European Union shows that the EU often finds itself characterized by a continuous crisis narrative. Whether it's issues surrounding migration or energy policy. European media often portray events using themes of peril, immediacy, and failure. This framing is particularly notable in the coverage of the Ukraine conflict and its implications for the EU's strategic autonomy by *Politico Europe* (von der Leyen, 2025) and *Euronews*<sup>[57]</sup>.

Common rhetorical strategies include: War metaphors, such as

*"Brussels is fighting a battle on multiple fronts"*.

The phrase above likely refers to the challenges and pressures faced by the city or the European Union (EU) insti-

tutions located there, rather than an actual military conflict. It suggests that Brussels is addressing multiple complex issues simultaneously that impact its political, economic, or social landscape. These "fronts" could involve matters such as economic reforms, civil unrest, geopolitical hurdles, or even internal divisions within the EU itself. Terms like "chaotic summit" and "botched response" dramatize policy initiatives and amplify negative connotations; likewise, phrases centered on threat and accountability, like "In the light of the war in Ukraine, Europe is seeking to adapt to new forms of conflict taking place far from the traditional frontlines.....Europe must act or face irrelevance", instill a sense of moral urgency. These narratives not only push for action but also depict the EU more as a reactive organization than a proactive one. The continued focus on crisis reinforces the perception of the EU as being in a perpetual state of transition and uncertainty.

However, European identity and the formation of 'Self' and 'Other' exhibit a remarkable pattern in discourse pertains to the formulation of what it means to be European and the identification of its supposed 'Others'. This was particularly pronounced in discussions surrounding migration and debates on EU expansion. Articles from *Rzeczpospolita* and *Le Monde* often established symbolic distinctions between "European values" and those of non-EU entities, especially regarding migration from Africa or EU expansion towards the Western Balkans<sup>[53, 58]</sup>. Key rhetorical tactics include: framing of Us vs. Them, such as in phrases like,

*"Europe's borders under siege" or "the challenge of assimilating non-European cultures"*.

The two phrases reflect different yet related aspects of the ongoing migration debate in Europe. The first statement emphasizes the perceived threats to European sovereignty and security arising from high levels of migration, particularly irregular migration, while the second highlights the difficulties of integrating diverse cultural communities within European societies. Both phrases address the complexities and tensions surrounding migration in Europe, but they approach the issue from different perspectives. Cultural essentialism is apparent in references to a "shared European heritage" in contrast to "incompatible values." There is also a moral evaluation in which the EU is viewed positively as a humanitarian entity, stating "Europe must uphold its values," while migrants or external countries are portrayed negatively as threats. These representations aid in the creation of a



normative European identity founded on liberal democratic values, while simultaneously excluding those deemed incompatible. The discourse subtly reinforces the Fortress Europe ideology, even in otherwise progressive media outlets.

The synthesis of discursive patterns shows that the EU is portrayed through a dualistic discourse across different languages and media: as both a normative ideal and an ineffective bureaucracy. This contradiction illustrates the persistent conflicts between integration and sovereignty, solidarity and nationalism, as well as cosmopolitanism and exclusion. While certain outlets like *Le Monde* focus on themes of unity and humanitarian values, others, such as *Rzeczpospolita* draw attention to dissatisfaction with the central governance of the EU, particularly from newer or more nationalist member states.

## 6. Case-Driven Comparative Results

**Euronews Framing:** A pan-European, multilingual platform with a populist-liberal inclination.

- **Textual Analysis:** Generally, the tone remains balanced and often neutral, while expressing some uncertainty about EU unity through terms like ‘cracks’ and ‘divisions’. The presence of modal verbs such as ‘may’, ‘could’, and ‘appears’ indicates a level of epistemic uncertainty, especially regarding contentious issues like migration or green policies. It consistently utilizes identity-focused labels such as ‘far-right’, ‘populist’, and ‘pro-European’, which help situate political figures within specific ideological contexts.
- **Discursive Practices:** Showcases differing viewpoints from member states to underscore the diversity and fragmentation within the Union. Positions the EU as a site for negotiation rather than a unified entity.
- **Sociocultural Interpretation:** Functions as a transnational mediating discourse, often alleviating nationalist-EU tensions while acknowledging their existence. Legitimately presents the EU as a platform for pluralistic dialogue while also highlighting its susceptibility.

**Politico Europe Framing:** Offers an elite, insider viewpoint from Brussels, concentrating on policy with a technical focus.

- **Textual Analysis:** Makes use of specialized terms and

formal language, such as ‘regulatory alignment’ and ‘competence debate’. Uses softer language to address conflicts, such as ‘coordination gaps’ and ‘rather than conflict’. Successfully employs metonymy, such as using ‘Brussels’ to represent the entire EU framework.

- **Discursive Practices:** The articles presume that readers possess an understanding of EU frameworks, establishing an epistemic barrier. They emphasize institutional legitimacy while simultaneously revealing internal inconsistencies.
- **Sociocultural Interpretation:** Reflects the elite’s concerns (Green Deal, digital regulation, transatlantic policies). Reveals the friction between EU technocracy and populist movements within member states.

**Le Monde Framing:** Center-left, pro-European, and intellectual; heavily interpretive.

- **Textual Analysis:** The chosen language typically demonstrates an adherence to EU ideals, such as democracy, solidarity, and peace. It employs discursive dichotomies, such as ‘European values vs. far-right nationalism’, to bolster the legitimacy of the EU. There is a significant focus on personal interpretation, often citing philosophers and intellectuals.
- **Discursive Practices:** Both reflects and shapes a moral narrative centered around Europeanism. Frames EU crises (migration, populism) as pivotal tests of democratic values.
- **Sociocultural Interpretation:** *Le Monde* typically portrays the EU as a civilizational project, opposing the rise of populism and anti-liberal movements. Affirms France’s role as a defender of European identity and progressive principles.

**Der Spiegel Framing:** Investigative, skeptical of institutions, socially liberal; critical of EU structures.

- **Textual Analysis:** Employs a powerful modality and an emotional tone when addressing topics such as migration, using phrases like ‘disarray at borders’ and ‘failed unity.’ Uses confrontational metaphors, such as ‘Brussels decree’ and ‘fortress Europe,’ to highlight power imbalances and institutional failures. Often depicts EU dysfunction through a dramatic narrative.
- **Discursive Practices:** Blends journalistic neutrality with

activist critiques, particularly on migration, climate, and democratic degeneration. Reflects the moral and political dilemmas associated with Germany's leading role in the EU.

- **Sociocultural Interpretation:** Emphasizes institutional hypocrisy and the concentration of power, aligning with left-liberal critiques of neoliberal governance. Frames shortcomings of the EU not as ideological shortcomings but as practical consequences of elite disengagement.

**Rzeczpospolita Framing:** Conservative-liberal, providing an Eastern European viewpoint; critical of perceived ideological enforcement from the West.

- **Textual Analysis:** Employs ideological phrases like 'woke', 'Brussels agenda', and 'Eurocrats' to suggest a pushback against liberal EU ideals. The choice of

words elicits a sense of cultural disconnection, for instance, 'ojkofobia' and 'green protectionism'. Heavily integrates markers of national identity (Polish values, Catholic heritage, sovereignty).

- **Discursive Practices:** Highlights the ideological rift between Western and Eastern Europe. Stresses Poland's defensive stance in discussions regarding values, especially around migration, LGBTQ+ rights, and climate policy.
- **Sociocultural Interpretation:** Depicts the EU as a tool of cultural and economic regulation, resonating with themes of post-colonial resistance. Reveals the tension between integrationist pressures and claims of national sovereignty.

However, **Table 1** Comparative Themes Across Cases presents a summary of the prevailing themes common to the chosen case studies.

**Table 1.** Comparative Themes Across Cases.

Theme	Politico	Euronews	Le Monde	Der Spiegel	Rzeczpospolita
Technocracy vs Populism	Framed as threat	Balanced	Delegitimizes populism	Critiques both	Populism as resistance
Migration	Bureaucratized issue	Contentious terrain	Moralized solidarity	Crisis narrative	Cultural threat
EU Legitimacy	Presumed, then challenged	Continuously questioned	Normatively upheld	Functionally critiqued	Culturally contested
Ideological Framing	Elite rationality	Democratic pluralism	Progressive universalism	Investigative skepticism	Conservative nationalism
Role of the Nation-State	Subsumed under EU	Negotiated partner	Europeanized France	Reluctant leader	Defiant sovereign

## 7. Discussion

This study utilizes Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional framework of discourse—textual analysis, discursive practice, and sociocultural practice—to reveal how five European media outlets create contrasting representations of the EU. Each dimension interconnects to offer a nuanced understanding of journalistic discourse and its ideological implications.

**Textual Analysis:** At the textual level, the linguistic elements—including word choice, modality, cohesion, and rhetorical techniques—expose varied attitudes toward the legitimacy, authority, and identity of the EU. For example, *Euronews* adopts a mostly neutral tone while introducing epistemic uncertainty through modal verbs such as *may*, *could*, and *appears*. This cautiousness implies a balanced yet

reserved viewpoint regarding EU unity. Conversely, *Politico* Europe employs specialized terminology (regulatory alignment, competence debate), crafting a technocratic discourse that assumes an informed audience and bolsters institutional legitimacy. *Le Monde* employs elevated, intellectual vocabulary, often incorporating philosophical references to reinforce EU ideals. It uses dichotomous frameworks like European values versus far-right nationalism, presenting a moral narrative of the EU as a defender of liberal democracy. In contrast, *Der Spiegel* employs emotive and at times confrontational language—failed unity, fortress Europe—which heightens the perception of EU disarray and crisis. *Rzeczpospolita* reflecting its Eastern European perspective, includes ideological markers such as *woke* and *Eurocrats* that rhetorically distance Polish identity from Western liberalism. These lin-

guistic variations are not simply stylistic but possess considerable ideological significance, influencing how readers perceive through evaluative choices and thematic framing.

**Discursive Practices:** Discursive practices involve how texts are created, disseminated, and interpreted. In this context, media organizations connect with different interpretive communities and journalistic traditions. *Politico* targets an elite audience with a substantial grasp of policy discussions, whereas *Euronews* seeks broader, transnational accessibility, providing diverse representations from throughout the EU. *Le Monde*'s discourse creates a moral high ground, engaging readers in a collective European civic identity. *Der Spiegel* merges classic investigative journalism with activist critique, using dramatization and narrative intensity to provoke critical thought. Meanwhile, *Rzeczpospolita* formulates a nationalized discourse that places the Polish reader in contrast to Western ideological pressures. These practices illustrate the strategic positioning of each outlet within the European media landscape. The selection of interviewees, quotes, and narrative framing reflects not only editorial choices but also the socio-political environments in which these texts exist.

**Sociocultural Interpretation:** The sociocultural aspect reveals how discourse is influenced by wider power dynamics, historical contexts, and cultural assumptions. *Politico* Europe replicates the reasoning of EU technocracy, mirroring the institutional concerns of Brussels elites while subtly surfacing internal conflicts. *Euronews* serves as a mediating discourse, representing both the diversity and fragmentation present within the Union. It occupies a delicate position, recognizing internal divisions while advocating for transnational unity. *Le Monde* depicts the EU as a civilizational endeavor, highlighting France's intellectual and moral leadership in upholding liberal democratic principles. This idealism stands in stark contrast to *Der Spiegel*'s skepticism towards EU institutions, which it criticizes as being opaque and elitist. *Rzeczpospolita*, rooted in post-communist national narratives, characterizes the EU as a means of Western ideological domination, reinforcing concepts of sovereignty and cultural resistance.

These sociocultural interpretations reflect wider tensions: technocracy versus populism, integration versus sovereignty, and universalism versus cultural particularity. Collectively, they illustrate how discourse functions not only

to report on events but also to shape competing visions of European identity and political legitimacy. The depiction of the EU as disjointed, overly bureaucratic, and reactive mirrors and perpetuates a dominant narrative of disillusionment. Although media sources vary in their tone and perspective, they share a common portrayal of the EU as fundamentally constrained in its capability to respond effectively to pressing issues. This observation aligns with Fairclough's assertion that media narratives typically reinforce prevailing ideologies by normalizing them as conventional wisdom. Even journalism that appears critical may inadvertently legitimize political dissatisfaction with the Union, bolstering stories of institutional stagnation and elitism. Moreover, by highlighting intricacy, negotiation, and sluggishness, the media foster the notion that the EU stands in stark contrast to nation-states regarding accountability and effectiveness. This perspective corresponds with van Dijk's theory of ideological discourse, which posits that media controlled by elites frequently depict supranational governance as remote and unclear, thereby further eroding its democratic legitimacy.

Crisis as a Discursive Constant refers to the ongoing portrayal of EU developments through a crisis lens, which encourages the normalization of emergency language. This pattern has been observed in earlier research, for instance Wodak & Boukala is clearly evident in the metaphorical and evaluative language found throughout the corpus<sup>[14]</sup>. The intentional use of war imagery, moral responsibilities, and urgency framing may create an atmosphere of insecurity that can be politically leveraged to rationalize exceptional measures or bypass democratic discourse. Simultaneously, this framing of crisis reinforces the EU's moral mission, especially regarding foreign policy and migration issues. By employing this discursive approach, the EU positions itself as a defender of liberal principles—albeit one whose actions frequently do not meet expectations. This inconsistency creates room for both Eurosceptic criticism and Europhile support, underscoring the multifaceted nature of EU discourse in the media.

The examination also shows how media plays a role in shaping European identity through narratives of inclusion and exclusion. The portrayal of migration, borders, and cultural integration highlights what Triandafyllidou refers to as the symbolic limits of being European<sup>[15]</sup>. Depictions of the EU as the protector of "shared values" inevitably prompt inquiries about who is included and who is excluded. Such nar-

ratives frequently depend on binary contrasts—Europe versus non-Europe, order versus chaos, values versus threats—which carry ideological significance. This bolsters a Fortress Europe narrative, which may not always be overt but is still present in discourse through imagery of defense, threat, and control. In this manner, media discourse contributes to the symbolic reinforcement of the EU’s internal and external boundaries.

National contexts and variations in media play a crucial role in shaping the construction of narratives, despite the existence of common discursive patterns. For instance, *Le Monde* frequently aligns the European Union with the interests of France and liberal cosmopolitan ideals, while *Rzeczpospolita* presents more critical viewpoints from Eastern Europe, especially concerning sovereignty and EU centralization. This supports the notion that discussions around the EU are diverse and dependent on context, necessitating that any analysis considers the political culture and media dynamics of each nation.

## 8. Implications

This analysis shows how Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) can reveal the ideological functions of media discourse in the context of EU politics. The EU is not just the subject of reports—it is linguistically framed in manners that influence public perception, democratic engagement, and discussions on policy. Grasping these discursive processes is vital for academics, journalists, and policymakers focused on European integration and the legitimacy of democracy.

## 9. Conclusions

This article has explored how discussions related to the European Union are framed in selected media outlets across Europe using Critical Discourse Analysis. By examining the linguistic and discursive tactics employed in news articles, the research has uncovered three main themes: the EU as a divided political entity, the prevalence of crisis narratives, and the portrayal of Europeanness through notions of inclusion and exclusion. This study illustrates that CDA is an effective method for revealing the ideological roles of EU media discourse. Through analysis of language and structure, the research emphasizes how news articles characterize the EU in ways that affect political legitimacy, identity, and

solidarity. The portrayal of the EU as both ideal and flawed signifies deeper cultural and political conflicts inherent to European integration. Future research should broaden this investigation to include multimodal and digital media to gain a deeper understanding of how these discourses develop in an increasingly fragmented public arena.

The results highlight that media discourse significantly influences public understanding of the EU, not only by presenting facts but also by framing them with ideologically charged terminology. While certain representations highlight unity, humanitarian values, and common ideals, others perpetuate narratives of dysfunction, disappointment, and cultural threat. These discourses are not neutral or consistent—they differ across national and institutional contexts and reflect wider conflicts regarding power, identity, and legitimacy within the European initiative.

This research adds to the overall fields of media discourse studies and European studies by demonstrating how CDA can reveal the nuanced ways in which ideology and hegemony function within journalistic language. It also emphasizes the significance of reflexivity in media practices and the necessity for more inclusive, transparent, and dialogic public discussions concerning Europe’s future. Future inquiries might expand upon this study by including social media discourse, analyzing visual and multimodal components, or performing cross-linguistic comparative studies to further clarify the discursive construction of the EU in an increasingly mediated and polarized public environment.

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## Data Availability Statement

The data that underpin the results of this research can be found on the newspaper’s website, using the identifier

provided in the corpus section mentioned above. There is no requirement for a formal request, as the data is accessible to the public without any limitations.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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