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Migration Coverage in Europe, Russia and the United States: A comparative Analysis of Coverage in 17 countries (2015-2018)

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Abstract: Six years after the so-called ‘refugee crisis’ in 2015, the European Union remains divided on questions of migration and asylum policy. The issue also remains high on the agendas of the USA and Russia, two other key destination countries with immigration from Latin America and the Post-Soviet space. This article presents results from a comparative study of news coverage in 17 countries, focusing on 10 EU member states in Western and Central Eastern Europe (CEE), the USA and Russia. The intensity of coverage was remarkably different, with Hungary’s and Germany’s media standing out while Russian media displayed relatively low levels of coverage. Individual migrants and refugees were most visible in the two outlets from the USA. Media in CEE countries tended towards a more critical approach than media in Western Europe. However, differences between most countries’ pairs of analyzed media outlets indicate a more pluralistic debate than frequently assumed.

Keywords: comparative analysis; journalism; migration; refugee; media coverage.

INTRODUCTION

The ‘refugee crisis’¹ of 2015 has had a deep impact on public debates and political landscapes across and beyond Europe. Almost 2.5 million asylum-seekers submitted asylum claims in the European Union (EU) during 2015 and 2016.² Pictures of Syrian refugees making their way towards Europe on foot, fences erected at European borders, and boats in the Mediterranean overload with migrants and refugees, became iconic images.³ At the same time, Russia saw migration from European and Central-Asian countries, while political discourse on migration and refugee matters in the USA during the Trump presidency was arguably even more controversial than in Europe.

However, numbers of first-time asylum applicants varied considerably across countries. The debate was particularly relevant in the EU as political leaders have continuously negotiated distribution across EU states ever since 2015. Until the outbreak of COVID-19, migration and asylum policy had dominated media agendas in European transit and destination countries alike (e.g., Haller, 2017; Krüger & Zapf-Schramm, 2016; Moore et al., 2018). The discussion had a considerable impact on election outcomes, and has shed light on a sharp divide between EU countries (Harteveld et al., 2018), arguably affected by distinct migration histories. For example, while the former colonial powers of France and the UK have decades-long experience as destination countries, Italy and Spain were, until a few years ago, also origins of migration to Northern Europe. The CEE countries have been, and still are, countries of origin for intra-EU migrants (e.g., Balabanova & Balch, 2010). At the same time, Poland hosts more than 1.3 million Ukrainian citizens (Główny Urząd Statystyczny, 2020). Germany’s 2015 decision to accept an unlimited number of refugees – consequently, 60% of asylum-seekers in Europe in 2016 were registered in Germany (Eurostat, 2020) – needs to be interpreted in the historic context of World War II.

The ‘European refugee crisis’ also became a major topic in the USA, adding to increased migration from Latin America and a heated discussion on plans of a border wall and the legal status of various groups of immigrants. The USA is home to the highest absolute number of international migrants (United Nations, 2019). From 2017, Donald Trump implemented highly controversial measures to limit immigration (Schmidt, 2019). Almost simultaneously, Russia received approximately one million Ukrainian citizens after the outburst of armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine in 2014 (Bessudnov, 2016). Even before, Russia had been the world’s second biggest attractor of immigrants (mainly from former Soviet republics) between 1990 and 2015 (United Nations, 2019). On the other hand, emigration of up to 2 million well-educated specialists – ascribed to authoritarian trends since 2000 – remains virtually de-thematized in Russia’s public discourse (Herbst & Erofeev, 2019).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Broad comparative studies into coverage of recent migration and refugee matters are sparse. The meta-analysis of English-language research since 2000 conducted by Eberl et al. (2018) lists 78 studies, but only 9 comprise more than two countries.⁴ The focus of these works includes factors shaping media coverage, but also social or political effects of that coverage (Bleich et al., 2015: 857).

MIGRATION COVERAGE IN EUROPE

Generally, research into European coverage of migration and refugee matters points to a focus on negative frames such as security issues and possible threats to receiving countries’ cultures (Caviedes, 2015; Eberl et al., 2018; Esses et al., 2013), especially for migration from outside the EU (Eberl et al., 2019). In contrast to this, studies on the events of 2015 conclude that migrants (mainly refugees from Syria) received more positive coverage (Berry et al., 2015; Fotopoulos & Kaimaklioti, 2016; Lawlor & Tolley, 2017).⁵ However, migration was still depicted from a European perspective with little attention to contexts, the situation in countries of origin, or individual stories (Chouliaraki et al., 2017; Ramasubramanian & Miles, 2018).

The majority of comparative studies on migration coverage in Europe focus on Western Europe (e.g., Caviedes, 2015; Chouliaraki et al., 2017; Fotopoulos & Kaimaklioti, 2016), few add media from CEE countries (e.g., Eberl et al., 2019). A comparative analysis of the media coverage of Aylan Kurdi – the little boy found drowned on the Turkish coast in 2015 – showed that the pictures received far more attention in Western European than in CEE countries (European Journalism Observatory [EJO], 2015).

MEDIA COVERAGE IN THE USA

News coverage of immigrants in the USA is largely episodic, marked by surges around important events such as elections (Mastro, 2019). The border with Mexico constitutes a predominant issue in USA newspapers, with an estimated 200 000 border news stories published from 2010 to 2014 (Davis, 2016). This coverage is characterized by sensationalist storytelling that focuses on themes like illegal immigration and organized crime, and relies heavily on official sources (Davis, 2016; see also Somaini, 2019). However, the tone changes in coverage of young immigrants who benefit from the DACA program (known as “Dreamers”): Pro-immigrant quotes appeared over four times more frequently than anti-immigrant quotes (Patler & Gonzales, 2015). Rendon et al. (2019) found that both English and Spanish-language newspapers present DACA as a sound public policy. A study of three media networks (CBS, Fox, NBC) found that reporting on Muslim refugees was predominantly negative, with terrorist activities and conflict accounting for 75 % of the coverage (Stone, 2017).

Analyzing USA and European differences in coverage of immigrants, Benson (2015) contends that American journalists emphasize emotional narratives about individual immigrants, whereas European journalists tend to put more focus on immigration as a social process. On both continents, scholars have documented the ‘objectification’ of immigrants by news media (Arcimaviciene & Baglama, 2018; Markowitz & Slovic, 2020; Somaini, 2019). Research suggests that USA media tend to conflate the term ‘migrant’ with ‘refugee’ (Hoewe, 2018). Finally, research also shows that USA media commonly portrayed refugees as locally situated, often totally divorced from the circumstance and context which led them to flee their homeland (Hickerson & Dunsmore, 2016).

MIGRATION COVERAGE IN RUSSIA

Media in Russia have been criticized as reinforcers of natives’ alienation from and hostility towards numerous groups of migrants mainly from former Soviet republics in Central Asia and the Caucasus, by highlighting the nationality of criminals in case of crimes committed by migrants (Malashenko, 2011). Hutchings and Tolz (2015) have found that migration-related TV content follows indecisive and controversial state policies in the area of migration. Research on social media discussions around anti-immigrant bashings in 2013 has shown an institutional vacuum in protecting immigrants’ interests in online discourse (Bodrunova et al., 2017). Instead, conflicts related to immigrants have provoked radicalized discussions (Bodrunova et al., 2019). Xenophobic attitudes towards labor migrants have increased in recent years (Levada Center, 2019), whereas migrants from Ukraine are being perceived more neutrally (Bessudnov, 2016: 56).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Based on the research results summarized above, the following research questions guided our analysis:

RQ1: How visible is migration as a topic, and how does the quantity of coverage develop over time?

RQ2: Can the coverage be differentiated by geographical region and (if applicable) the political position of news outlets in terms of...

- a) ... topics covered?
- b) ... actor selection?
- c) ... portrayal of migrants and refugees?
- d) ... opinions on migration represented in coverage?

METHODOLOGY

A structured, comparative content analysis was conducted to analyze quantity, focus, themes, actors and tone of coverage. The sample involves two agenda-setting print or online media outlets in each of twelve countries: In addition to the USA and Russia, the 10 EU member states are the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain and the UK⁶ (n=1 889). The original dataset also includes data for two outlets each in Albania, Belarus, Ukraine, and Switzerland, as well as one online outlet for Greece (for all 17 countries n=2 417 articles). While some insights into coverage from these latter 5 countries will be included, the paper focuses on the initial 12 countries.⁷ National partners selected print or online media with a high impact on the national news agenda and public debate, striving for the largest-possible functional equivalence within media systems in our sample. In many Western European countries, this role is still occupied by leading quality newspapers; in many CEE countries, online portals have taken over this function. Where media outlets have an identifiable political stance, partners considered media with contrasting positions; for Russia, this duality was represented through inclusion of government newspaper *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* and privately owned *Kommersant*.

PRE-STUDY: VISIBILITY OF THE TOPIC OVER TIME

While a database-driven sampling approach may have allowed the gathering of data for longer periods of time, full and comparable database access was not available for all media. The consortium decided to pick six natural weeks: Three between August 2015 and January 2016, and three between October 2017 and March 2018 as a more recent period for comparison. The weeks were identified during a pre-study conducted in selected media from 8 of the sampled 12 countries. In each half year, the objective was to identify weeks with a particular increase of coverage as compared to the previous one.

The pre-study included outlets from the EU and beyond: Germany (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*), France (*Le Monde*), Greece (*Efimerida ton Syntakton online*), Spain (*El País*), Czech Republic (*MF Dnes*), the UK (*The Daily Telegraph*), as well as Russia (*Rossiyskaya Gazeta*) and the USA (*New York Times*).⁸ Most of the analyzed outlets showed significant increases in coverage during the same weeks. Converse trends, i.e., outlets producing less coverage when the general trend was to report more, were very rare. Thus, we may conclude that the six selected study weeks indeed represent moments of increased media interest, with *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* in the week in January 2016 being the only exception.

Figure 1. Quantitative development of coverage on migrants and refugees August 2015 – January 2016 (total: 3 187 articles)

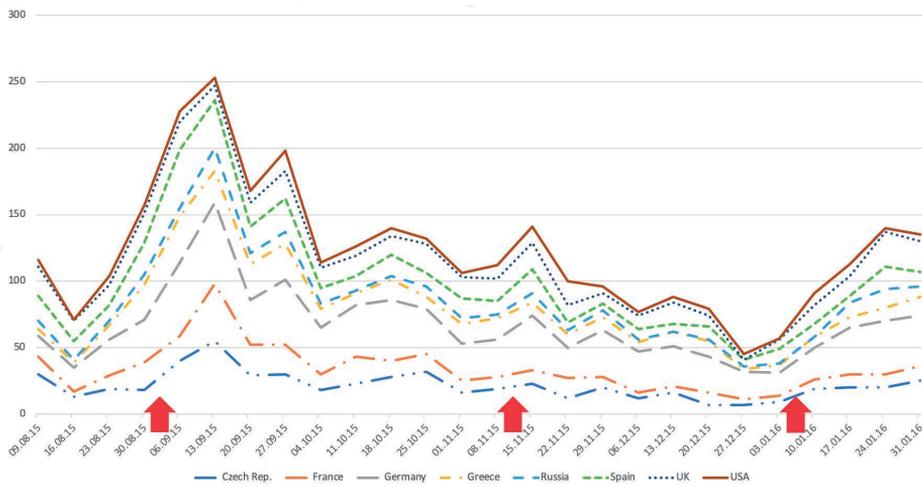
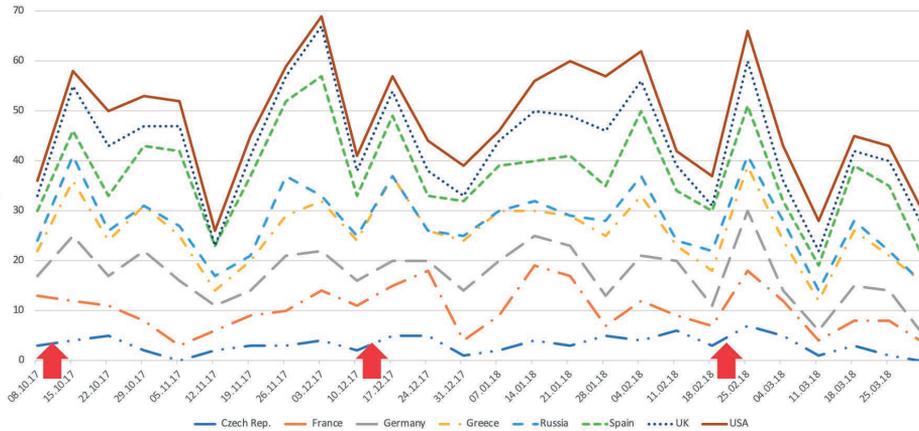


Figure 2. Quantitative development of coverage on migrants and refugees October 2017 – March 2018) (total: 1 245 articles)



Source: Authors. Note to Figures 1 & 2: Accumulated article numbers. In total, 4 432 articles were identified in the eight outlets of the pre-study. Selected weeks for the main study are marked by arrows

A comparison between the study periods of 2015/16 (Figure 1) and 2017/18 (Figure 2) reveals a decrease in coverage over time. While migrants and refugees clearly dominate media agendas across countries in summer 2015, coverage remains at a high level in autumn 2015 (more than 100 articles per week in the outlets of the pre-study). However, coverage already decreases in late 2015, and intensifies again only in January 2016, most likely triggered by the events of New Year's Eve in several German cities. In contrast, less than half as many articles were published in the 2017/2018 study period.

The following weeks were selected on the basis of the pre-study: August 31—September 6, 2015; November 9—November 15, 2015; January 4—January 10, 2016; October 9—October 15, 2017; December 11—December 17, 2017; February 19—February 25, 2018. National partners collected relevant articles for these six selected weeks, using online databases as well as non-searchable archives.

SAMPLING AND CONTENT ANALYSIS

Table 1 provides an overview of the outlets selected, channel of distribution (print/online), and editorial line. It also shows article numbers found and analyzed. The large variety in article numbers required a further reduction of the number of articles for in-depth analysis in media with particularly intensive coverage. For outlets with up to 100 articles ($n=13$), all articles were coded. For outlets with more than 100 articles in total ($n=11$), 100 articles were randomly selected. This allowed both limiting the workload for partners as well as avoiding

an over-representation of few outlets with very many articles. The sample for the final coding process in the 24 outlets comprised 1 889 articles.

Table 1. Pairings of media outlets and the quantity of analyzed articles for each of the 12 sampled countries; plus the aggregate of the number of first-time asylum applications per country for 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018 (EU countries; Eurostat, 2020).

Country	First-time asylum applications 2015–2018	Media Outlet	Print/ Online	Political Leaning	Articles	
					Total	Sample
Czech Rep.	4 925	<i>aktualne.cz</i>	Online	no political affiliation	106	100
		<i>MF Dnes</i>	Print	moderately conservative	102	100
France	365 905	<i>Le Figaro</i>	Print	conservative	74	74
		<i>Le Monde</i>	Print	center-left	59	59
Germany	1 126 595	<i>Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung</i>	Print	center-right	303	100
		<i>Süddeutsche Zeitung</i>	Print	center-left	703	100
Hungary	206 400	<i>Index.hu</i>	Online	no political affiliation	1 282	100
		<i>Magyar Hírlap online</i>	Online	right	301	100
Italy	383 965	<i>Corriere della Sera</i>	Print	center	56	56
		<i>La Stampa</i>	Print	center-left	35	35
Poland	25 445	<i>Gazeta Wyborcza</i>	Print	center-left	58	58
		<i>Rzeczpospolita</i>	Print	center-right	40	40
Portugal	3 835	<i>expresso.pt</i>	Online	Portugal’s papers traditionally avoid a political profile	89	89
		<i>público.pt</i>	Online		80	80
Romania	9 725	<i>adevarul.ro</i>	Online	center-right	137	100
		<i>hotnews.ro</i>	Online	center-right	63	63
Russia ⁹		<i>Rossiyskaya Gazeta</i>	Print	official government newspaper	51	51
		<i>Kommersant</i>	Print	considered independent	26	26
Spain ¹⁰	115 935	<i>El País</i>	Print/ Online	center-left	113	100
		<i>La Razón</i>	Print/ Online	conservative	103	100
UK	151 715	<i>Daily Telegraph</i>	Print	conservative	68	68
		<i>Guardian</i>	Print	center-left	300	100
USA ¹¹		<i>New York Times</i>	Print	center-left	216	100
		<i>Washington Post</i>	Print	center-left	90	90
Total					4 455	1 889

Source: Authors

The consortium followed a “project-language procedure” (Rössler, 2012: 463) with English as the working language for coordination, codebook development and testing. Partners then worked with material in their national languages. Thus, the project strived to both establish shared standards for all steps in the research process and the utilization of specific expertise of partners on political contexts, media systems, and journalistic cultures (Wilke, 2008: 243-4). This was achieved by closely involving all partners in every research step. The codebook was jointly developed and pre-tested with material from the study countries as well as with articles in English. After thorough revision, the final draft was tested for intercoder reliability.¹²

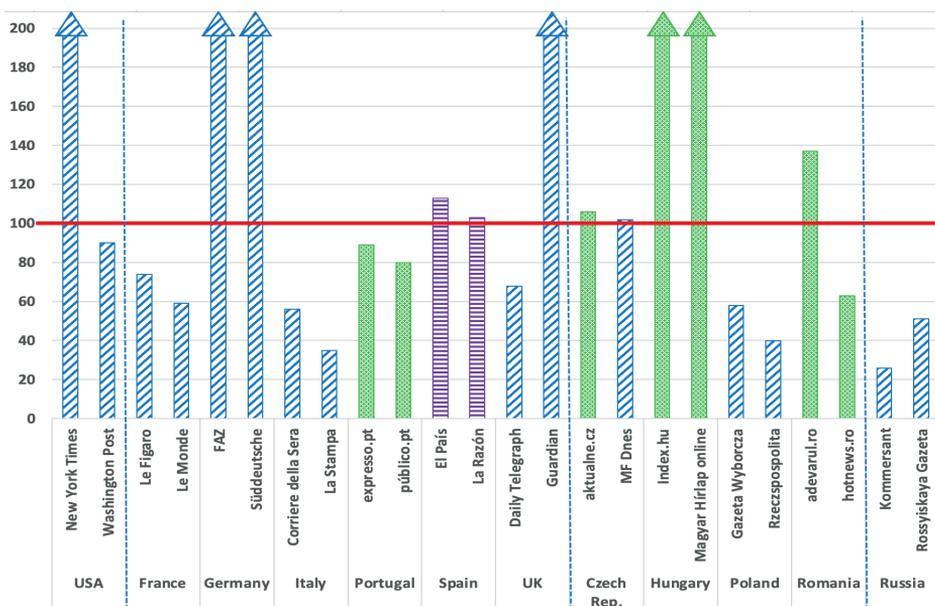
FINDINGS

QUANTITY OF COVERAGE (RQ1)

Before limiting the number of articles for further analysis, a total of 4 455 articles focusing on cross-border migrants and refugees was retrieved: 1 983 of these articles appeared in the Western EU countries, 2 089 articles in CEE countries. While attention was high in the USA (306 articles), coverage in Russia (77 articles) was limited. Germany and Hungary – the two countries with highest numbers of first-time asylum applicants in 2015 – were standing out (Figure 3): The two Hungarian online outlets published 1 583,¹³ the two German newspapers 1 006 articles. Additionally, outlets targeting an international readership published more articles: *The Guardian* accounts for 300 of the 368 British articles, *The New York Times* (USA) published more articles (216) than *The Washington Post* (90).¹⁴

Over time, article numbers in most outlets developed similarly to trends seen in the pre-study (Table 2) with 39.4 % of all articles appearing in the first study week, while 74% did so in the three study weeks in 2015/2016. These trends are most pronounced across Western and Eastern EU countries, and to some extent in the USA, while the Russian media seem to follow a different pattern with peak coverage in November 2015 (33.8 % of their articles) and no coverage in the study week in January 2016.

Figure 3. Number of articles published by each media outlet during the six study weeks



Key: FAZ – Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung

Striped = print media, dotted = online media, lines = combination of print and online (Spain). For outlets with more than 100 articles, 100 articles were random-selected

Source: Authors

Table 2. Coverage Over Time (N=4455, n=1889)

Study Week	USA	Western EU	Eastern EU	Russia	Total
Aug/Sep 2015	47	374	309	14	744
	24.7 %	38.9 %	46.7 %	18.2 %	39.4 %
November 2015	40	204	110	26	380
	21.1 %	21.2 %	16.6 %	33.8 %	20.1 %
January 2016	32	133	109	0	274
	16.8 %	13.8 %	16.5 %	0.0 %	14.5 %
October 2017	31	76	31	15	153
	16.3 %	7.9 %	4.7 %	19.5 %	8.1 %
December 2017	19	83	49	12	163
	10.0 %	8.6 %	7.4 %	15.6 %	8.6 %
February 2018	21	91	53	10	175
	11.1 %	9.5 %	8.0 %	13.0 %	9.3 %
Total	190	961	661	77	1 889

Source: Authors

MAIN TOPICS (RQ2A)

Political debates are the focus of almost half of the articles found (Table 3). By contrast, only 17 % of articles cover the situation of migrants and refugees (e.g., on transit routes, in camps, etc.), 7 % cover aid initiatives, and 4 % individual stories. Also, background stories (on “economic aspects”, “statistics and background”, “culture and religion”), which would help to contextualize information, have a rather low combined share of 10 %. The Russian coverage is particularly limited to political debates and to a lesser degree to articles on problems with migrants: These two topics alone shape almost two thirds of the Russian coverage.

Table 3. Main topics per region (N=4455, n=1889)

	USA	Western EU	Eastern EU	Russia	Total
Political Debates	100	449	267	40	856
	52.60 %	46.70 %	40.40 %	51.90 %	45.30 %
Economic Aspects	2	31	21	4	58
	1.10 %	3.20 %	3.20 %	5.20 %	3.10 %
Cultural & Religious	1	52	16	5	74
	0.50 %	5.40 %	2.40 %	6.50 %	3.90 %
Situation of Migrants	29	145	134	5	313
	15.30 %	15.10 %	20.30 %	6.50 %	16.60 %
Personal Stories	13	39	17	2	71
	6.80 %	4.10 %	2.60 %	2.60 %	3.80 %
Problems w/ Migrants	16	55	74	11	156
	8.40 %	5.70 %	11.20 %	14.30 %	8.30 %
Support for Migrants	9	86	36	1	132
	4.70 %	8.90 %	5.40 %	1.30 %	7.00 %
Reactions vs. Migrants	17	25	45	3	90
	8.90 %	2.60 %	6.80 %	3.90 %	4.80 %
Statistics/Background	3	33	26	3	65
	1.60 %	3.40 %	3.90 %	3.90 %	3.40 %
Other	0	46	25	3	74
	0.00%	4.80 %	3.80 %	3.90 %	3.90 %
Total	190	961	661	77	1 889

Source: Authors

Comparing key topic areas over the six study weeks reveals remarkably different patterns of coverage between Western European and CEE countries. The overall shares of articles focusing on politics and context information were similar, but CEE media report notably more on ‘problems with migrants’ and ‘protests against migrants’. Analyzed over time, the share of articles on ‘situation & help’

(i.e., situation, personal stories, and support categories of Table 3 combined) was highest both in Western (36.1 %) and Eastern (37.5 %) EU media in the first study week, but with a sharp ensuing drop in CEE media (Table 4). The share of articles on ‘problems & protests’ (i.e., problems with & reactions against migrants of Table 3 combined) in Western EU coverage is continuously lower than in CEE countries, and in five out of six weeks also lower than in Russian and USA media. In the USA, there is a general shift of attention towards the situation of and support for migrants in the last two study weeks. This shift is mainly at the expense of the political realm. For example, American newspapers dedicated more than 60 % of their coverage to political debates in both weeks in 2015 and October 2017 (and 43.8 % in January 2016, always considerably more than European media). By contrast, the share of politics dropped to 26.3 and 38.1 % in the last two study weeks, making way for a stronger focus on situation and help.

Table 4. Share of articles on ‘situation & help’ and ‘problems & protest’, as percentages of total coverage (762 articles in these categories, percentages refer to all articles)

	Situation & Help				Problems & Protest			
	USA	Western EU	Eastern EU	Russia	USA	Western EU	Eastern EU	Russia
Aug / Sep 2015	25.5	36.1	37.5	0.0	10.6	3.5	7.1	14.3
Nov 2015	20.0	22.5	25.5	15.4	12.5	8.8	17.3	23.1
Jan 2016	15.6	22.6	11.9	-	37.5	21.8	54.1	-
Oct 2017	29.0	27.6	16.1	20.0	6.5	7.9	12.9	20.0
Dec 2017	36.8	26.5	28.6	0.0	31.6	7.2	12.2	16.7
Feb 2018	47.6	17.6	20.8	10.0	14.3	8.8	17.0	10.0
Total	26.8	28.1	28.3	10.4	17.3	8.3	18.0	18.2

Source: Authors

The most remarkable changes happen in the study week in January 2016, right after the events of New Year’s Eve in Germany. Coverage of problems and protests rose steeply, with 21.8 % of all articles in Western EU, as much as 54.1 % in Eastern EU media, and 37.5 % in USA media.¹⁵

This first week of January 2016 also illustrates a double division not only along regions, but also political profiles of media in the EU. While the shift towards problems and protests was more pronounced in media of Eastern member states, adding political stance (where applicable, see Table 1) provides a more nuanced picture: In contrast to conservative media, left/liberal media across Europe reported more than three times more on the situation of and help for refugees even during this particular study week than right/conservative outlets (Table 5).

Looking at coverage of problems and protests in all study weeks, the topic occupied substantially more room in conservative media across Europe, as well as in CEE countries in general: There is a continuum from “Western EU&liberal” over “Western EU&conservative” and “Eastern EU&liberal” to “Eastern EU&conservative”. However, it is conservative media in Western EU states that reported the least about situation and help. Western EU liberal media published 4.9 times more articles on situation and help than on problems and protests. This rate was 1.5 in Western EU conservative/right-wing media, 2.0 in Eastern EU liberal and 1.4 in Eastern EU conservative media.

Table 5. Share of articles on ‘situation & help’ and ‘problems & protest’ by political stance of analyzed left- and right-wing outlets in the EU, as percentages of total coverage (461 articles in these categories, percentages refer to all articles)

	Situation & Help				Problems & Protest			
	Western EU		Eastern EU		Western EU		Eastern EU	
	left/lib.	r./cons.	left/lib.	r./cons.	left/lib.	r./cons.	left/lib.	r./cons.
Aug/Sep 2015	38.3	27.3	29.6	35.7	2.1	8.3	0.0	7.1
Nov 2015	24.1	15.5	27.3	22.9	10.3	10.7	9.1	18.6
Jan 2016	35.1	10.4	25.0	7.4	17.5	25.0	62.5	57.4
Oct 2017	43.8	4.0	0.0	11.1	3.1	4.0	50.0	11.1
Dec 2017	34.2	8.0	42.9	23.8	7.9	8.0	0.0	14.3
Feb 2018	28.2	10.3	0.0	20.0	2.6	10.3	33.3	20.0
Total	33.8	17.0	27.6	25.8	6.9	11.1	13.8	19.1

Source: Authors

The analysis included three news perspectives (domestic, foreign and foreign with national involvement) and the directions of migration and refugee movements covered. Generally, Eastern EU media reported mostly on migration into other European countries (72.3 %), while Western EU (35.3 %) and particularly USA media (46.8 %) focused on migration into their own countries. But there are national differences. Most notably, German and Italian newspapers covered migrant and refugee matters largely as a domestic topic (*Süddeutsche Zeitung* 79 %, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 57 %; *Corriere della Sera* 64 %, *La Stampa* 40 %). In line with this domestic focus, Germany’s outlets (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 65 %, *Süddeutsche Zeitung* 79 % of the articles) as well as Italy’s *Corriere della Sera* (76 %) mainly covered migrant and refugee movements *into their own countries*. Also *The Washington Post* (52 %) and *Kommersant* (56 %) focused on movements *into their own countries*. *The New York Times* seems to rather assume the role of a ‘global chronicler’, being the only outlet reporting mainly on migrants and refugee issues *on other continents* (53 %). By contrast,

most outlets in both Western and Central Eastern Europe covered migrants and refugees like remote phenomena, as movements *into other countries* on the continent. These results are especially relevant as the perspective is linked to topic selection: Articles dealing with support for migrants and refugees are more frequent in domestic (12.1 %) than in foreign coverage (5.0 %). Problems with migrants are reported more frequently in foreign (12.9 %) than in domestic coverage (6.5 %).

ACTOR SELECTION (RQ2B)

Politicians and political institutions are the main actors in 51 % of all articles.¹⁶ Citizens and representatives of society are featured as main actors in 18.4 % of the articles, they are particularly visible in the Russian media (Table 6) and even more present in the German outlets (35 % of articles in *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, and 30 % in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*).

Table 6. Various actor groups in coverage from non-EU and EU-countries, the USA, and Russia; as percentages of all articles in each group of countries (N=4455, n=1889)

	USA	Western EU	Eastern EU	Russia	Total
Government	34.7	33.7	38.1	44.2	35.8
Opposition	3.7	2.9	1.8	2.6	2.6
International Organizations	5.3	10.7	8.0	7.8	9.1
Collective political terms (e.g., "the West")	4.7	0.8	3.2	1.3	2.1
Individual migrant	11.1	5.6	5.0	7.8	6.0
Small group of migrants	2.6	2.7	3.5	0.0	2.9
Large, anonymous group of migrants	22.6	18.9	20.0	3.9	19.1
Social actors, citizens, judiciary, etc.	14.2	18.7	18.2	26.0	18.4
Other	1.1	5.8	2.3	6.5	4.1
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Authors

About a quarter (28 %) of all articles presented migrants and refugees as the main actors. However, they are often represented as large, anonymous groups (19.1 %) rather than individuals (6.0 %) or small groups like families (2.9 %). *Magyar Hírlap* covers the topic without a single migrant or refugee as a main actor. While the statistics are relatively similar across the EU, they differ from the non-EU countries. In the USA, individual migrants and refugees are much more visible as main actors as compared to all other study countries (11.1 %

of the articles). In Russia, the overall focus on political actors and citizens took attention away from migrant actors.

REPRESENTATION OF MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES (RQ2C)

Only 639 articles (34 %) were specific about a *country/region of origin* of migrants and refugees: In 244 articles, the actors were from Syria. ‘Africa’ – as a continent, without specifying a country – was mentioned in 53 articles. Other frequent origins are Myanmar (28 articles), Afghanistan and Iraq (13 articles each).

Analysis across countries reveals specific geographic patterns (Table 7). USA outlets focus almost as intensely on migrants and refugees from Latin America (33 %) as from the Middle East (32 %). The Middle East is the main focus in most Western EU countries (48 %), but migrants and refugees from Africa play a central role in Italy (57 %, *La Stampa* did not publish a single article mainly on Middle Eastern origin) and France (32 % for both African and Middle Eastern origin). Coverage in Eastern EU countries focuses on migrant and refugee flows from the Middle East without exception. European countries of origin played a considerable role in coverage in Poland (30 % of articles with specified origin), and even more so in Russia (33 %, more pronounced in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* with 44 %) where migrants and refugees from Europe (most notably Ukraine) were the most visible group.

Table 7. Origin of migrants and refugees per region (n=639)

	USA	Western EU	Eastern EU	Russia	Total
Africa	6	80	41	7	134
	8.2 %	25.2 %	18.8 %	23.3 %	21.0 %
Asia	15	37	31	6	89
	20.5 %	11.6 %	14.2 %	20.0 %	13.9 %
Middle East	23	153	122	6	304
	31.5 %	48.1 %	56.0 %	20.0 %	47.6 %
Europe	4	31	23	10	68
	5.5 %	9.7 %	10.6 %	33.3 %	10.6 %
Americas	24	16	1	1	42
	32.9 %	5.0 %	0.5 %	3.3 %	6.6 %
Oceania	1	1	0	0	2
	1.4 %	0.3 %	0.0 %	0.0 %	0.3 %
Total	73	318	218	30	639

Source: Authors

In addition to main actors, we have established the number of individual migrants in each article. In the 1 889 articles, only 632 migrants and refugees

could be identified. The USA newspapers stood out, accounting for 187 or 30 % of these individuals. Indeed, almost a quarter of all articles featuring migrants and refugees as recognizable individuals have appeared in the *Washington Post* (average of 0.84 recognizable migrants per article) and in the *New York Times*, which is the only outlet featuring an average of more than 1 migrant per article (103 migrants in 100 articles). In Europe, the highest shares were found in *Aktualne.cz* (average of 0.44 per article), *Gazeta Wyborcza* (0.48), *El País* (0.46) and *La Razón* (0.67). It was especially low in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (average of 0.09 migrants per article), *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* (0.02), and *Magyar Hírlap* (0.04).

Table 8. Individual Migrants and Refugees represented and quoted in articles (N=4455, n=1889)

		USA	Western EU	Eastern EU	Russia	Total
Individual Migrants / Refugees	<i>Total</i>	187	296	143	6	632
	<i>Avg per article</i>	0.98	0.31	0.22	0.08	0.33
... among them quoted	<i>Total</i>	122	152	74	1	349
	<i>Avg per article</i>	0.64	0.16	0.11	0.01	0.18

Source: Authors

Migrants and refugees rarely speak for themselves (Table 8). Among 632 identified individuals, only 349 were directly or indirectly quoted; only 11.4 % of the articles gave a voice to at least one migrant or refugee. In EU media, slightly more than every second migrant or refugee appearing in the coverage is also quoted (Western EU: 51.3 %; Eastern EU: 51.7 %). USA media quote migrants and refugees more frequently (65.2 %). None of the migrants and refugees appearing in *Magyar Hírlap* (four individuals) and *Kommersant* (five individuals) were quoted.

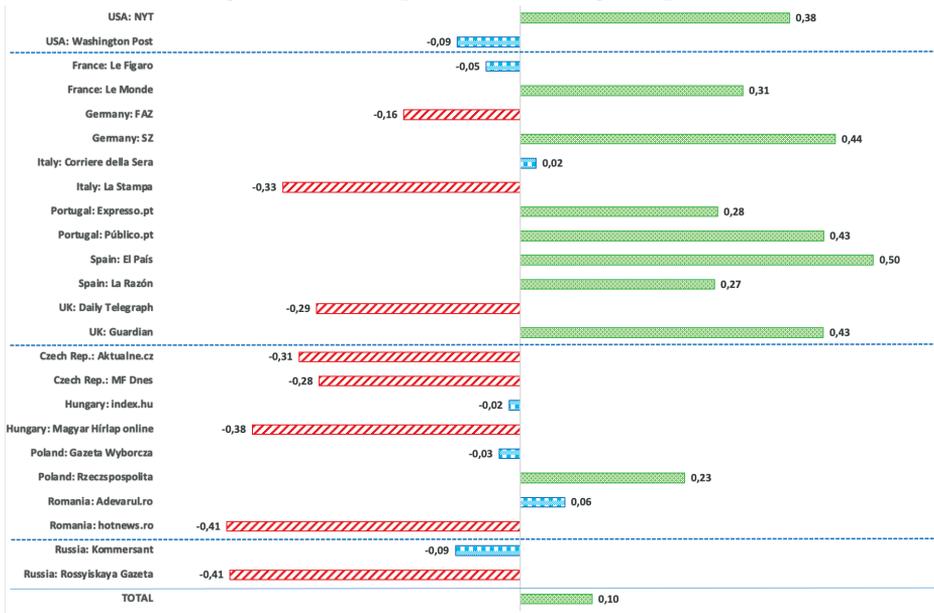
PLURALITY OF THE DEBATE ON MIGRATION (RQ2D)

Finally, we assessed which opinions on migration were represented and whether the each of paired media per country offered distinct perspectives. To this end, all non-migrant speakers (NMS) quoted in the articles were registered and their positions about migrants and refugees analyzed. The study found 3 640 NMS, more than 10 times more than migrant speakers (349).

Quotes from 2 025 NMS (55.6 %) were identified as neutral or ambivalent.¹⁷ A total of 1 615 NMS voiced either positive (24.4 %, n=889) or negative attitudes (19.9 %, n=726). Among those NMS with a clear opinion, Western EU (62.6 %) and USA outlets (58.3 %) quoted more speakers with positive attitudes towards migrants and refugees than CEE media, where NMS with negative attitudes prevail (58.2 %).¹⁸ In Russian media, negative voices are even more visible (63.3 %).

Again, debates are not uniform in the paired media outlets for each country as contrasting perspectives are being offered (Figure 4). In Germany and the UK, news organizations represent strikingly different perspectives. In many other countries, one outlet displays an almost balanced selection of positive and negative quotes, while the other prefers speakers with negative (Italy, Hungary, Romania, Russia) or positive attitudes (Poland, France, USA). Only in Spain and Portugal both outlets feature predominantly positive quotes; in the Czech Republic, both outlets feature predominantly negative quotes.¹⁹

Figure 4. Ratio of opinionated non-migrant speakers



Source: Authors. In this figure, the share of negative quotes was deducted from the share of positive quotes, to reach values between -1 (all non-migrant speakers with a clear position are quoted with negative attitudes towards migrants/refugees) and 1 (all non-migrant speakers with a clear position are quoted with positive attitudes towards migrants/refugees)

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Generally, our study points towards a diverse and more nuanced coverage of migrants and refugees in the specific context of the ‘refugee crisis’, as indicated by Berry et al. (2015). Coverage appears less negative than in the studies conducted e.g. by Caviedes (2015), Esses et al. (2013), and to some extent Eberl et al. (2019) for time periods *before* 2015. Our data not only confirm a prior analysis by EJO (2015) pointing towards differences between Western European and

CEE media, they clearly show how news media in different countries within the EU tell a completely different migration story. For example, in Germany and Italy, migration takes place at home, into the country.²⁰ The emphasis on citizen actors and support for migrants and refugees in German coverage may be read as proof for Hafez's (2002: 61) thesis about negativism in foreign coverage being contrasted by a "positive-harmonic" domestic world. On the one hand, differences in coverage of Western and Eastern EU media may fuel doubts about a European public sphere on matters of migration and asylum, with a negative impact on the political process. Europe not only disagrees in terms of solutions, but in part also in the perception of a common problem. While many European media outlets covered the topic extensively from their country's point of view, a European perspective or a look into other countries' discourse was rare. It is here that a more Europeanized discourse might have helped to bridge perceived gaps between EU members states and to find common political strategies. On the other hand, compared to the Russian coverage – limited both in quantity and thematic variety – differences between the EU's West and East shrink considerably. In *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, the EU migration crisis was often politicized to show Europe as weak and disunited; this explains why topics beyond politics and problems with migrants were left virtually untouched.

Our study supports Chouliaraki et al. (2017) and Fotopoulos and Kaimaklioti (2016) who argue that media in Europe paid little attention to the contexts of migrants and refugees and under-represented them as individuals in news coverage. Like Haller's (2017) and Maurer et al.'s (2019) studies for Germany, our analysis finds serious differences in coverage between liberal and conservative outlets across countries – the latter focusing on rather negatively connoted topics and choosing more speakers critical of migration.

In line with McNeil and Karstens (2018), journalistic traditions might impact on reporting patterns. The high number of migrants and refugees quoted in the USA coverage may be explained by the tradition of feature articles, and the impact of professional standards. The Society of Professional Journalists encourages explicitly to give "a voice to the voiceless" (Society of Professional Journalists, 2014). By contrast, post-Soviet political journalism often assumes an analytical perspective with less emphasis on personal stories. Nevertheless, the American newspapers shifted towards covering the situation of migrants and refugees (allowing for the emotional storytelling described by Benson, 2015) mostly in the later study weeks, while earlier coverage had a strong focus on politics. This shift can be explained by a much calmer political debate in Europe by 2017, indeed from a foreign perspective, the European discourse with less obvious conflict and the involvement of lower-ranking politicians was less newsworthy. Also, the situation within the USA had changed. The coding period in November 2015 coincided with a court ruling that blocked President Obama's proposed

immigration overhaul, and the discourse on migration was thereafter, between 2015 and 2017, shaped heavily by candidate and later President Trump. After years of major political discussion on border wall funding, travel bans and the end to the DACA program, media were possibly looking for different approaches that brought to the fore the human effects of these policies. This is also reflected by a shift in staff allocation away from political to dedicated migration reporters (Orme, 2015).

A distinction of political profiles (liberal/conservative bias) was not feasible in several countries where political identification was neither clear nor consistent. It also needs to be noted that study weeks have sometimes coincided with major national events likely to have impacted on the news agenda (e.g., terrorist attacks in France in November 2015 and December 2018 affecting French coverage). While this study has shed light on divisions of media content along the lines of geographical regions, the political stance of media outlets and professional standards, the interplay between these factors is undoubtedly very complex. Although a challenging task for a similarly broad set of countries, studying the journalists' motivations for the coverage they have offered may help to better understand this interplay. In addition, future research needs to address shifts in media coverage resulting from the new situation generated by the war in Ukraine, also in comparison to our findings on the 2015-2018 time frame.

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NOTES

- 1 The use of terms such as 'crisis' in this context has been critically discussed by scholars like Petersson and Kainz (2017).
- 2 1 256 580 asylum applications in 2015 (+123%), 1 206 055 applications in 2016 (-4%). From this plateau, numbers started to drop with 654 620 in 2017 (-46%) and 602 520 in 2018 (-8%) (Eurostat, 2020).
- 3 UNHCR (2018) argues for a clear separation of the terms "refugee" and "migrant" – those who are refugees cannot be migrants; those who are migrants cannot be refugees. In contrast, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the EU use a wider definition of "migrant", which is explicitly independent from the motivations (European Commission, 2018: 252; IOM, 2019: 130).
- 4 Special issues of the European Journal of Communication (2019, Vol. 34, No. 6) and Communications (2018, Vol. 43, No. 3) contain several national studies on migration and refugee coverage and related issues.

- 5 The events of 2015 also inspired a number of studies into coverage in single countries. Germany is a good example: Haller (2017: 136) concludes that German news were dominated by voices close to the government and had little interest for the actual situation of those arriving between February 2015 and March 2016. Maurer et al. (2019: 28-30) argue that Germany's media presented the phenomenon of migration as a risk (see also Greck, 2018; Hestermann, 2020), while portraying individual migrants and refugees rather positively.
- 6 Please note that for the duration of the study—2015 to 2018—the UK was still an EU member state. It was not until 31.12.2020, that the UK officially left the EU.
- 7 The focus on the USA, Russia and 10 EU member states was chosen in order to allow for a more thorough comparison. While there are important differences between EU countries, they are bound by a common political framework and at least an aspiration to common asylum policies, so a differentiation of Western and Eastern EU members combines countries in reasonably similar situations. Going into detail on the diverse situations of Albania, Belarus, Switzerland and Ukraine would go beyond the scope of this article, while Greece was excluded because data is limited to only one media outlet.
- 8 The search term comprised translations of the following English-language search strings: *refuge**, *flee**, *escape**, **migra**, *asyl**, where the * can represent any number of characters. Lists in the national languages could include more items (where one English term translates into a number of words) or various wildcard arrangements for prefixes and suffixes or combined words. Results were filtered for ambiguous use of the defined keywords (e.g., criminals fleeing from the police, bird migration etc.) as well as duplicate results.
- 9 Data on first-time asylum applications is not available. For reference, Russia's Federal Service of State Statistics Rosstat (2020) reports net growth of foreign population of +245.384 for 2015, +261.948 for 2016, +211.878 for 2017 and +124.854 for 2018.
- 10 Due to the varied forms of distribution of Spanish papers (exclusive content in the print edition of *El País*), the articles were retrieved in a procedure that combined print and online versions.
- 11 Data on first-time asylum applications is not available. The Yearbook of Immigration Statistics lists an aggregate of 231 004 refugee arrivals from 2015 through 2018 (US Department of Homeland Security, 2019: 39).
- 12 For the intercoder reliability test, the 15 coders involved coded 30 English-language articles. In the 'motivation' category (pairwise .598 / Krippendorff's α .283), the 'other' option was used noticeably often and with differing meanings. Further clarifications in the codebook led to a more expected use of this residual category (3.9 %). The other categories resulted in acceptable (pairwise .677 - .978 / Krippendorff's α .699 - .999) and sometimes critical (topic, main actor, number of non-migrant speakers; pairwise .478 - .675 / α .501 - .598) reliability scores. It was decided to keep these three categories – with the necessary caution in interpretation – based on the fact that the English-language texts in the test caused specific problems, exacerbated by the high number of countries involved, while coders were working in their native languages during the main coding.
- 13 *Magyar Hírlap* 301 and *index.hu* 1 282. A possible objection could be that online media like Hungary's have more 'space' at their disposal than print newspapers. However, there is no systematic difference between article numbers in online and print media (see Fig. 3); the outlet in our total sample of 17 countries with the lowest number of articles, Belorussia's *Nasha Niva*, is an online news portal.
- 14 In Switzerland, the German-language *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* with its considerable readership in Germany and Austria published 183 articles. The Francophone *Le Temps*, mostly limited to the French-speaking Swiss market, published only 97 articles.
- 15 Our Russian consortium partners note that their country's media only picked up the topic with some delay and thus after the week included in this study.
- 16 For each article, one (the most prominently featured) actor was coded as main actor.
- 17 If one speaker was featured with more than one quote, coders assessed the overall tendency of all quotes in the article, so several contemplative statements could lead to "ambivalent" coding.

18 Poland is an exception (52.1 % positive).

19 Outside the EU, this was also true for Belarus where negative voices made up 64.3 % of all non-migrant speakers (NMS). The two Albanian media were most polarized when selecting opinionated NMS.

20 This was also true for the solitary Greek outlet.

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