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Politicising funding

Media coverage of the EEA grants, the Recovery and Resilience Facility and EU Cohesion Policy in Hungary in the period 2010-2022

Master's thesis in European Studies

Supervisor: Tobias Schumacher

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Abstract

This master thesis studies the media coverage of the EEA-grants, the Recovery and Resilience Facility, and the Cohesion Policy in their operations in Hungary through the tumultuous years 2010-2022. Using Norwegian and EU media, it breaks down the media attention to see to how these years are reflected. It uses the concept of politicisation to gain a better understanding of the broader context of the media coverage.

Sammendrag

Denne masteroppgaven studerer mediadekning av EØS-midlene, the Recovery and Resilience Facility og the Cohesion Policy i deres arbeid i Ungarn gjennom de tumultartede årene 2010-2022. Gjennom media som dekker Norge og den Europeiske Union, bryter den ned mediaoppmerksomhet for å undersøke hvordan disse årene er reflektert. Konseptet politisering er brukt for å få en bedre forståelse for den breder konteksten av mediadekningen.

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Abbreviations

GDP	Gross Domestic Product
USD	United States Dollar
EU	European Union
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
LGBTQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual and Queer
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
ERDF	European Regional Development Funds
CF	Cohesion Funds
ESF+	European Social Fund Plus
JTF	Just Transition Fund
ESIF	European Structural and Investment Funds
EAFRD	European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development
DG REGIO	Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy
EMFF	Directorate-General for European Maritime and Fisheries Fund
DG AGRI	Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development
DG MARE	Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
DG EMPL	Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion
RRF	Recovery and Resilience Funds
VG	Verdens gang
NRK	Norsk rikskringkasting
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
EP	European Parliament
FMO	Financial Mechanism Office
DG	Directorate-General
EEA	European Economic Area

1 Introduction

In 2010, the Fidesz party won the Hungarian national election and Viktor Orbán became the prime minister of Hungary for a second time. In the period between his first term in 1998-2002, and his victory in 2010, Orbán had undergone a political transition from a centre-right, pro-western politician to a strong man, increasingly intent on creating a more authoritarian Hungary with himself in the centre of the power structure (Lendvai, 2017, pp. 86-87). Over the next 12 years, Hungary would see itself increasingly under the control of the Fidesz party under Orbán, as the media, public administration, the judicial system and electoral systems increasingly aligned to the interests of Orbán (Kelemen, 2017, pp. 221-227). Hungary would over those 12 years enact anti-LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual and Gay) legislation under the guise of protecting children and stopping ‘gay propaganda’ (Nattrass, 2021), an anti-immigration policy which would receive particular attention as the refugee crisis of 2015 unfolded (Gotev, 2015; Zalan, 2015), as well as looking to the east, primarily Russia, in its foreign policy in the hope of counterbalancing its ties and economic dependency to the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) (Végh, 2015). Perhaps the most indicative statement of the changes that had happened since 2010 was a statement by Orbán in July of 2022 stating that Hungarians “don’t want to be a mixed race”, and instead wanted to mix within Europe, but that Europeans should not mix with “non-Europeans” and that such mixing had already led to Western-European countries no longer being nations (Mitchell, 2022; Orban, 2022; Woods, 2022).

This shift in Hungarian politics would put the Hungarian government in opposition to both the European Union, vocal critics of the changes in the make-up of amongst other things the reforms to the media and judicial system (Rydliński, 2018, p. 100), and Western-Europe. Western-Europe would see itself presented as a declining and obtrusive power, which sought to fundamentally undermine traditional values which was equated with a fundamental ‘goodness’. No more clearly is the understanding that Hungary is fundamentally different from “western civilisation” expressed than in the same speech that denounced the mixing of Europeans and non-Europeans:

“My answer to this phenomenon is that this winter of our discontent is a fundamentally Western attitude to life, which stems from the fact that Western civilisation is losing its power, its performance, its authority, its capacity to act. (...) the West wants to spread its own values,

which is something that the rest of the world feels to be humiliating. This is something which we understand, as sometimes we also feel the same way.” (Orban, 2022). A clear dividing line is thus created between the Hungarian government and Western-Europe.

In the increasingly fraught relations between the EU and Western-Europe, and the Hungarian government, a recurring topic is the funding provided to Hungary to increase the country’s economic development as part of efforts to increase European social and economic cohesion. One such funding scheme is the European Cohesion policy, a major investment policy which seeks to address economic and social discrepancies in the European Union. Another is the EEA (European Economic Area) and Norway Grants, a funding scheme provided by Norway, Iceland, and Liechtenstein, three Western-European countries closely connected to the European Union through the EEA-agreement. Both funding schemes have invested heavily in Hungary in the past, and both have had fraught relations with the Hungarian government.

The EEA-grants provided to Hungary were suspended in 2014 in response to actions by the Hungarian government to gain greater control over the disbursement of the funds as well as concerns over Hungarian action against EEA-funded Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO)s. Following an agreement in 2020 which saw EEA-grants provided to Hungary (Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020), it was again suspended in 2021 over new Hungarian attempts to increase control over disbursements (Bayer, 2021). Confronted with the Hungarian turn towards authoritarian illiberalism, the EU spent several years scrambling for a response (Appel, 2019, pp. 258-259). Article 7 of the treaty of the European Union, the article stating that a country may have certain rights suspended if breach of the founding values of the European Union is identified, was quite early on discussed as a potential means of hindering the Hungarian shift away from the principles of the European Union (Euractiv, 2011; Leonhardsen, 2012; Phillips, 2011). When Article 7 was proposed, one of the ‘rights’ Hungary would lose was the funding from the Cohesion Policy. The initiation of article 7 would only appear in December of 2017, in response to Polish judicial reform and in 2018, the European Parliament (EP) voted to censure Hungary (Appel, 2019). Still, beyond the initiation of procedures and EP vote to censure, the European Union still lacked a clear-cut means of sanctioning the developments in Hungary. A third funding scheme would provide such an opportunity, however, the Recovery and Resilience Funds. These funds, intended to compensate for the economic pain created by Covid-19, were made dependent on rule of law criteria, a concept already envisioned attached to the Cohesion policy. After intense political turmoil regarding the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), the mechanism to deploy the

funds, Hungary and Poland were caught in a limbo, seeking to access the funds, but unable to without enacting meaningful reform away from the illiberal policies enacted. In 2023, a final blow would be struck to the Hungarian government, when the European Union suspended regular operations of the Cohesion Policy in move to sanction the country over rule of law violations.

This thesis seeks to observe how media, as an indication of the public arena, have responded to the increasing conflict over funding provided to Hungary. To do this the thesis will utilise the concept of politicisation. Over the last two decades, a sizeable portion of the study of the European Union has been dedicated to the politicisation of the European Union. The study of politicisation in Europe in the 21st century, began first by establishing whether the concept in fact existed, and connected to this, to what degree the concept had affected the union if it had occurred. Following some years of intense debate and scrutiny over these questions the more conceptual questions were increasingly sated, and most relevant academics had positioned themselves on the matter, the concept was swiftly incorporated into studies of areas of European governance. Examples of this includes EU foreign development (Hackenesch et al., 2021), trade sanctions (Meissner, 2020), EU foreign policy (Kostanyan, 2017), and free movement of people (Blauberger et al., 2023). Following in this vein, this thesis will seek to study politicisation in a surprisingly sparsely populated context: the funding provided to countries which are a part of the European Union.

There are strong arguments for choosing this policy area when attempting to expand on the concept of politicization. It is a field which has been embroiled in many of the most prescient debates about the rise of the Eurosceptic far-right, in the context of being a natural first step to withhold as part of a sanctioning of the behaviour of the governments of Hungary and Poland. Additionally, accusations of this funding being increasingly corrupt, ending in the pockets of loyalists in the Hungarian government, points to an enormous potential for conflict and contestation (Lendvai, 2017, pp. 149-165). As these funds are provided without direct compensation, there is fertile ground for this funding to become a lightning rod in an increasingly politicised Europe.

The addition of a national funding scheme provides an interesting means of comparison. The fact that the EEA-grants are built with similar goals and means as the Cohesion funds allows for a relatively unique approach to the study of funding for Hungary. By providing a comparison to the study of a concept often applied in a 'vacuum', this thesis will seek to put context to both

the EEA-grants compared to an EU perspective, and the Cohesion Funds to a national perspective. Both should allow the analysis of the findings to be put into a more coherent perspective. Similarly to the Cohesion funds, the EEA-grants has also been in the centre of controversies around the right-wing turn of the Hungarian government. As the contested events of the EEA-grants go back to 2014, they were also quite prescient to the contestation which would develop between the Hungarian government and the EU through the article 7 proceedings which began in 2017.

An important additional reason for wanting to study this area, in addition to its potential as a salient issue, is that it is a relatively understudied aspect of European governance. Unlike concepts like party affiliation or foreign policy, the former particularly well studied and the latter increasingly popular, the internal funding of the European Union has yet to become one of the mainstays of politicisation. This is despite, as has already been covered, it being an important factor in many of the most contentious issues of the European Union. In picking this topic, the thesis hopes to look at an issue which is increasingly central in the contestation of values and integration in Hungary, but which has yet to become well studied in the context of politicisation.

The thesis proposes a simple research question to get to grips with the question of politicisation of the funding provided to Hungary: How has the media covered the conflicts over the operations of the EEA-grants, Recovery and Resilience Facility and the Cohesion policy in Hungary between 2010 and 2022. The research question is used as the foundation for the methodology of the thesis, but to explore the data more closely, breaking it down into smaller sections and tying it to the concept of politicisation the thesis will use hypotheses. Four hypotheses have been drafted for this purpose:

H1: EEA-grants are increasingly politicised in its operations in Hungary.

H2: The Cohesion policy is increasingly politicised in its operations in Hungary.

H3: The Recovery and Resilience Facility's Hungarian operation was politicised in its inception.

H4: The politicisation of the EEA-grants has affected the politicisation of the Cohesion funds.

To get to grips with the research question and the Hypotheses, the thesis has chosen 4 newspapers, 2 European and 2 Norwegian to study. Search terms have been chosen to provide salient coverage of relevant terms and the thesis has then made an overview of every article under the search terms in the timeframe chosen by the thesis, 2010-2022. Though this overview provides important insight, the actual analysis of the data is provided by choosing two search terms, one Norwegian and one European, in 2 newspapers, again one Norwegian and one European. A document study is then performed, with the articles being read through and then categorised according to their relevance to the hypothesis.

The thesis is structured thus. First the research design will review politicisation literature, providing background to the politicisation literature of the study of the European Union. It will thus engage with the conceptualisation of the concept as it pertains to the EU. In the last section of the literature review, it will discuss the developments of the concept and how it is increasingly included in the research of new areas of European governance. Moving to the methodology, the thesis will engage deeper with the research question, hypothesis, and research design. In two subsequent sub-chapter, the thesis will explain the choice of time frame, and how the thesis has structured its document analysis. Chapter 3 will explore various actors, arenas, and financial mechanisms, exploring their roles and explaining their place in the thesis. The chapter will begin by exploring the three funding mechanisms used in the thesis. It will then explore the media selected and explain the selection process. It will expand upon the Hungarian government and its “role” in this thesis, before explaining how parliaments are understood as a natural recipient of politicisation in the institutional arena. Chapter 4, the analysis, is divided into a findings section which will present the data created. The second sections, the discussion, will connect the data with the research question and the hypothesis and organise the findings into a broader picture. Finally, the conclusion will present the thesis’ findings as they regard to the research question and give more thorough break down of the Hypotheses considering the analysis. The conclusion will then present the limitations of the thesis.

2 Research design

2.1 Literature review

The primary concept which will be used in this text is politicisation. Politicisation is the transition of a policy field, political institution, and decision-making process from a bureaucratic, behind-closed-doors approach to an approach defined by political pressures (Bruycker, 2017). The vagueness of the definition means that several approaches to the concept exists. This thesis will utilise the approach to politicisation found in the study of European integration, although generalised to also be usable for national policy and polity.

The concept of politicisation in European Studies was originally used primarily in the neo-functional school of study. As a part of this branch, politicisation was understood as a natural end-result of the increased European integration neo-functionalism foresaw. Not only would this politicisation be inevitable, but it would also be an important and positive force in involving the populace of Europe into a Europe-spanning state and potentially even a nation (Schmitter, 1969). Through this beginning, the concept of politicisation in the study of Europe would for a long time be defined by its association with a normative branch of European Study.

Politicising Europe

One of the biggest arguments for introducing politicisation into the study of the European Union as a concept beyond neo-functionalism, was that it produced a coherent argument to explain how the union was going through a paradigm shift starting in the 1990s and the Maastricht treaty, and through the 2010s with the failure of the constitutional treaty and the financial crisis, into the rise of the far-right framed by the refugee crisis in 2015. It allowed academics to understand the increasing contestation of the union as it moved from an economic “community” and into a union with increasing ambitions beyond economic integration.

One of the defining texts of this period was Hooghe and Marks’ *A Postfunctionalist Theory of European Integration: From Permissive Consensus to Constraining Dissensus* (2009). In moving the understanding of politicisation as a concept in European integration from a contested narrative with normative undertones, to a matter of fact actively utilised in understanding how the European system develops. By positing this new, politicised reality of the union, Hooghe and Marks would provide a new wellspring of study and analysis in the field

of European studies. They framed their findings as “postfunctionalism”, arguing that the theories of Neofunctionalism and intergovernmentalism are both developments of functionalism, and that the reliance on fundamentally economic analysis belied the transformed nature of the union. The relevance of the two former mainstays of the study of Europe were argued to be lesser in the new, politicised Europe.

This is not to suggest that the suppositions of Hooghe and Marks were, or are, uncontroversial or uncontested. Although broad agreement exists that politicisation is present at an unprecedented level in EU history, many additions to the argument over the politicisation has been added. Börzel and Risse (2009) argued in their response to the Hooghe and Marks article that politicisation would not inevitably increase and fundamentally change the structure of the European Union, but was instead tied to singular events and would diminish when contentious issues disappeared. While it is difficult to prove or disprove this argument given the pace of major contentious issues in the years to follow 2009, Hooghe and Marks seem to have been largely vindicated in their supposition of continuous politicisation. Another major contestation would arise from neofunctionalist who continued to argue that the politicisation of Europe was beneficial to the European Union as it was a necessity for the development of a European demos, the natural conclusion of an ever-increasing integration of Europe (Habermas, 2012). This understanding of politicisation runs counter to the description created by Hooghe and Marks, who see politicisation as something which creates increasing contestation of the EU, and thus can be construed as a negative for the day-to-day operations of the union.

Like many of the scholars who would look at the debate over the nature of politicisation subsequently to the period of intense scrutiny from 2009 to the early 2010s (Hackenesch et al., 2021; Hurrelmann et al., 2013; Mercenier et al., 2023; Wilde et al., 2016), this thesis accepts the proposed definition of European politicisation by the postfunctionalists as largely correct. Whether politicisation is a negative force for the elite of the European Union or a necessary piece on the path to an integrated European polity is irrelevant for this thesis, although it is important to acknowledge that politicisation is understood to be a complication in the running of aspects of European governance. When an issue becomes politicised, a different level of scrutiny can be expected and the decision-making process which organises it must inevitably be affected. This thesis proposes that the EEA-grants and Cohesion must inevitably fall under the same logic, and that to observe the symptoms of politicisation is indicative of whether there can be an expectation of the principles of politicisation increasingly applying to the funds. As can be expected from the former conclusions on the nature of politicisation, this thesis also

supposes that the description of politicisation as an increasing force in the European polity and as no longer bound to individual events is accurate. In operationalising politicisation, however, a deeper look into the nature of politicisation is needed.

Defining the setting and process of politicisation

A broadly accepted definition of politicisation is as a three-dimensional process (Hackenesch et al., 2021), consisting of the growing salience of European governance, polarisation of opinion and an expansion of actors and audiences. This definition was posited by de Wilde, Leupold & Schmidtke (Wilde et al., 2016) and was built on a variety of studies and scholarly works which were written in an attempt to contend with a politicised Europe (Wilde, 2011).

Salience is understood in the text by De Wilde, Leupold and Schmidtke as “the importance attributed to the EU and European integration.” (Wilde et al., 2016, p. 8) It can, according to the article, “be indicated by the amount of newspaper articles reporting on European governance (...), how ‘aware’ citizens are of the existence of the EU, its institutions and policies and how worried they are about EU politics, (...) by the amount of public statements party representatives dedicate to EU issues in national election campaigns (...) or by the number of parliamentary questions devoted to EU issues” (Wilde et al., 2016, p. 8). Polarisation is defined as the “occupation of more extreme positions (...) and/or a depletion of neutral, ambivalent, or indifferent attitudes. Actor expansion refers to a “growing number of citizens and collective actors who dedicate resources in the form of time and money to follow and engage with EU governance.” (Wilde et al., 2016, pp. 8-9). Actor expansion is mostly related to mass media, as elite and collective actors must actively utilise it as a means to participate in EU governance. Audience participation, on the other hand, refers to “increasing resonance in the form of the amount of citizens regularly following EU events (...)” (Wilde et al., 2016, p. 9).

Although politicisation is defined as needing all three elements, this thesis will concentrate primarily on the question of salience. The thesis seeks to explore whether there are correlations between the EEA-grants and the Cohesion policy, and an increase in attention in newspapers which are important agenda setters in the relevant sectors. Actor expansion is also likely to be correlated with the findings of the thesis, though it will not cover actor expansion beyond this supposition. Polarisation can also be presumed to follow increasing attention paid to the transformation of the Hungarian polity in the context of funding provided to the country,

although the thesis will not provide sufficient insight into polarisation to make any claims regarding this.

When defining the arenas of politicisation, the thesis follows the definition of three levels, the institutional, intermediary or public, and the citizen level. This definition is common among the scholars studying politicisation in the European Union (Hutter & Grande, 2014; Mercenier et al., 2023; Wilde, 2011). The citizens arena, usually observed by scholars through public opinion, will not be analysed in this thesis. Instead, public pressure will be observed in the public arena expressed through media coverage of EU and EEA funding in the context of Hungary. The institutional level is narrowed down to the parliaments of the European Union and Norway. These are, as mentioned previously, chosen for their positions as natural recipients of public pressure, and as institutions which are capable of putting pressure on the relevant executive institutions, the European Commission and the Norwegian ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Previous research has differentiated three levels at which politicization can take place – the national, the European and the international level. While these three levels have often been analysed separately, the article “Politicization compared: at national, European, and Global levels” (Zürn, 2019) calls for more integrated perspectives to understand the interaction dynamics between the three levels. The thesis will position itself in the vacuum identified by Zürn, analysing a country on the boundary of European integration and the European Union.

2.2 Methodology

This thesis is a qualitative and deductive case study of the Cohesion policy and the EEA-grants in the context of the Hungarian turn towards illiberalism. The data of the thesis is created through a document study. The approach of the thesis is comparable to concepts like the ‘fitting case study’ (Moses, 2019), also referred to as a ‘theory-confirming case study’ by Arend Lijphart (Lijphart, 1971). The fitting case study seeks to find cases which adhere to theories or conceptual frames and thus conclude on the theory or concepts’ potential validity. Though the thesis is based in the deductive logic of the fitting case method, it does not seek to invalidate the concept of politicisation through utilising the concept to ‘test’ the potential validity. As section 2.1 presents, though there is disagreement on the extent of politicisation, there is agreement that something which is akin to politicisation has happened in the European Union (Grande & Hutter, 2016, p. 3). As such, and given the limited resources of the thesis, the thesis

does not seek to validate or invalidate the concept of politicisation, but instead to attempt to gain insight into the degree to which politicisation can be observed when applied to the governance area of Cohesion and EEA funding for Hungary.

To generate qualitative data, the thesis performed a document study of news media in the period of 2010 to 2022. As Aksel Tjora explains, “a substantial point of documents is that they give us information about a case relation written in a specific time and a specific place, and often with a specific audience in mind [authors translation from Norwegian]” (Tjora, 2018, p. 183). The purpose of a document study is to organise and contextualise this information in a manner which allows academic works to utilise the documents to gain greater insight into any research-worthy topics. This thesis used these principles as the point of departure, choosing to combine the thorough reading of relevant articles with an overview of articles over the years in the time frame. By combining the organising of articles in a broader set of search terms with an in-depth case study of these documents, the thesis will be able to produce a coherent set of data, which will give insight into the media coverage of the Cohesion Policy, the Recovery and Resilience Facility, and the EEA-grants in the context of Hungary.

The thesis is comparative in choosing to study media coverage of two arenas, the Norwegian and the EU. Commonly, academics of politicisation concentrate on either the EU level, or on how the national level interacts with the European level. By choosing to study politicisation of a grant managed by nation-states outside of the European Union, the thesis will be able to compare the media coverage of media connected to the European Union and connected to Norway. The inclusion of two arenas of study, rather than one, allows the thesis to put the data it collects and analyses into a more coherent picture through comparison.

The research question chosen is “How has the media covered the conflicts over the operations of the EEA-grants, Recovery and Resilience Facility and the Cohesion policy in Hungary between 2010 and 2022”. The research question was written broadly, intended to summarise the structure of the data collection. The findings in the data will naturally not be able to answer the research question in its totality, as there is a slew of media and media-types which could be used to answer this question. The text’s emphasis on Norwegian and specifically EU news media will instead provide insights into two quite specific forms of media, providing knowledge of two of the most likely sources of relevant coverage of the operations of the chosen funding mechanisms in Hungary. Although the research question will be explored further in the

conclusion and the analysis is intrinsically linked to the research question, the ‘meat’ of the thesis will instead be explored through the hypotheses.

When it comes to the hypotheses, H1 and H4 were both chosen with the foreknowledge that, for one, the EEA-grants were involved in a conflict with the Hungarian government as early as 2014. The conflicts between the Norwegian and Hungarian government could feasibly either be impacted by or create an impact on the media coverage of this area. H1 explores whether there is a trend of media coverage which can be observed coherently over the timeframe of the thesis. H4 explores the impact of aforementioned conflict over the EEA-grants and attempts to discover whether there is a correlation between the events with the EEA-grants and an increased attention paid to Cohesion Policy. Two means of validation of this hypothesis are used. One is quite simply a sizeable number of articles which cite the events as indicative of the relations between Hungary and funding from the European Union, as an example of means to punish the illiberal turn of the Hungarian government, that is the suspension of funding. Another would be a clear-cut trend of increased coverage of the Cohesion Policy in the time-period after following the legal prosecution of EEA-grant by the Hungarian government and/or the suspension of the grants in Hungary. Although the overviews and categorisations of the articles are done year by year, this is still a qualitative thesis, and the relevant time frame will be analysed in detail to make an assessment of this hypothesis. It should also be noted that the Recovery and Resilience Facility is considered part of this hypothesis, as it will only be relevant in 2020 and later.

H2 was, similarly to H1, chosen with the foreknowledge of the conflict between the EU and Hungary, which was very likely to have caused an impact on the coverage of the Cohesion Policy in Hungary. Again, like H1, increased coverage of these events could be feasible both before or in response to the conflicts. For both H1 and H2 to be applicable, the increased coverage must exist beyond just coverage of any singular event, and must instead happen over a series of events through several years. Although there is an argument that the term politicisation is equally apt if there is ad-hoc interest in a single event over a short time span, the thesis is instead interested in longer term interest covering not just one event for H1 and H2 to be considered validated.

H3, “the Recovery and Resilience Facility’s Hungarian operation was politicised in its inception.”, was produced as part of preliminary reading when beginning the writing of the master thesis. When using similar key search terms to the ones chosen for this thesis, 2020 was

defined by similar coverage of the conflict between the EU and Hungary over the Cohesion Policy, but they instead covered the RRF. Its inclusion is based on an interest to see if the RRF can be placed along the Cohesion Policy in 2020 and after, in a logical manner. The inclusion of an additional fund, politicised from its inception and covered similarly to the Cohesion Policy, would be indicative of a broader politicisation of funding for Hungary.

2.2.1 Timeframe

This thesis has chosen the timeframe 2010 to 2022. There are several reasons to pick this timeframe. For one, 2010 was the year Viktor Orbán was re-elected, and is commonly understood as the beginning of his rapid turn towards autocratic rule. As mentioned, the turn of Hungary towards the far-right forms the basis of this thesis's data. A common interpretation of this turn is that it began in 2010, with a largely free and democratic, though fundamentally flawed, election (Lendvai, 2017, pp. 29-37), in which Viktor Orbán received a narrow majority in the popular vote, but a supermajority through the electoral system and was thus in position to cement his power and begin enacting sweeping changes in accordance with his national populist agenda.

Hungary officially joined the European Union in 2004, and this could be conceived as a possible starting year to study. By choosing 2010 as the starting year, however, the thesis will avoid a time period which is unlikely to contain observable politicisation. The period of 2004-2010 was marked by largely centrist governments under Ferenc Gyurcsány, concentrated on economic issues and alignment with the European Union, which declined in popularity through these years and was rocked by a series of scandals (Lendvai, 2017, pp. 27-29). It is unlikely that this period will lend itself to this thesis, and in likelihood would instead be at best irrelevant and at worst be a red herring.

The delivery of the two grants also lend themselves well to this time frame. The EEA-grants and Cohesion policy had periods officially running from 2014-2021 and 2014-2020, consecutively (European Commission, 2023a; Norwegian Government, 2023). Despite this, they both still delivered funding through these programmes through 2022. In other words, there is a consecutive period in which the funding was distributed running through most of the time period the thesis will study. Though a transition in the funding periods might have been non-consequential, the fact that the transition period happens early in the timeframe of the thesis provides greater stability to the findings of the text.

The decision to not include 2023 is twofold. For one, the data is organised year by year. In organising the articles by year, the thesis can attain a broader sense of when there have been increases in attention paid to relevant topics in the papers. In choosing not to organise by smaller time units such as months, the thesis avoids spending undue attention on briefer trends in what is a qualitative thesis seeking to find correlations within the topics. 2023 is additionally a year in which the impressions of news cycles are harder to gauge objectively and with a professional distance. Simply by them being more current, the articles of 2023 have a greater potential of being obfuscated by opinion or creating a greater impression than is warranted. As they are not necessary for the conclusion of this thesis, their removal can be fairly justified.

Part of the argument for choosing 2010 as the starting date is also that it provides a few years where it is unlikely that there was observable attention paid to Hungary in the context of funding, especially when compared to events which would later put the funding at the forefront. The early years of the Orbán governments serve as good cases to compare with later developments. For one, even the concept of politicisation of the European Union in the context of scholarly study was still an underexplored concept. As mentioned, although the Maastricht and Lisbon treaty would create the need to explore the union in a different light, it would take the economic crisis and the rise of the far right for the concept of politicisation to take its place as one of the most salient means of analysing the EU. As such, going into the writing of this thesis, there was a reasonable presumption that there would be negligent levels of politicisation before 2014.

Finally, there are certain events which were crucial in forming the reasoning for, and design of, this thesis. The initial conflict between Norway and Hungary from 2014 to 2015 over the Hungarian actions against EEA-funded NGOs is a prescient example of funding becoming tied to the right-wing wave which swept, and arguably still sweeps, parts of Europe. From around 2017 (Tamma, 2017), the matter of rule of law would be tied to the matter of cohesion funding as part of the discourse over the use of Article 7. This discourse was noticeable for those inclined to pay attention to it but was understood to be largely at a standstill given the inability on the European level to enact the punishments related to the article. These two circumstances, one at the European and one at the Norwegian level, formed an area of interest which laid the foundations for writing this thesis. By beginning in 2010 and ending in 2022, this thesis will seek to explore the prelude to 2014 and article 7 in elite media, the events of both and the developments after, hoping to better understand politicisation in the context of funding for Hungary.

2.2.2 Analysing politicisation

In producing data for the thesis, the native search engines for Euractiv and EUobserver was used. For the Norwegian data the media library Atekst was used. Atekst is a service provided by the communication and media analysis company Retriever. It contains the majority of Norwegian news media going back to 1945 and keeps up to date articles by both Aftenposten and VG (Retriever, 2023a, 2023b).

The data was collected beginning the 1. January 2010 to 31. December 2022 (Retriever, 2023a). The total amount of articles in this period was recorded for each search term and media in a separate spreadsheet.

Search term	Total article	Paper
Cohesion AND Hungary	345	Euractiv
Funding AND Hungary	917	Euractiv
"EU funds" AND Hungary	496	Euractiv
Hungary	6143	Euractiv
EU	71010	Euractiv
Cohesion AND Orban	134	Euractiv
Funding AND Orban	327	Euractiv
"EU funds" AND Orban	250	Euractiv
Cohesion AND Hungary	131	EUobserver
Funding AND Hungary	1034	EUobserver
"EU funds" AND Hungary	432	EUobserver
Cohesion AND Orban	46	EUobserver
Funding AND Orban	376	EUobserver
"EU funds" AND Orban	179	EUobserver
EØS AND Ungarn	200	Aftenposten
Midler AND Ungarn	200	Aftenposten
EØS-midler AND Ungarn	56	Aftenposten
EØS AND Orban	49	Aftenposten
Midler AND Orban	75	Aftenposten
EØS-midler AND Orban	19	Aftenposten
Midler AND Ungarn	123	Verdens Gang
EØS AND Ungarn	170	Verdens Gang
EØS-Midler AND Ungarn	37	Verdens Gang
Midler AND Orban	54	Verdens Gang
EØS AND Orban	37	Verdens Gang
EØS-midler AND Orban	24	Verdens Gang
Hungary	2477	EUobserver
Norge	236191	Verdens Gang
Ungarn	7856	Verdens Gang
Norge	260680	Aftenposten
Ungarn	7231	Aftenposten

Figure 1: Screenshot of total number of articles for all search terms.

2022	Euractiv	"EU funds" AND Hungary	120	24%
2021	Euractiv	"EU funds" AND Hungary	64	13%
2020	Euractiv	"EU funds" AND Hungary	122	25%
2019	Euractiv	"EU funds" AND Hungary	50	10%
2018	Euractiv	"EU funds" AND Hungary	42	8%
2017	Euractiv	"EU funds" AND Hungary	31	6%
2016	Euractiv	"EU funds" AND Hungary	11	2%
2015	Euractiv	"EU funds" AND Hungary	8	2%
2014	Euractiv	"EU funds" AND Hungary	7	1%
2013	Euractiv	"EU funds" AND Hungary	4	1%
2012	Euractiv	"EU funds" AND Hungary	7	1%
2011	Euractiv	"EU funds" AND Hungary	10	2%
2010	Euractiv	"EU funds" AND Hungary	11	2%

Figure 2: Screenshot of parts of the number-collection cells from sheet "Number of articles".

The European Search terms were ‘Cohesion AND Hungary’, ‘Funding AND Hungary’, ‘“EU funds” AND Hungary’, ‘Cohesion and Orban’, ‘Funding AND Orban’ and ‘“EU funds” AND Orban’. The Norwegian search terms were EØS AND Ungarn (EEA and Hungary), ‘Midler AND Ungarn’ (Funding and Hungary), ‘EØS-midler AND Ungarn’ (EEA-grants and Hungary), ‘EØS AND Orban’, ‘Midler AND Orban’, and ‘EØS-midler AND Orban’.

The search terms are intentionally divided into two sections, one using ‘Hungary’ and one using the term ‘Orban’. This was done both to potentially create one more generic and one more specific set of results and to diversify the results, potentially showing that searching more broadly for the country provides different levels of interest from the media or that there are similar results despite tying the funding directly to Viktor Orbán.

The use of the term ‘EØS’ is partially tied to Norwegian language used to refer to the agreement between Norway and the EU. As the actual European Economic Area is extremely rarely referred to in Norwegian discourse, the Norwegian term for the EEA, EØS, is commonly used to refer simply to the EEA-agreement. By using this term as a search term in the Norwegian media, the results tied to EØS will almost exclusively refer to the EEA-agreement in one form or another. The results will still include irrelevant data, such as coverage of Covid-19 restrictions and the effect of them on travel to Hungary in the years 2020 and 2021.

Each search term was then organised into articles per year. The number of articles were then made into percentage of the total number of articles from 2010 to 2022. Two search terms were chosen to be read through by hand, one Norwegian from Aftenposten and one European from

Euractiv. The terms were “‘EU funds” AND Hungary’ and ‘Midler AND Ungarn’. The articles which fell under these terms were put into categories to be able to see the actual relevance of the articles. For the EU articles, the results were put into the categories ‘EU funding for Hungary’ and ‘Rule of law as a criteria’. The last category ‘rule of law as a criteria’ for continued funding through the cohesion policy. If an article covers rule of law as a criteria for funding in Hungary, usually by covering the discussion of ceasing funding to Hungary because of rule of law violations, the article would be defined as falling under category 2. If the article covered EU funding for Hungary without the mention of rule of law, the article fell under category 1. The purpose of this distinction was to be able to identify the degree to which the coverage of funding for Hungary can be tied to the debate and actions around the rule of law in Hungary. For a topic to be politicised, it must, as the literature on politicisation of the EU has discussed in detail, rise above a single topic and/or event. By adding this category, the degree to which the connection between Hungary and EU funding is related to one specific set of issues can be ascertained. Finally, Misappropriation of funds was included. It was added both to observe the level of interest in corruption or perceived misspending in the EEA-grants, and to be able to give greater perspective to unexpected numbers in the searches, as it does in part in 2017.

"EU funds" and Hungary	1. EU funding for Hungary	2. Rule of law as a criteria	Summary
2022	19	64	83
2021	5	16	21
2020	0	71	71
2019	4	10	14
2018	10	17	27
2017	2	2	4
2016	1	0	1
2015	0	1	1
2014	1	0	1
2013	0	0	0
2012	0	0	0
2011	1	0	1
2010	0	0	0

Table 1: Table of the in-depth review of articles with the search term “‘EU funds” AND Hungary’.

The Norwegian search term was organised into three categories: ‘1. EEA-grants’, ‘2. EU funds’, and ‘3. misappropriation of funds’. Category 1 is the only one which relates directly to H1.

Category two is added both to help explain any potential discrepancies in the numbers, and to assess the degree to which Norwegian media is paying attention to the conflicts between the EU and Hungary over funding. Finally, the misappropriation of funds is once again added to potentially explain discrepancies, however it is also added to explore the degree to which the spending of the EEA-grants is questioned in the public arena. The spending of the grant has occasionally been questioned, in particular by Eurosceptic politicians and public figures, and this thesis provides an interesting opportunity to explore such statements and the degree to which this shapes the media coverage of the EEA-grants. Articles would only be put in this category if they did not also cover the operation of the EEA-grants in Hungary.

Midler AND Ungarn	1. EEA-grants	2. EU funds	3. Misappropriation of funds
2022	0	5	0
2021	1	1	1
2020	2	3	0
2019	0	1	0
2018	3	5	0
2017	2	0	1
2016	1	0	0
2015	2	0	0
2014	4	0	0
2013	0	0	0
2012	0	0	0
2011	0	0	0
2010	0	0	0

Table 2: Table of the in-depth review of articles under the search term 'Midler AND Hungary'.

The decision to use the search term “‘EU funds’ AND Hungary’ as the main term for study in the European media was made for several reasons. The search terms should preferably be broad enough to contain as many relevant articles as possible. By choosing the term with the second most result (496), The number of articles to go through provides a thorough data set without reaching a quantity which would be insurmountable with the resources and time available for a master thesis. The search term ‘funding AND Hungary’ with its 917 articles would require a lot more resources than “‘EU funds’ And Hungary’ and likely with very diminishing returns in terms of relevant articles. There is still an expectation, however, that the search term will provide more irrelevant articles than for example “‘EU funds’ AND Orban’, with the term ‘Orban’ likely connecting the articles closer to the increased politicisation of Hungarian politics in the context of the European Union. The term ‘EU funds’ is a common term used to refer to

the funding sent to Hungary through, amongst others, the cohesion policy and is the most common phrase used when discussing the funding which was held back from Hungary, in particular as it relates to the debate over the rule of law criteria. The choice of using this term is likely a means of discussing the funding which would be held back from Hungary without getting bogged down in the complicated policy field of EU regional funding.

Similar logic used to choose the European search term was used to choose the term “midler AND Ungarn”. By choosing the term ‘midler’ (funds), the thesis would likely receive irrelevant results, but since the number of articles were 200, this was still a surmountable number of articles to analyse.

Finally, each of the media sources have been given one to two categories which provide insight into the change in number of articles in total and the number of articles covering Hungary specifically. For all media, simply searching for ‘Hungary’ (Ungarn specifically for Norwegian media) was used to indicate the total interest in Hungary. For the number indicating change in the total number of articles, ‘Norge’ (Norway) was used in the Norwegian media. For Euractiv the term ‘EU’ was used. With EUobserver, the search engine functionality ended up being insufficient for searching for a large set of articles, as the engine is unable to say how many articles there are above 1000 articles and there are several thousand articles per year with the category ‘EU’. Nevertheless, given the similarities between the size and growth of the two EU media, it is likely that they share similar developments in total number of articles, meaning a steady growth of articles.

3 Exploring actors, arenas and funding mechanisms

3.1 The Cohesion Policy, the Recovery and Resilience Facility and the EEA-grants

3.1.1 The EEA and Norway grants

When the EEA-grants are referred to in this text, the text is in fact referring to both the Norway-grants and EEA-grants. The two used to be the same grant, but because of a disagreement over spending in 2004, Norway decided to divide the money into one half which they administer alone and the EEA-grants which are administered by the three EEA-agreement countries Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway (NOU 2012:2, 2012, p. 762). In this text, these grants are only referred to as the EEA-grant and only Norway is understood as the primary operator of the EEA-grant. Partly this is to maintain a scope for the text to only encompass one country, thus avoiding a problematic increase in scope which could serve to weaken the precision of the text. Given the vast difference of scale between the countries, Norway with a population of 5,4 million and a Gross Domestic Product (GDP)us of 579 Billion United States Dollars (USD) in 2022 (International Monetary Fund, 2023b) compared to Iceland and Liechtenstein with 376 000 and 37 000 inhabitant and a GDP of 27 and 6 billion USD (International Monetary Fund, 2023a; The World Bank, 2023) , the difference in economic and available administrative capabilities is vast. Norway pays around 95% of the funds of the EEA-grants without the Norway grants (NOU 2012:2, 2012, p. 762). Additionally, there is a trend among Norwegian media and even the Norwegian government (Norwegian Government, 2023) of referring to the grants as Norwegian.

This is not to say that the EEA-grants as means of influence for the other countries of the EEA-agreement is not worthy of study. Of particular note is the case study on Romanian-Icelandic cooperation through EEA-grant funded initiatives (Corpadean, 2016). This serves as an excellent example of the ways the junior partners of the EEA-agreement have gained influence through the grants, as well as being important members of the grant. Nevertheless, the sheer power disparity between the members of the EEA-agreement belies the fact that Norway is the main actor behind the EEA and Norway grants, and that it is thus justifiable to see the expressions of politicisation in the Norwegian public sphere as correlated with the pressures exuded towards the actions of the EEA-grants, even without including similar expressions in the Icelandic and Liechtensteiner public spheres.

Following the failed referendum for Norwegian entry into the European Union in 1992, Norway found itself on the outside of union along with Iceland and Liechtenstein. Although there was now no path for Norway to join the EU directly, a process led by the Norwegian prime minister Gro Harlem Brundtland, in close cooperation with Jacques Delors, had been working on a way to tie the European Union closer to the EFTA countries. The final agreement, the EEA-agreement, tied the three countries very closely to the European Union. As part of this agreement, the countries agreed to fund the development of less developed countries in the EU.

In the period until 2004, the EEA-grants would be referred to as the Financial Mechanism and was granted to Greece, Spain, Portugal, Northern Ireland and Ireland. With the eastern expansion of the European Union, the focus of the funding moved to Central and Eastern Europe. Among the countries funded was Hungary. The fund is divided into periods. The most recent, and most relevant to this paper, is the period of 2014-2021. Funding for projects during this period will last until 2024. By 2014, with the exit of Spain from the programme because of their increased GDP, there were 15 total countries receiving funding from the EEA-grants.

The grants are divided into 5 Priority Sectors and 23 Programme Areas. These seek to match the priorities of the EU Cohesion Policy. Hungary was originally intended to receive funding under the programmes:

- Business development, innovation, and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
- Roma inclusion and empowerment
- Local development and poverty reduction
- Social Dialogue – decent work
- Education and scholarships
- Climate change and energy
- Culture
- Civil society

Hungary		EEA FM contribution	National contribution
Programmes			
1	Education and Scholarships	€4,500,000	€794,118
2	Climate Change and Energy	€50,000,000	€8,823,529
3	Culture	€17,000,000	€ 3 000 000
4	Civil Society	€10,890,000	N/A
5	Roma Inclusion and Empowerment	€ 14,531,000	€ 2,564,294
Other allocations			
	Technical assistance to the Beneficiary State (Art. 1.10)	€ 1,633,500	N/A
	Reserve (Art. 1.11)	N/A	N/A
	Reserve for completion of projects under FM 2009-14 (Art. 1.12)	N/A	N/A
	Fund for bilateral relations (Art. 4.6.1)	€2,178,000	N/A
Net allocation to Hungary		€100,732,500	€15,181,941

Table 3: Financial parameters of the memorandum of Understanding between Hungary and the EEA-grants 2014-2021, signed in 2020 (EEA Financial Mechanism, 2020).

	Hungary	Norwegian FM contribution	National contribution
	Programmes		
1	Business Development, Innovation and SMEs	€ 45,000,000	€ 7,941,176
2	Roma Inclusion and Empowerment	€ 17,003,000	€ 3,000,529
3	Local Development and Poverty Reduction	€ 31,013,000	€ 5,472,882
4	Social Dialogue – Decent Work	€1,057,000	N/A
	Other allocations		
	Technical assistance to the Beneficiary State (Art. 1.10)	€ 1,585,500	N/A
	Reserve (Art. 1.11)	N/A	N/A
	Reserve for completion of projects under FM 2009-14 (Art. 1.12)	N/A	N/A
	Fund for bilateral relations (Art. 4.6.1)	€ 2,114,000	N/A
	Net allocation to Hungary	€97,772,500	€16,414,588

Table 4: Financial parameters of the memorandum of Understanding between Hungary and the Norway grants 2014-2021, signed in 2020 (Norwegian Financial Mechanism, 2020).

EEA-Grant projects often cooperate with “Donor Programme Partners”. These are typically national public bodies like ministries, but also include international partners like the Council of Europe and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). These partners are tied to programme areas which fall under their expertise. These partners will often work with the local counterpart in the same programme, i.e. a project for environmental improvement will fall under the jurisdiction of the Norwegian Environment Agency (Miljødirektoratet) in cooperation with the most similar agency in the recipient country. Additionally, the grants emphasise inviting Project Partners from the Donor countries.

3.1.2 The Cohesion Policy

The analysis of the European funding will primarily be focused on the Cohesion Policy. Cohesion Policy is the term used by the European Union to describe the delivery of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the Cohesion fund (CF), the European Social

Fund Plus (ESF+) and the Just Transition Fund (JTF). As presented by the European Commission, the Cohesion Policy seeks to “support job creation, business competitiveness, economic growth, sustainable development, and improve citizens’ quality of life” (European Commission, 2023a). In the 1980s and 1990s, the funding primarily went to the European south, specifically Greece, southern Italy, southern France, Spain and Portugal, as well as Ireland. With the Eastern expansion, both the scope and number of countries receiving funding would be drastically raised. Much funding would still be sent to the European south, but eastern European countries would take centre stage in the decision-making and funding. Hungary would become one of the states that was most reliant on the funding provided through the Cohesion policy, with 90 percent of public spending coming from the policy in 2010-2012 (Kovács, 2016, p. 306) and the Cohesion fund amounting to 3.2 percent of GDP annually in the period of 2014-2020 (Jedlička & Rzentarzewska, 2014).

The Cohesion Policy is often understood to have an unstated secondary goal of increasing the cohesion of the EU. Specifically, this is studied through the expression Europeanisation. Although there are scholarly disagreements on how to express and measure Europeanisation in the context of the Cohesion policy, there is agreement that the policy can be tied to the integration of the European Union (Dąbrowski & Graziano, 2016).

The decision to use the Cohesion policy specifically can thus be explained through the emphasis on investment into the least developed areas of the European Union and the common understanding of the policy as a means of achieving increased politicisation. The Cohesion policy is integral to the development of the Hungarian economy, making it a salient area of study when attempting to analyse politicisation in European funding. The secondary interest in increasing European cohesion serves to make the framing of funding in the context of politicisation both more salient and more comparable to the interest seen in the EEA-grants to achieve influence in the recipient countries.

The term cohesion policy refers primarily to the overarching policies which organise the projects which receive funding from three funds: the European Regional Development Funds, the European Social Fund Plus and the Cohesion Fund. The ERDF is considered “the delivery arm of traditional Regional Policy”(Franziska et al., 2021). Other funds included in the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), also include the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF).

The Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO) is the primary Directorate-General when it comes to the Cohesion Policy and is part of the management of almost all the funds. However, there is a myriad of Directorate-Generals (DG) which manage the various funds. The EAFRD and EMFF are managed by the Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development (DG AGRI) and the Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DG MARE) respectively. These funds are tied closely to their respective European policy fields, The EAFRD being tied to the work around the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and EMFF being tied to the Common Fisheries Policy and broader maritime policy of the European Union. Finally, the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL) is also involved the policy, a result of the major emphasis on employment and social inclusion in the Cohesion Policy.

In the period 2014-2020, the ERDF had four key priorities:

- Research and innovation
- Information and communications technologies
- Small and medium-sized enterprise competitiveness
- A low carbon economy

The importance of utilising these priorities was correlated with the level of development in the area where the project was performed, with 80 percent of funding in “more developed” regions requiring at least two of these, whereas less developed regions only required 50 percent.

The Partnership Agreement between the EU and Hungary covers the five funds found in ESIF and allocated “around €21.9 billion for Cohesion Policy”. These funds covered 5 main development priorities (European Commission, 2014):

1. Improving the competitiveness and global performance of the business sector.
2. Promoting employment through economic development, employment, education and social inclusion policies, taking account territorial disparities.
3. Enhancing energy and resource efficiency.
4. Tackling social inclusion and demographic challenges.
5. Implementation of local and territorial development aimed at promoting economic growth.

The funding’s intention is to “provide financial basis for Hungary’s medium and long-term development strategy”. Amongst other things, the intention is to provide funding for “growth and job creation” which will help “reduce regional disparities in Hungary”, “focus on enhancing innovation activity and competitiveness of enterprises” and help Hungary in its “shift to a low carbon economy”. The allocation of funds follows 11 objectives tied to the development priorities.

Thematic objectives	ERDF (€)	ESF (€)	CF (€)	EAFRD (€)	EMFF (€)	TOTAL (€)
(1) strengthening research, technological development and innovation;	2 148 860 450	0	0	85 609 625	0	2 234 470 075
((2) enhancing access to, and use and quality of, ICT;	689 265 295	0	0	0	0	689 265 295
(3) enhancing the competitiveness of SMEs, of the agricultural sector (for the EAFRD) and of the fishery and aquaculture sector (for the EMFF);	2 071 435 900	0	0	853 251 242	20 267 058	2 944 954 200
(4) supporting the shift towards a low-carbon economy in all sectors;	1 425 387 797	0	845 597 151	532 278 345	5 000 000	2 808 263 293
(5) promoting climate change adaptation, risk prevention and management;	0	0	888 196 396	126 551 958	0	1 014 748 354
(6) preserving and protecting the environment and promoting resource efficiency;	1 011 757 443	0	1 397 475 387	970 463 650	12 744 468	3 392 440 948
(7) promoting sustainable transport and removing bottlenecks in key network infrastructures;	631 099 276	0	2 700 708 949	0	0	3 331 808 225
(8) promoting sustainable and quality employment and supporting labour mobility;	1 497 946 769	1 723 979 610	0	291 718 633	732 900	3 514 377 912
(9) promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and any discrimination;	862 827 154	1 056 904 966	0	457 585 678	0	2 377 317 798
(10) investing in education, training and vocational training for skills and lifelong learning;	418 200 606	1 246 399 567	0	54 949 286	0	1 719 549 459
(11) enhancing institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders and efficient public administration.	0	684 855 782	0	0	0	684 855 782
Technical assistance	0	0	193 449 129	82 928 076	351 867	276 729 072
TOTAL	10 756 780 690	4 712 139 925	6 025 427 012	3 455 336 493	39 096 293	24 988 780 413

Table 5: Table of allocation of funding and thematic objectives of the Partnership agreement between Hungary and the EU (European Commission, 2014, p. 4).

As the summary of the partnership agreement between Hungary and the EU shows, the actual allocation of funds to Hungary were not aimed at taking action against the turn of the government towards the far-right. The partnership briefly mentions increased benefits to Roma communities, but these are related to integration of vulnerable groups in Hungarian societies. Of the 11 thematic objectives, only the improvement of the capacity of public authorities and efficient public administration could be understood as allowing the EU a means of utilising these funds to directly oppose the rise of the Hungarian far-right. A component of the improvements is a Human Resources Management improvement regarding the objectivity of civil servants. A stated goal of the administrative improvements is “to improve the quality of its public administration through structural reforms by giving them the necessary institutional capacities” (European Commission, 2014). This goal can also be associated with a report written by the OECD in 2017 on the capacity for improvement in the Hungarian public administration and public service (OECD, 2017). Amongst a broad set of recommendations,

the report points to government- and ministerial loyalty as important expectations in public servants as a weakness of the government.

Given the importance of political control over public administration in the Hungarian movement towards illiberalism and utilisation of political appointments and termination of public administration (Meyer-Sahling & Fanni, 2020a, 2020b), there is an argument that the push for more independent public administrators is a direct confrontation with the Orbán-governments practice of replacing civil servicemen with loyalist. In 2010, there was for example a 100% turnover rate of top positions and the systematic use of patronage to control civil administration in the subsequent years (Meyer-Sahling & Fanni, 2020b, pp. 119-120).

Nevertheless, there is still little indication that neither the funding from the Cohesion funds, nor the advice from the OECD report have been used to “temper” Hungarian movement towards illiberalism. Neither describe these changes in terms other than efficiency improvements. The OECD report summarises the grounds for their suggestions as such “The basic tenet of a good public administration is a merit-based, politically neutral, professional civil service...”. The understanding of what constitutes a good civil administration is simply different from the current approach of the Hungarian government, and thus it is less likely that there is implied criticism and rather that they provide common best practices while reserving judgement on the actions of the Hungarian government.

3.1.3 The Recovery and Resilience Facility

The thesis has chosen to include the RRF along with the Cohesion policy. The fund is a major, ad hoc response to covid-19, consisting of 672.5 billion in loans and grants aimed at countering the adverse economic effects of the virus and the policies enacted to stop its spread (European Commission, 2023b). The RRF has been included along with the cohesion policy because of its integral part of the conflicts between the Hungarian government and the European Union. The conflict between the parties lay with the decision of the EU to include rule of law requirements for receiving benefits from the RRF (Gyulavári, 2022). In doing so, the EU managed to find a means of pushing Hungary and Poland on the topic of rule of law after a nearly 3-year long dispute over using Article 7 to tie the Cohesion policy to rule of law in the two countries. Although including the Recovery and Resilience Funds allows for a potential distraction from the analysis of the Cohesion Policy, there are several reasons why including it will strengthen the thesis.

When it was proposed in 2020, the RRF was made conditional to rule of law. Fairly predictably, Hungary and Poland moved to veto it. This conflict, with the EU indirectly targeting the Hungarian and Polish governments and the governments responding with a veto, forms a pinnacle of the conflict between the EU funding and the Hungarian government. As such, its inclusion will form a more comprehensive understanding of the coverage of EU funding for Hungary. Secondly, the fact that the RRF was an ad-hoc reaction to Covid-19 intended to last for 6 years makes its inclusion less complicating than including institutions like the Common Agricultural Policy, an organisation with a long history and dedicated scholarly approaches.

3.2 Media

The thesis will use four news media, 2 Norwegian and 2 EU-centric. They were chosen for their relationship with the relevant parliament. For Norway, the media chosen were the ones quoted the most in parliamentary sessions. The data for these were created with the data produced by the now defunct NGO “Holder de ord” (do they keep their word [Authors translation]). In 2014, they produced a dataset which could be used to analyse the minutes of the parliament to find the most quoted news media (Bakken, 2014). The three most quoted in descending order are Aftenposten, Norsk Rikskringkasting (NRK) and Verdens Gang (VG) (Mikalsen & Myrvang, 2018). The thesis will use Aftenposten and VG.

NRK, or Norsk rikskringkasting, is the Norwegian national broadcaster, but is divided into several branches, including the district division in charge of coverage of every region of Norway and the Sápmi division in charge of creating content for the native Sami population primarily in Sami languages. News is provided through a website and app, and several television and radio channels (Norges Rikskringkasting, 2023). The diversity of means of providing information combined with the geographically diverse coverage makes it a less reliable means of analysing the influence at Stortinget both in finding which sections of the NRK are actually actively utilised by members of parliament, as well as how to structure an analysis of the content. This, thus, leaves Aftenposten and VG.

Aftenposten receives the most mentions and is used for the qualitative analysis of search terms in Norwegian media. The paper was founded in 1860 and is a daily paper producing both paper and digital editions. Although it made strides towards political neutrality and states in its statement of purpose to aim to deliver objective news, the same statement of purpose states that the paper should be “ideologically anchored in a liberal-conservative world view [authors

translation]” (Schwencke, 2019). The newspaper has long held a reputation as capable of providing domestic news coverage, including investigative journalism, as well as up to date international news coverage. In addition to its image as a non-tabloid paper, it is not surprising that Aftenposten is a popularly cited paper in the Norwegian parliament.

Verdens Gang is also a daily paper, although it is defined as a tabloid paper. It was founded in 1868 but went bankrupt in 1923. It would be relaunched in 1945. Although the original paper was liberal left, its relaunch aimed to make it completely politically independent. It moved to become a tabloid newsmagazine in 1963 in an attempt to improve readership and has maintained this format since. The paper is national, and unlike Aftenposten does not claim any belonging to Oslo. Like Aftenposten, the paper is both published on paper and digitally. When combining the readers of both, VG is the most read paper in Norway.

It is worth mentioning that both papers are published by the same publishing house, Schibsted, and have been since VG was purchased by the publisher in the 1960s. This could, hypothetically, cause an opportunity. The papers have independent management and argue that they are fully independent. This description is likely more or less correct, especially given the different approaches towards news coverage by the two papers.

Finding an EU equivalent of the Norwegian news media presents some challenges. For one, the media which is influential in Norway is Norwegian, both in language and in perspective. It follows that the European media should be European in perspective. According to a survey by BCW Brussels, a branch of the public relations and communication firm Burson Cohn & Wolfe, and SavantaComRes, a UK polling company, the ten most influential news sources are in descending order Politico, Reuters, Financial Times, The Economist, Euronews, BBC, Euractiv, Twitter, Bloomberg and EUobserver (BCW Brussels, 2022). Of these papers, Euronews, Euractiv and EUobserver define themselves as European, with EUobserver and Euractiv in particular aimed at covering EU affairs. Politico Europe, created in 2014 with its first print issue published in 2015, has also positioned itself as an EU affairs news, with apparent success given their position as the most influential news source. For this thesis, the four EU affair newspapers, Politico Europe, Euronews, EUobserver and Euractiv, are the best options of these ten. By choosing sources with a distinctly EU angle, the thesis is able to have sources which serve as analogous sources to those chosen in Norway, which all have distinctly Norwegian outlooks.

The thesis has chosen the news sources Euractiv and EUobserver as its European sources. This decision comes from a rejection of the two other sources, rather than any distinct advantages of the two. The decision to avoid Euronews is derived from its angle as “Europe’s leading international news channel”, as opposed to an EU centric news source. In its emphasis on the international and pan-European, as opposed to EU centric, news coverage, the paper is likely less relevant to the study of EU policy aimed at an EU member, than the unabashedly EU-centric papers chosen by the thesis. Politico Europe was founded as an independent branch of Politico in 2014 and is thus a poor fit with the timeframe of the thesis. Furthermore, the news provider lacks functionality in its search engine to organise its content in a manner which lends itself to the data collection used in this thesis.

Moving to the details of the chosen European media, both Euractiv and EUobserver have similar stories behind their founding. Having been founded in 1999 and 2000, both sought to establish themselves in the vacuum of news coverage in the emerging Brussels sphere (EUobserver, 2023; Euractiv, 2023). Both would be able to create a decent impact, swiftly become leading news platforms for those working in, with or around the EU, again primarily in Brussels. Both are small news media in international context, and lack the resources commonly seen in international or dominant national media. Both are online newspapers built around websites and are active users of social media to maintain presence in their field.

Euractiv was chosen as the media to perform the qualitative analysis of articles. It was chosen because it has been shown to have a slightly greater impact than EUobserver, both in terms of its influence amongst EU officials and through social media (BCW Brussels, 2022). Despite this, given the similarities of the two newspapers, picking EUobserver would in likelihood have not affected the precision of the thesis noticeably.

3.3 The Hungarian government

The thesis has chosen to study the politicisation as it relates to the Hungarian government. There are other options when choosing a case to study increasing politicisation in the European Union. Poland is the second country often mentioned when the rise of illiberalism is brought up. There are several reasons why Hungary forms a better case study than Poland, however. For one, Poland’s reputation has been increasingly connected to its role as an ardent opposer of Russia in the aftermath of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Poland has, from the invasion of Ukraine to the time of writing this, seen itself become a reliable partner for NATO, a dogged supporter

of Ukraine and the most important refugee hub of Europe. The Polish conflict with the European Union over rule of law and liberal democracy is by no means gone, but Polish relations with the EU has rapidly become very complicated, as procedures are engaged to punish Poland over anti-LGBTQ policies and legal reforms at the same time that Poland is receiving international praise for its support for Ukraine and Ukrainians (Fox & Vasques, 2022). By using Hungary as a case, these complications are largely avoided.

Hungary will serve as a case to study the politicisation of the Cohesion policy and the EEA-grants. There are several reasons Hungary is a salient area of study. The country has taken a marked shift to the right under the leadership of Orbán from his second premiership in 2010 until today. It has during this period become a beacon of “illiberal democracy”, and fronted the idea that it is part of a movement to create an alternative form of democracy which emphasises European, Christian values (Ablonczy, 2015, pp. 59-62). The EU, having been founded in part as a bulwark of liberal democracy in the aftermath of the second world war (Phinnemore, 2016, p. 14), has long understood itself as fundamentally tied to democracy and liberal democracy as the only legitimate form of democracy. Similarly, many western countries both see themselves as proponents of liberal democracy. Scandinavia in particular has distinguished itself as an active defender of liberal democracy through the countries’ work on the international stage, with scholars arguing that the insistence on value-based diplomacy amounts to a form of soft power (Stokke, 2017, pp. 140-145). As Hungary has moved further away from western democracy, there has been increasing attention paid to the money the country receives to improve and modernise.

Hungary is also a good case given its complicated history with both EU funding and the EEA-grants. In 2014, the EEA-grants suspended regular operations as a part of a greater conflict with the Hungarian government over, amongst other circumstances, treatment of EEA-grant sponsored NGOs. In 2017, use of Article 7 of the Treaty of the European Union to tie the Cohesion Policies actions to the deteriorating rule of law in Poland heightened the pressure between the EU and Hungary, as Hungary was closely tied to Poland politically and had overseen the deterioration of rule of law in much the same manner. 2020 would see a relatively successful attempt to tie rule of law conditionality to the Covid recovery funds, the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF).

Hungary will be used as a salient area in which to study the politicisation of the two funds but will itself not be covered in detail. By choosing data related to Hungary, this thesis will be able

to identify the coverage of events relating to the EEA-grants and the Cohesion Policy in the context of one of the most complicated and politicised countries in Europe at this moment. The thesis will not seek to explore the decisions of the Hungarian government, nor will it seek to investigate the current Hungarian policies in any deeper manner. Hungary will only serve as a context from which to analyse the politicisation of funding.

3.4 Parliaments as the endpoint of politicisation through media

European Parliament

On the EU level, this thesis has chosen its data collection amongst media which resonate to the European Parliament. The thesis relies on the definition of three arenas of politicisation, the institutional, intermediate and citizen arena. It will not use the citizen level, instead using the intermediate arena, studied through media, to ascertain public pressure toward political elites. By picking news media by their influence in Brussels, the thesis is able to observe the news coverage of the relevant topic in the media most likely to be read and used by the members of European Parliament.

The European Parliament has a variety of functions which makes it ideal to study politicisation of EU governance. The EP has the power to pass resolutions which communicates demands to the European Commission. Further the EP can pose written questions to the commission, allowing it to both scrutinise the actions of the commission, and often make demands from it. Combined with the insight and means of scrutiny provided through plenary debate and through committees, the EP has become an important actor in the European system and a useful actor to study when analysing the effect of politicisation in the European Union (Burns, 2016, pp. 156-161).

When an issue becomes politicised there is a reasonable expectation that constraint will be put on the actors working with the issue (Hooghe & Marks, 2009). In practical terms, if there is an increase in the politicisation of the EU cohesion policy, it will likely follow the patterns observed in other issues of governance which have been politicised, namely that actors like the European Parliament will put increasing constraints on the Commission as the executor of the Cohesion policy. These constraints would primarily be expressed through the scrutiny and demands arriving from actions such as the aforementioned questions and demands from written questions, and the resolutions presented by the European Parliament.

Norwegian Parliament

The closest Norwegian equivalent to the European Parliament is, perhaps not surprisingly, the Norwegian parliament, Stortinget. By choosing the Norwegian parliament, the text follows the logic of postfunctionalism, that an increase in politicisation, here observing traits of politicisation through media, will constrain the actions of the decision makers of the EEA-grants through the scrutiny and interaction with the decisions and consequences of the EEA-grants (Hooghe & Marks, 2009). There are several reasons for choosing the Norwegian parliament as the arena of politicisation. Following in the footsteps of several scholars in the field of politicisation, the thesis sees parliaments as a natural area of analysis to observe politicisation (Closa & Maatsch, 2014; Meissner, 2020; Wendler, 2014).

For the case of Norway, the use of parliament as the primary arena of analysis is further justified given the Norwegian parliamentary system, in which power nominally only exists through parliament and the legal system. Ministries are led by ministers chosen almost exclusively from members of parliaments by the prime minister of a government. The governments are formed by parties which can hold a majority of votes in the parliament following a national election. The dominance of parliament in Norwegian politics makes it a particularly salient object of study in the matter of politicisation as it is both respondent to Norwegian citizens, but also has powers to scrutinise and guide the administration of the ministries (Andenæs & Fliflet, 2003, pp. 86-103).

The EEA-grants structure belies the strength of the Norwegian parliament in the decision-making of the grant. The highest responsibility of the EEA-grants from Norway comes from the Norwegian ministry of foreign affairs, who are responsible for the rules and organisation of the office, sanctions against recipient countries, risk-analysis and following up the analyses, adopt and approve evaluations of programmes and sectors, yearly meeting with recipient countries and receiving complaints and tips on misappropriation of funding. The responsibility of the ministry is hands-off for the most part, and the day-to-day administration of the grant falls to the Financial Mechanism Office (FMO), but the responsibilities of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs put them in a powerful position to direct the running of the funds (Norwegian Government, 2021).

In other words, in a hypothetical situation of high politicisation with great scrutiny from the public on a particular issue with the EEA-grants, this salience would be identifiable in the

Norwegian parliament. From parliament, constraint would be put on the actions of the Ministry of Foreign affairs, and from there the FMO. The Norwegian parliament, being both susceptible to influence from the grassroots by nature of being a parliament in a small democratic country and maintaining strong and close influence on the actions of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign affairs provides a potent arena for studying politicisation.

4 Analysis

4.1 Findings

4.1.1 Overview of all search terms

The raw numbers of articles used will be used to a lesser degree when analysing the findings of the thesis. Largely, they are best comprehended in percentages of the total number of articles in the period, however, there are some observations which should be commented on when just looking at the number of articles. For one, the broader the search terms, the more unrelated the results. This can be observed when looking at the number of articles which do not adhere to the expected results, namely a noticeably higher number of articles in the period 2010 to 2015. The increase in unrelated articles is then firmly confirmed in the quantitative analysis, in which, as the thesis come back to, attention is negligible until 2017.

Euractiv		"EU funds" AND Hungary	Cohesion AND Hungary	Funding AND Hungary	"EU funds" AND Orban	Cohesion AND Orban	Funding AND Orban
	2022		120	54	148	66	29
2021		64	36	134	30	20	49
2020		122	58	151	72	29	77
2019		50	46	87	28	19	32
2018		42	41	88	21	15	43
2017		31	33	80	13	9	38
2016		11	10	25	4	6	7
2015		8	10	37	4	2	6
2014		7	5	20	1	2	1
2013		4	5	23	0	0	2
2012		7	20	31	3	2	8
2011		10	10	30	0	0	0
2010		11	17	32	0	1	1
Euobserver		"EU funds" AND Hungary	Cohesion AND Hungary	Funding AND Hungary	"EU funds" AND Orban	Cohesion AND Orban	Funding AND Orban
	2022		81	14	133	45	13
2021		63	6	108	24	5	38
2020		89	20	155	44	10	74
2019		46	16	92	17	4	36
2018		47	29	106	16	8	45
2017		34	10	98	17	1	45
2016		13	4	59	4	1	15
2015		14	1	69	4	0	11
2014		9	1	32	3	0	10
2013		4	8	17	0	1	2
2012		15	10	50	5	3	16
2011		4	0	43	1	0	7
2010		13	12	76	1	0	14

Table 6: Both tables of total number of articles in the European media.

The articles provided through the European Media display similar trends in number of articles by percent. For both there is a minor peak in 2012, although it is more distinct in EUobserver with ‘Cohesion AND Hungary’ continuing to receive attention in 2013. Thus, the peak is only temporary and attention largely recedes until 2017. The terms ‘Funding AND Hungary’ begins rising in 2013 and only dips slightly in 2016 before rising with the rest in 2017. All search terms would see a doubling or more of articles in 2017, with the exception of ‘Funding AND Hungary’ and ‘Cohesion AND Orbán’ in EUobserver. ‘Funding AND Orban’ had already increase in 2015 and so would end with a similar percentage compared to most other terms in 2017, whereas ‘Cohesion AND Orbán’ can be understood as an outlier given the low number of articles total, giving it less reliance as a search term.

Euractiv		"EU funds" AND Hungary	Cohesion and Hungary	Funding and Hungary	"EU funds" AND Orban	Cohesion AND Orban	Funding AND Orban	EU	Hungary
	2022	24%	11%	16%	26%	22%	18%	16%	18%
	2021	13%	7%	15%	12%	15%	15%	14%	15%
	2020	25%	12%	16%	29%	22%	24%	12%	13%
	2019	10%	9%	9%	11%	14%	10%	7%	9%
	2018	8%	8%	10%	8%	11%	13%	8%	9%
	2017	6%	7%	9%	5%	7%	12%	8%	9%
	2016	2%	2%	3%	2%	4%	2%	8%	6%
	2015	2%	2%	4%	2%	1%	2%	6%	5%
	2014	1%	1%	2%	0%	1%	0%	6%	4%
	2013	1%	1%	3%	0%	0%	1%	4%	2%
	2012	1%	4%	3%	1%	1%	2%	4%	3%
	2011	2%	2%	3%	0%	0%	0%	3%	3%
	2010	2%	3%	3%	0%	1%	0%	4%	3%
Euobserver		"EU funds" AND Hungary	Cohesion and Hungary	Funding and Hungary	"EU funds" AND Orban	Cohesion AND Orban	Funding AND Orban	Hungary	
	2022	19%	11%	13%	25%	28%	17%	15%	
	2021	15%	5%	10%	13%	11%	10%	14%	
	2020	21%	15%	15%	25%	22%	20%	13%	
	2019	11%	12%	9%	9%	9%	10%	14%	
	2018	11%	22%	10%	9%	17%	12%	15%	
	2017	8%	8%	9%	9%	2%	12%	13%	
	2016	3%	3%	6%	2%	2%	4%	13%	
	2015	3%	1%	7%	2%	0%	3%	16%	
	2014	2%	1%	3%	2%	0%	3%	8%	
	2013	1%	6%	2%	0%	2%	1%	4%	
	2012	3%	8%	5%	3%	7%	4%	6%	
	2011	1%	0%	4%	1%	0%	2%	7%	
	2010	3%	9%	7%	1%	0%	4%	10%	

Table 7: Both tables of total number of articles by percentage in the European media.

In 2018, there is a steady rise in the percentage of most search term, with a very high increase in the searches containing the term ‘cohesion’ in EUobserver. This increase comes from the coverage of the EU budget, which included a cut in Cohesion funding. The EUobserver chose to frame the articles covering the cut by including mention of Eurosceptic criticism and rejection of the proposed budget, whereas the articles covering the proposed budget either

covered this angle less, the larger number of articles under the ‘Cohesion’ search terms ‘absorbed’ the few articles that covered the event through this angle, or a combination of both.

2019 would see a small dip in the coverage for the ‘Cohesion’ terms for the EUobserver, and a dip for the ‘Funding AND Orban’ in Euractiv, but largely there is either a small increase or continuation of the same level of articles.

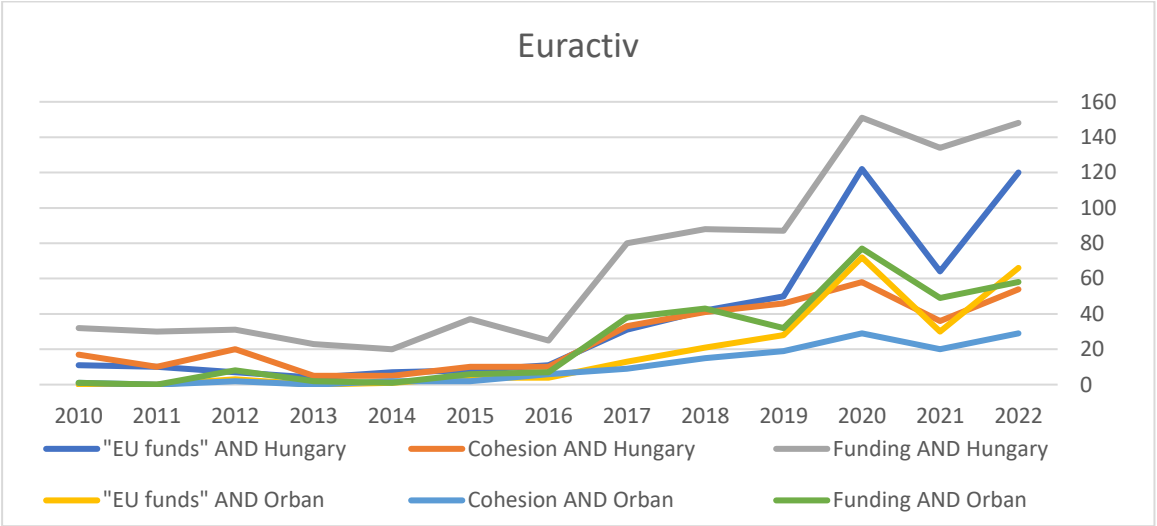


Figure 3: Diagram of total articles of all search terms in Euractiv.

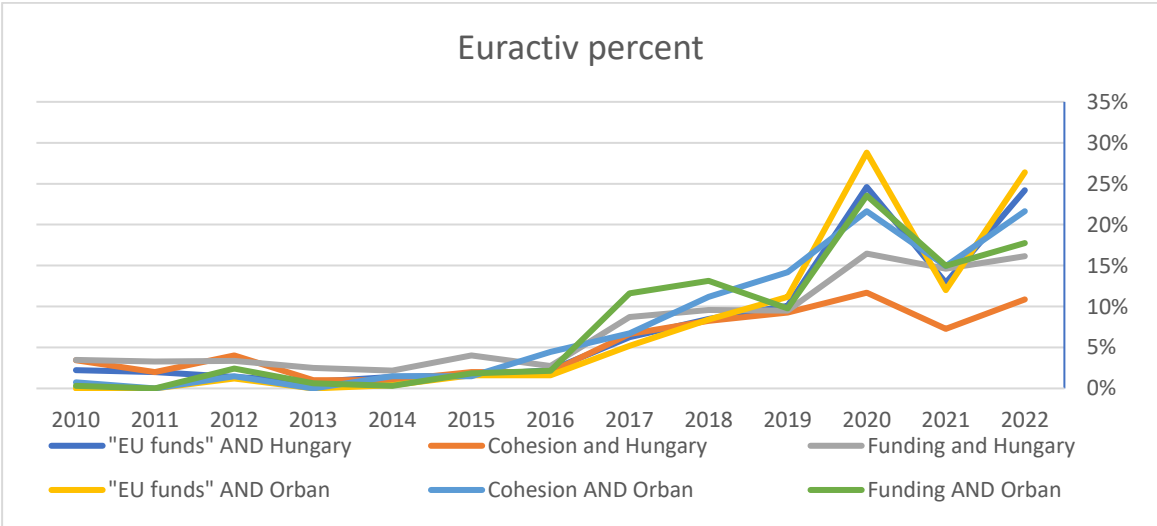


Figure 4: Diagram of total articles in percentage of all search terms in Euractiv.

2020 sees a very distinct increase for almost every category. For most of them, the growth is almost double, although there are some that do not share this level of growth. ‘Cohesion AND Hungary’ of both media grow by three percentage points, though nowhere near the amount of growth shown in the other categories. ‘Funding AND Hungary’ has a growth of 6 percentage points, though this is still comparatively lower than that of the other terms. 2021 sees a distinct drop from the numbers of 2020, with ‘Cohesion AND Hungary’ falling distinctly even from 2019 numbers in EUobserver, and the rest having article numbers comparable to 2019 levels or somewhat higher. 2022 sees another rise in number of articles, all articles except for the ‘Cohesion AND Orbán’ saw either a return to 2020 levels or a slight decrease.

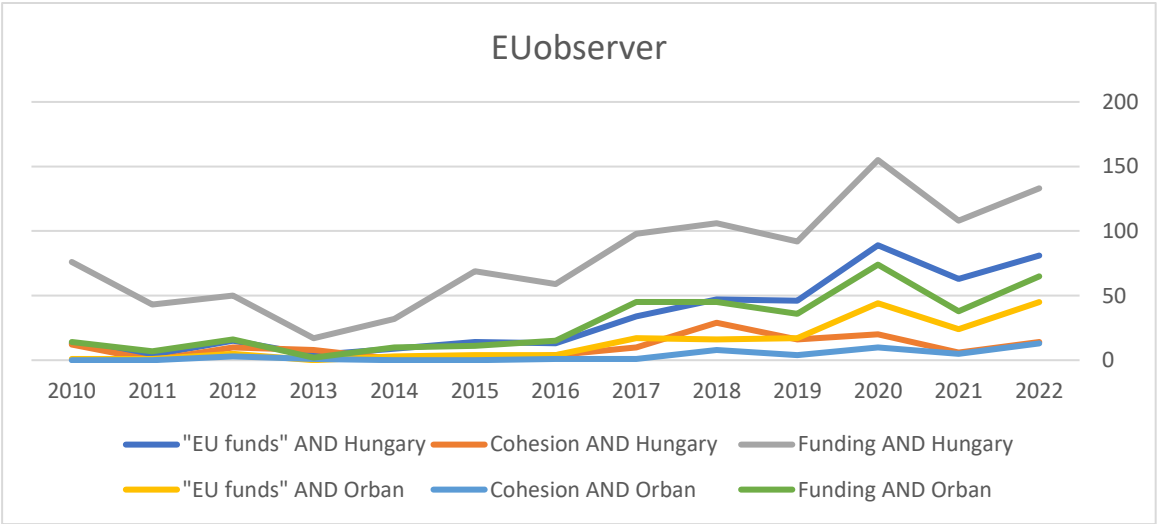


Figure 5: Diagram of total articles of all search terms in EUobserver.

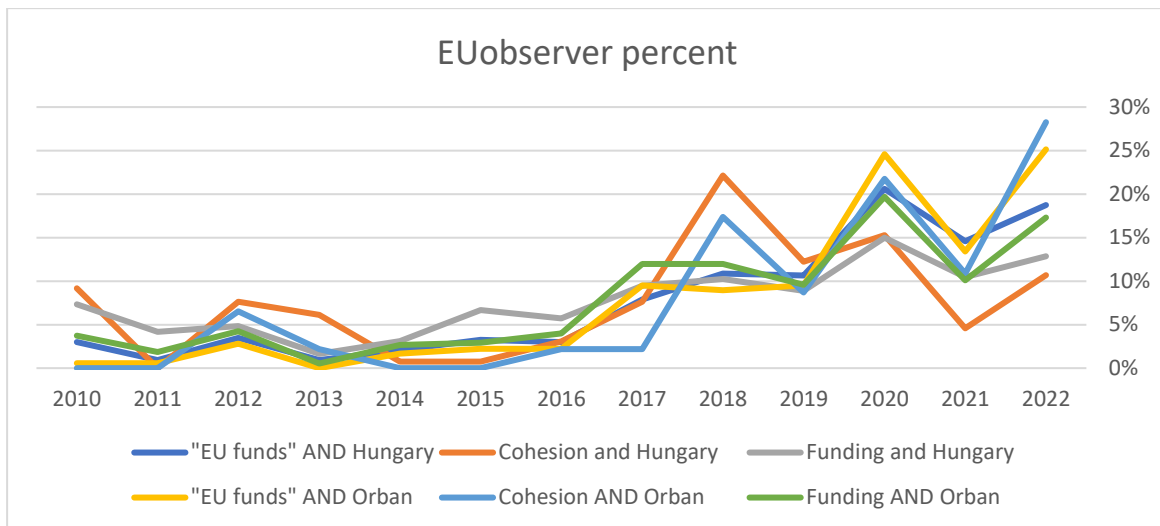


Figure 6: Diagram of total articles in percentage of all search terms in EUobserver.

The Norwegian Numbers are more complex than the European numbers. In VG, the years 2010 to 2013 had a very low number of articles. Similarly, in Aftenposten there were few articles in the years 2010 to 2012. Aftenposten saw a strong rise in the articles with the key term ‘Ungarn’ in 2013, however. The reason for the rise in Aftenposten does not have one distinct reason. The articles under ‘EØS AND Ungarn’ and ‘Midler AND Ungarn’ include 4 articles covering a demand for increase in the EEA-grant from the EU and 4 articles covering the low percentage of EEA-funding going to projects aimed at helping the Romani. Beyond these, the rest of the articles cover different topics, indicating that the rise in results were largely random. As the thesis will return to, this is indicative of the greatest weakness of the Norwegian data, the low number of relevant articles. 2014 sees a strong increase in number of articles in every search term which had not risen in 2013, namely the ones in Aftenposten including the term ‘Ungarn’.

Aftenposten		Midler AND Ungarn	EØS-midler AND Ungarn	EØS AND Ungarn	Midler AND Orban	EØS-midler AND Orban	EØS AND Orban
	2022	20	0	13	14	0	6
	2021	16	3	22	4	2	2
	2020	18	3	30	8	1	7
	2019	9	0	7	5	0	1
	2018	32	7	18	19	6	6
	2017	14	5	16	11	3	6
	2016	14	5	19	2	0	9
	2015	22	9	15	0	0	2
	2014	20	11	21	10	5	8
	2013	15	9	18	3	0	0
	2012	7	2	7	0	2	2
	2011	8	2	8	0	0	0
	2010	8	3	11	0	0	0
VG		Midler AND Ungarn	EØS-midler AND Ungarn	EØS AND Ungarn	Midler AND Orban	EØS-midler AND Orban	EØS AND Orban
	2022	14	2	8	9	2	2
	2021	20	9	35	10	6	7
	2020	11	2	47	10	1	1
	2019	11	4	16	10	4	6
	2018	11	2	11	2	1	5
	2017	6	1	16	0	0	3
	2016	9	0	10	1	0	1
	2015	10	3	6	1	1	2
	2014	14	10	14	8	8	8
	2013	3	1	2	0	0	0
	2012	4	2	3	3	1	1
	2011	7	1	4	1	0	0
	2010	4	0	4	1	0	1

Table 8: Both tables of total number of articles in the Norwegian media.

Aftenposten		Midler AND Ungarn	EØS-midler AND Ungarn	EØS AND Ungarn	Midler AND Orban	EØS-midler AND Orban	EØS AND Orban	Norge	Ungarn
	2022	10%	0%	7%	19%	0%	12%	6%	8%
	2021	8%	5%	11%	5%	11%	4%	7%	8%
	2020	9%	5%	15%	11%	5%	14%	7%	8%
	2019	5%	0%	4%	7%	0%	2%	7%	7%
	2018	16%	13%	9%	25%	32%	12%	7%	7%
	2017	7%	9%	8%	15%	16%	12%	7%	7%
	2016	7%	9%	10%	3%	0%	18%	8%	10%
	2015	11%	16%	8%	0%	0%	4%	9%	13%
	2014	10%	20%	11%	13%	26%	16%	8%	7%
	2013	8%	16%	9%	4%	0%	0%	9%	5%
	2012	4%	4%	4%	0%	11%	4%	7%	7%
	2011	4%	4%	4%	0%	0%	0%	9%	7%
	2010	4%	5%	6%	0%	0%	0%	10%	9%
VG		Midler AND Ungarn	EØS-midler AND Ungarn	EØS AND Ungarn	Midler AND Orban	EØS-midler AND Orban	EØS AND Orban	Norge	Ungarn
	2022	11%	5%	5%	17%	8%	5%	7%	8%
	2021	16%	24%	21%	19%	25%	19%	9%	9%
	2020	9%	5%	28%	19%	4%	3%	8%	7%
	2019	9%	11%	9%	19%	17%	16%	6%	5%
	2018	9%	5%	6%	4%	4%	14%	7%	6%
	2017	5%	3%	9%	0%	0%	8%	8%	6%
	2016	7%	0%	6%	2%	0%	3%	9%	11%
	2015	8%	8%	4%	2%	4%	5%	9%	14%
	2014	11%	27%	8%	15%	33%	22%	9%	9%
	2013	2%	3%	1%	0%	0%	0%	7%	6%
	2012	3%	5%	2%	6%	4%	3%	7%	8%
	2011	6%	3%	2%	2%	0%	0%	7%	6%
	2010	3%	0%	2%	2%	0%	3%	8%	7%

Table 9: Both tables of total number of articles by percentage in the Norwegian media.

2014 saw a marked rise in the article numbers, especially when looking at the percentage. With the exception of the Aftenposten articles with the term ‘Hungary’ which only saw a small rise,

the rest of the search terms rose manifold. In 2015, the searches with the search term ‘Orban’ return to the pre-2014 levels of interest, with 0 to 2 articles in both papers. Most search terms with ‘Ungarn’ saw a decrease as well, though not as great as the ones with ‘Orban’. The term ‘Midler AND Ungarn’ saw a small increase.

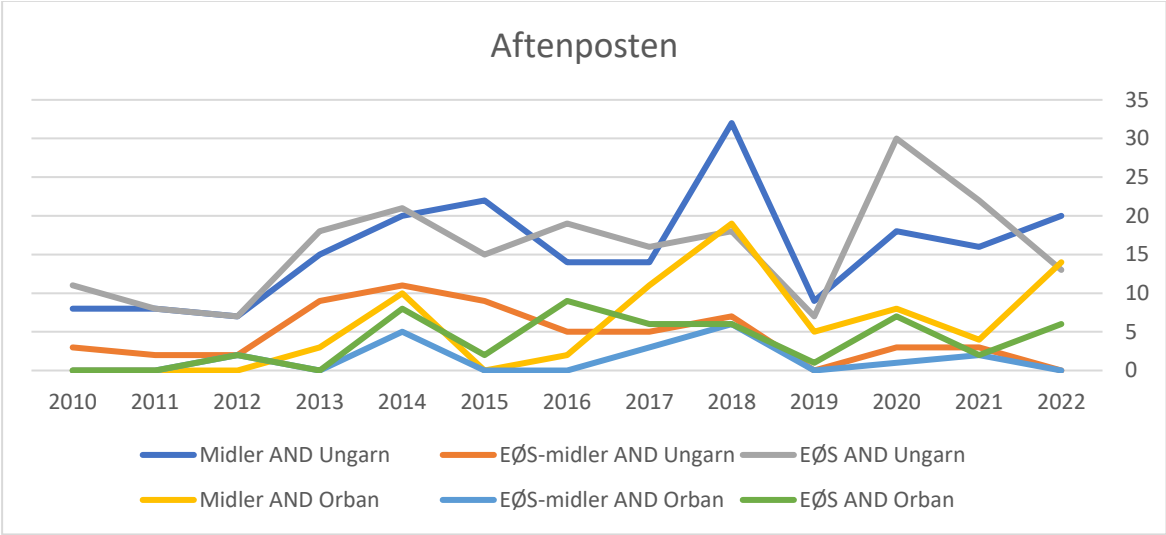


Figure 7: Diagram of total articles of all search terms in Aftenposten.

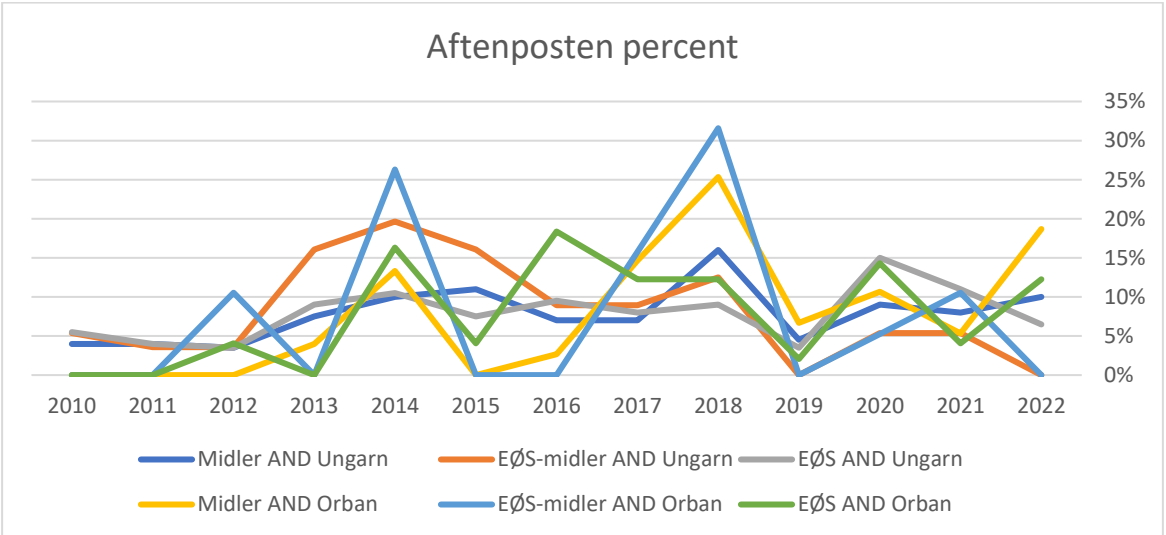


Figure 8: Diagram of total articles in percentage of all search terms in Aftenposten.

2016 would only see negligible change in VG, with the exception of ‘EØS AND Ungarn’, which increased by 4 articles from 6 articles to 10. In Aftenposten, ‘Midler AND Ungarn’ and

‘EØS-midler AND Ungarn’ decreased moderately in number of articles, whereas ‘EØS AND Ungarn’ rose moderately. ‘Midler AND Orban’ and ‘EØS-midler AND Orban’ would remain at a very low number of articles, whereas ‘EØS AND Orban’ rose greatly from 2 to 9 articles.

The Norwegian numbers for 2017 are equally complicated. In VG, ‘EØS-midler AND Ungarn’ and all of the ‘Orban’ terms are have minor changes between 0 and 2 articles. ‘Midler AND Ungarn’ has a considerable increase from 6 articles to 10, whereas ‘EØS AND Ungarn’ has a decrease in articles from 16 to 11. In Aftenposten, only ‘Midler AND Orban’ sees a change beyond 3 articles, going from 2 articles to 11.

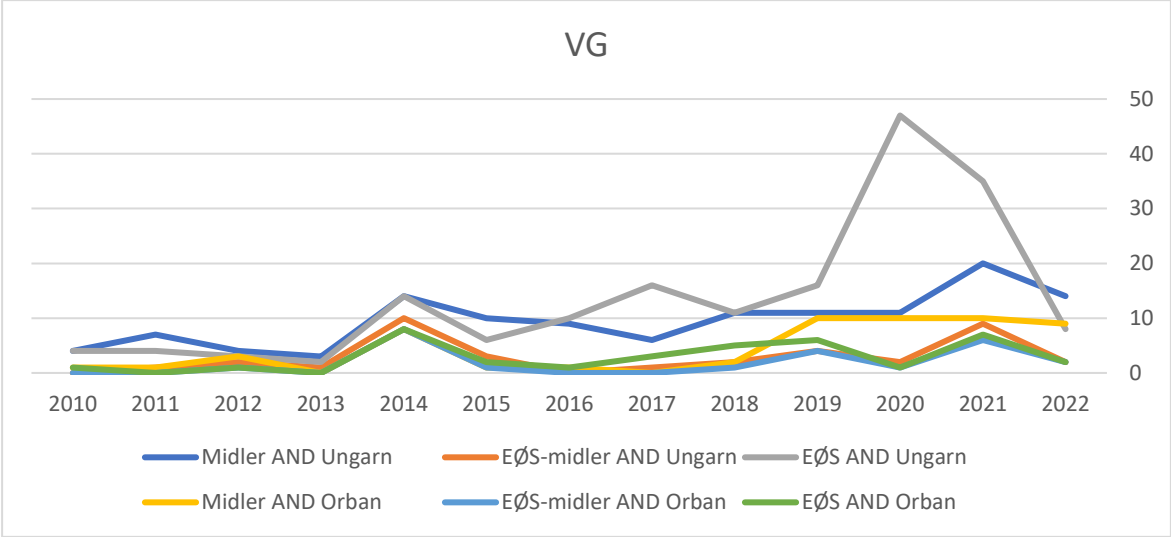


Figure 9: Diagram of total articles of all search terms in Verdens Gang.

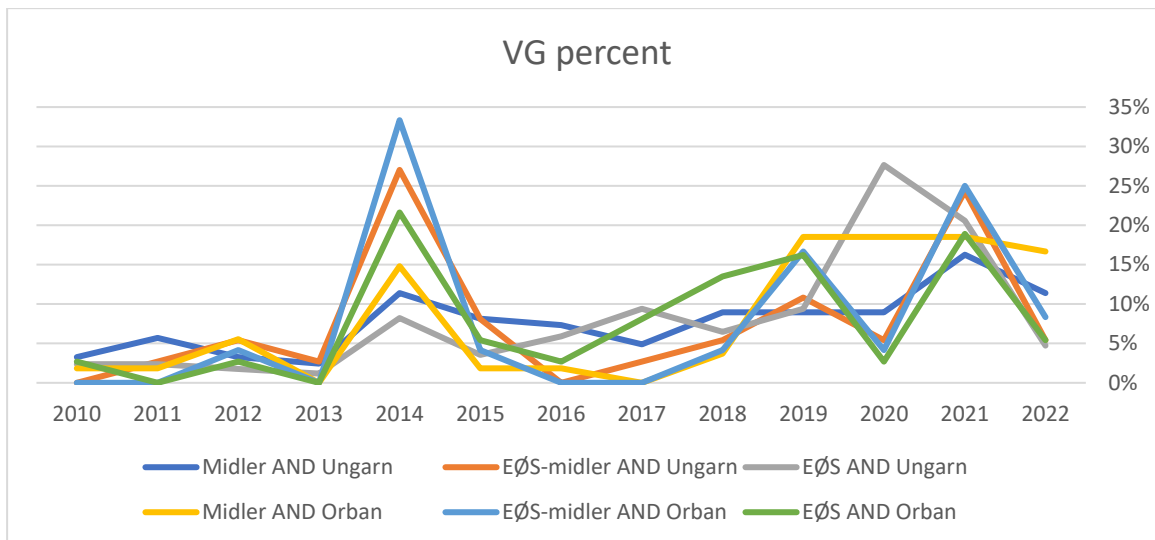


Figure 10: Diagram of total articles in percentage of all search terms in Verdens Gang.

In 2019, VG would see the same level or increases in articles from the 2018 level. ‘Midler AND Orban’ in particular would rise from 2 articles to 10. ‘EØS AND Ungarn’ would increase from 11 to 16. In Aftenposten, all articles with ‘EØS-midler’ and ‘EØS’ retained the number of articles or rose to 3 or less articles, whereas both containing ‘midler’ have strong increases with ‘Midler AND Ungarn’ going from 14 to 32 articles and ‘Midler AND Orban’ going from 11 to 19.

2020 saw a very high increase in articles for the search term ‘EØS AND Ungarn’, going from 16 to 47. ‘EØS-midler AND Orban’ and ‘EØS AND Orban’ fell from 4 and 6 articles to just one article in 2020. The rest kept similar numbers to the 2019 numbers. Aftenposten saw a similar increase in ‘EØS AND Ungarn’, going from 7 articles to 30. Overall, the other terms saw increases, with ‘Midler AND Ungarn’ and ‘EØS AND Orban’ seeing particularly high increases going from 9 to 18 and 1 to 7. The extraordinary increase in the term ‘EØS AND Ungarn’ comes from a combination of articles covering covid-19 restrictions in Europe, and coverage of the friction between the Hungarian government and the two funds. The absolute majority of the articles comes from coverage of covid-19 restrictions, with VG in particular spending many articles debating the conditions for international vacations in light of the pandemic. 19 of the articles in VG, are in fact written in the span of 4 days, between 10. July and 14. July, all covering travel and Covid-19 restrictions. Although the coverage of the conflicts with the Hungarian government are distinctly present, they still only make up a small amount of the total articles.

In Aftenposten, 2021 would see a maintenance or lowering of the number of articles across the board. The searches with the term ‘EØS’ would see a strong decrease, down from 30 to 22 in ‘EØS AND Ungarn’ and 7 to 2 in ‘EØS AND Orban’. In VG, ‘EØS AND Ungarn’ went down from 47 to 35 and ‘Midler AND Orban’ remained at 10. The rest saw high increases. ‘EØS-midler AND Ungarn’ went from 2 to 9, ‘EØS-midler AND Orban’ from 1 to 6, ‘EØS AND Orban’ from 1 to 7. additionally, ‘Midler AND Ungarn’ saw an increase from 11 to 20.

A final decrease happened in every search term in VG 2022. ‘EØS-midler AND Ungarn’, ‘EØS-midler AND Orban’ and ‘EØS AND Orban’ all returned to numbers almost identical to 2020 numbers. ‘Midler AND Orban’ fell by only one article, leaving it at 9 articles. ‘Midler AND Ungarn’ fell from 20 to 14, still above the levels in 2020, 2019 and 2018 of 11 articles. ‘EØS AND Ungarn’ fell the most dramatically, from 35 to 8. This left the search term at a number of articles which was only as low in 2015. In Aftenposten, ‘EØS AND Ungarn’ also fell, from 22 to 13, in other words also substantially though not nearly as dramatically as in VG. There were no articles covering ‘EØS-midler AND Ungarn’ and ‘EØS-midler AND Orban’, down from 3 and 2. Unlike VG, several of the search terms in Aftenposten rose in 2022. ‘Midler AND Ungarn’ and ‘EØS AND Orban’ both rose by four, from 16 to 20 and from 2 to 6. ‘Midler AND Orban’ rose from 10, from 4 to 14.

4.1.2 The in-depth review of data

Hungary

Looking more in-depth at search terms provides interesting addendums to the broader data. Looking first at the European Search term “EU funds” AND Hungary”, it is immediately noticeable that there is little to no coverage of these terms in the period of 2010 to 2017. 2017 saw an increase in total articles from 11 to 31 with these search terms, and it is worth going through the main trends of the year. There was an expectation that 2017 would be a point of increased attention given the triggering of article 7 in this year. There are two reasons this does not give results in the search terms. For one, the actual triggering of article 7 only happened in December of 2017. Although there were discussions of moving to tackle rule of law violations in Hungary and Poland before the triggering, the coverage of article 7 would instead be reactive to the actions of the European Union, rather than the other way around.

On the other hand, there was a noticeable increase in the coverage in 2017 on article 7, which should still be mentioned, despite being lacklustre compared to 2018 levels. Although only 4

articles would write about conflicts between the EU and Hungary in the context of the Cohesion Policy, part of the reason was that it was Poland which would take the majority of attention and it was Poland that would be the country that the EU argued had breached article 7. There were also other issues which would grab attention in 2017, yet still responded to the search term. The EU moved to create a position of anti-fraud prosecutor, which was met with condemnation and opposition from Hungary and Poland. Additionally, a proposal from the European Union to resettle European migrants across its member states was met with opposition from Hungary and Poland. There is a noticeable increase in interest in the Cohesion Policy and Hungary through 2017, but there is clearly a variety of other issues given similar levels of attention at this point.

2018 stands out as the year with the highest ration of articles in the in-depth review to the overview. 2018 had 27 articles which fell under one of the two criteria, whereas the overview had 42 articles. No single event or circumstance beyond the move to apply article 7 to Poland appears to have started this increase of articles, instead the European Union moving to punish Poland over rule of law violation, and the implicit (and occasionally explicit) threat such a move posed for the Hungarian government, sparked a rapid increase of coverage.

2019 would see a continued increase in coverage overall, but, observing the in-depth coverage, there was clearly a decrease in the linking of Hungary and funding to the conflict over rule of law article 7. Despite this, the in-depth coverage would fall to roughly half, from 27 to 14 articles. There is no one event which explains this decrease in relevant articles, instead it is the lack of concentration towards a single issue which makes the articles less relevant. Again, Poland and its conflicts with the European Union takes a sizable portion of the attention. Beyond this, Finnish work to link rule of law with EU funding as part of its presidency, work to agree on 2050 as a deadline for climate neutrality and the work of gaining support for the von der Leyen presidency all resonated with the search terms. Despite the relatively low correlation between the in-depth and overview numbers, rule of law and Orbán still took a noticeable portion of the attention across the year, articles covering these topics in various angles continuously being produced through the year.

2020 saw the highest number of articles under the search terms across all the years. Interestingly, it also had a high resonance between the in-depth and overview numbers, with 122 number of articles in the overview and 71 articles in the in-depth section. A large part of this comes from the conflict over the rule of law criteria and the RRF. As the in-depth numbers show, discussion of rule of law was part of every mention in 2020. The decision of Hungary

and Poland to veto the Recovery and Resilience Funds created the perfect storm over a period of about a month, providing plentiful fodder for EU-centric media. Firstly, the debate was over access to the much-needed Covid-19 funding. It should come as no surprise that the extraordinary funding to begin to make up for the slowing European economies facing recessions were of high interest in the media. Secondly, it handed the European Union a decisive victory in its attempt to create rule of law conditionality to funding.

2021 saw a return to the relatively low convergence between the search terms in the in-depth and overview numbers. With the in-depth coverage amounting to 21 articles and the overview reaching 64 articles, the search terms were both quite drastically reduced in each regard, with the articles of relevance reduced to a third of the total of the search terms. The rule of law conditionality for the RRF was resolved temporarily in December 2020, with the European Union pushing through rule of law conditionality, though with legal vulnerabilities (Kirst, 2021). Similarly to 2019, the lack of specific events to tie the coverage to EU funds and Hungary, the coverage became more haphazard. Amongst the events covered were the anti-LGBTQ legislation and movements in Poland and fraud in of EU funds, though these articles were primarily discussing Andrej Babis of Czechia and Bulgaria more in general. Still, despite the onerous coverage of the RRF not taking centre-stage anymore and the search term relevance being lesser, coverage of conflict over EU funding to Hungary and Poland still received the most attention of in the search term.

2022 stands out as a year of high interest and high convergence between overview and in-depth numbers, as well as a return to relatively similar levels of attention paid to rule of law as a condition for providing funding for Hungary as 2020. A major event in the matter of rule of law was the move to freeze cohesion funds to Hungary over rule of law violations. Through the laws proposed in December of 2020, the EU had begun freezing a variety of funding for Hungary and Poland. In early 2022, legal challenges to the new laws from Poland and Hungary were rejected by the EU top court, clearing the way for the European Commission to freeze funding for the two countries. As the first breakthrough in a 5-year deadlock between the EU and Hungary and Poland over rule of law conditions for Cohesion Funding, this was naturally both covered closely and led to much back and forth between those supporting the decision by the EU, The European Parliament being one of the strongest proponents of this move, and those critical of the move.

Norway

For the Norwegian in-depth data, there are no articles in the period 2010-2013. In 2014 there were 4 articles covering relevant interests. All of these covered raids by the Hungarian government on NGOs which received funding from the EEA-grants, and the subsequent legal actions by the government against the NGOs. The articles two articles in 2015 covered the agreement between the Hungarian and EEA-countries to renew funding. Although there was a small increase in the total number of articles in 2015, most of this was accounted for with articles on the refugee crisis and Hungarian responses to it.

A single article in 2016 references the renewal of funding and argues that it was the wrong decision. 2017 coverage of the EEA-grants were primarily covering Polish moves to take greater control of the delivery of the grants. As this resonated with the actions of Hungary in 2014, coverage in these articles included critical coverage of the events in 2014.

2018 saw a steady increase in the coverage of both Hungary and Poland's increasingly restrictive regimes. The Hungarian election in this year also received further attention. With the number of articles covering the Orbán, it is not surprising that there would be an increase in attention paid to the conflict between the EEA-grants and Orbán. The conflict between the European Union and the Hungarian government over the conditions for rule of law and the Cohesion policy had a distinct impact on the coverage, receiving more attention than the EEA-grants would achieve across all years.

Mirroring the EU data, 2019 saw few articles, with the overview receiving 2012-levels of attention. A single article written arguing that illiberal democracy does not exist was the only relevant article, as it mentioned Orbán's defrauding of the Cohesion policy. 2020 would see an increase in relevant articles, though not substantially. The year saw a large part of its increase through increased attention on the Polish and Hungarian government, though there was only one mention of the RRF. 2021 would see a small decrease in the overview numbers, but a relatively high number of relevant articles. The articles written about the EEA-grants and Hungary were covering the decision by the EEA-countries to deny access to the EEA-grants to Hungary over disagreements on the spending.

2022 would see a high number of articles in the overview section and a high number of articles covering the cohesion policy, but no articles covering the EEA-grants. The high number of total articles can be attributed to a combination of Orbán's election victory, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the latter being connected to Orbán through his good relations with Russia and

Hungary's close vicinity to Ukraine. Several of these topics included coverage of the EU's conflict with Hungary over the Cohesion Policy and two articles also covered the EU freezing Hungarian funding because of the rule of law criteria.

4.2 Discussion

Summarily, the European data can be said to have a great increase in 2018 which it largely maintained, with the exception of 2020 and 2022 where it would rise manifold.

Looking at the expectations for H2 from section 2.2, there was indeed a marked rise in interests in response to the initiation of Article 7 procedures and the EP sanction of Hungary over rule of law. This rise in interest lasted until the end of the potential timeframe of the analysis. This five-year period of interest validates the hypothesis, with a distinct increase in media coverage, and thus an increased salience in the public arena, over the time period.

It can be argued that attention increased in 2017 and that this constitutes a prelude to the attention increase in 2018. Coverage of the Hungarian government's actions against NGO's operating in the country increased and rule of law-legislation on the EU level received attention. However, although there was an increase in articles in the in-depth analysis, the number of relevant articles is still negligible. Similarly, despite the number of articles covering the operations of the Cohesion Policy in Hungary being low, there is a distinct thread of articles arguing that there is a need to impose some form of sanction on Hungary over the rule of law-situation in the country, and that the Cohesion Policy is a good means of doing so, which were written in the time period 2010-2017. Given, however, their haphazard timing and the distinct space in time between them, there is little evidence to claim they conform to an increase in politicisation.

The RRF provides an interesting insight into the way in which the news coverage of EU funding for Hungary was defined by the question of rule of law and the possibility of using the suspension of funding to sanction Hungarian behaviour. As mentioned, there is a potent combination of topics and interests in the conflict between the Hungarian government and the EU over rule of law-criteria, with funding for Covid-19 being caught up in the conflict and the potential of a major money infusion for Hungary and Poland being held up. Nevertheless, the decision to tie funding to rule of law criteria and the pattern of media coverage of the event all indicate a correlation when comparing the coverage of the RRF with the Cohesion Policy. It is particularly interesting to note that the coverage of the RRF entirely overtook the coverage of

the Cohesion Policy, indicating a clear connection between the coverage of the two. In the data, coverage of the RRF was primarily present in 2020, with the interest in this topic quickly waning in the following years. If the timeframe of the thesis did not end in 2022 by necessity, it would be interesting to see whether the coverage of the RRF would continue to remain low, or if further conflict regarding the delegation of the funding would produce a similarly powerful effect on the number of articles.

The numbers provided in Norwegian media are far more erratic than the numbers from the EU media. There are several reasons for this, each indicating weakness in the Norwegian data used in this thesis.

The simplest explanation is that there is simply not enough coverage of the EEA-grants in the selected Norwegian media to make any conclusions, other than that it seems unlikely that there is a similar process of politicisation of the EEA-grants in Norway comparable to the process happening in the European Union across several fields of governance. While perhaps not a very exciting result, it still serves to decidedly reject the hypothesis that the EEA-grants have become politicised. The data in the Norwegian media shows that there is no coherent interest over a longer period of time in the EEA-grants relation towards Hungary in the public arena. Although there is very tangible interest in the EEA-grants in 2014 tied to the conflicts between the Hungarian government and the EEA-grants in this period, the interest dabs away very swiftly, with 2015 levels being barely higher than the 2012 levels.

When looking at the spikes in 2014 in total number of articles, the Norwegian media simply covers the topic of Hungary in the context of the EEA-grant less than the EU media. This is despite producing a larger number of articles covering Hungary in total. Again, there seems to simply be less attention put on the relevant topics when they converge in Norwegian media than in EU media.

A second observation which is important to note about the Norwegian media is that the search terms used in Norwegian media are insufficient. The term 'EU funds' ended up being a strong catch-all when searching in Euractiv. The Norwegian search terms seem to have ended up either being too broad, as can be seen with search terms such as 'EØS', or being uncommon terms for describing the relevant policies, as can be seen in terms like 'EØS-midler'. For the terms EØS, the aforementioned use of word as a catch all for both Norwegian relations with the EU and the geographical area of the EU plus the EEA-agreement countries led to result such as the 2021 and 2022 numbers of 'EØS AND Orban' which included so much coverage of Covid-19 travel

restrictions that the numbers were largely useless for this thesis, beyond emphasising the lacking media coverage of the relevant topics.

The difference in results from the two papers indicate a third problem with the Norwegian data. By picking one “serious” newspaper with more traditional coverage of news, and one tabloid paper, the decision-making process will likely be different in the two papers, and the emphasis in the two will as a result be different. The difference in coverage will provide results which are less coherent, as can be seen in the difference between the coherence of the European data and the Norwegian data. By emphasising the similarity of the media, over direct influence in Norwegian parliament, as was done for the European media, the results might have lent themselves better to analysis. Good options for comparison would be to choose the other major tabloid newspaper in Norway, *Dagbladet*, to compare with *VG*, or comparing *Aftenposten* with the economy-centred *Dagens Næringsliv* or centre left leaning *Dagsavisen*, all cited amongst the top ten most cited media in *Stortinget*.

Reflecting on the broader implications of the data, the thesis seeks to understand whether the data is an expression of an increasingly active public arena, as per the definition among scholars of politicisation in the study of the European Union. When there is an increase in the media coverage of a salient issue, this is indicative of a politicisation of the salient issue. Moving to the Norwegian findings, there is little to indicate an increase in politicisation in the public arena in the matter of EEA funding for Hungary. The number of relevant articles when performing a document study is even at its highest number, five articles, negligible. This conclusion is further corroborated by the high number of articles covering Hungary, 7231 in *Aftenposten* and 7856 in *VG*.

Moving to the European data, the data shows a rise in articles which, while not consistent over the years 2018-2022, still contains a high number of relevant articles. The Cohesion Policy’s operations in Hungary are clearly salient in the public arena in a manner which it did not come close to in the years before. More importantly, although there is a trend of emphasising rule of law-conditionality, the coverage jumped from a variety of issues and avoided getting connected to just one event. The impact of the RRF on the coverage, causing a great leap in coverage in 2020, is indicative of the manner in which the public arena has reached a high point of contestation in the coverage of Cohesion funding to Hungary.

2022 saw the suspension of Cohesion funding to Hungary. This created the very high increase in coverage for that year. When attempting to predict likely avenues of development from the

2022, a logical first conclusion is that this is unlikely to be a turning point in the media coverage. That is to say, it is unlikely that the suspension of funding is the final step in EU-Hungarian relations. The European Commission has shown itself to be quite interested in maintaining its relations with Hungary if Hungary compromises with the interests of the union. On the other hand, the European Parliament has shown itself to be a tenacious actor in favour of a harder line against the Hungarian government. Regardless of the future developments, the trend of a contested public arena appears likely to remain in the immediate future.

5 Conclusion

The primary research question “How has the media covered the conflicts over the operations of the EEA-grants, Recovery and Resilience Facility and the Cohesion policy in Hungary between 2010 and 2022” has taken more of a backseat throughout this thesis, as the hypotheses have taken lead in breaking down the research question into smaller parts and tying the research to the concept of politicisation and to establish a broader understanding of the data of the thesis. Nevertheless, the methodology has granted good insight into the coverage of two examples of news media, Norwegian newspaper and EU media. The Norwegian media has shown itself to be very sporadic in its coverage of the operations of the EEA-grants, responding meekly to important events of relevance and swiftly “losing interest” in the grants once their relation with Hungary is no longer tied to salient events. The EU media covered the conflicts from 2018 until 2022, with the Cohesion Policy taking the majority of the attention except for in 2020, when the RRF dominated the coverage.

H1 “EEA-grants are increasingly politicised in its operations in Hungary” is not validated through the data in Norwegian media. Primarily, there is simply not enough relevant articles to argue that there is an observable increase in salience in the public arena for the issue of the operations of the EEA-grants in its operations in Hungary. A lack of attention paid to Hungary because of the Norwegian narratives in the media is clearly not a factor, as the number of articles covering Hungary is higher than the ones in the European media. Instead, there is a lack of convergence between the Hungary and the operations of the EEA-grants in light of the illiberal change in Hungary. When there is attention, it is directly tied to events of high conflict, the suspension of funding for Hungary in 2014 being the most distinct. Swiftly following the increase in attention, the interest diminishes. The combination of these two findings clearly invalidates H1 of the thesis.

H2 “The Cohesion policy is increasingly politicised in its operations in Hungary” is validated through the data. There is a noticeable increase beginning in 2018, likely correlating with the decision to begin article 7 procedures against Poland in late 2017 and the censure of Hungary in 2018. From this point, though, there is still a certain amount of leapfrogging in number of relevant articles, there is still a marked increase from pre-2018 numbers. Certain caveats must nevertheless be applied. The primary question of the numbers is whether the increase in attention can be understood as a direct response to the coverage of news-worthy events, such

as the initiation of the Article 7 proceedings, or if there is a politicised cat which at some point came out of the bag. The leapfrogging of interest indicates that the former is certainly true, regardless of whether the latter is true. Media coverage follows events of high stakes, and with salient actors and environments. Despite this, there is still a clear increase in attention even disregarding the two spikes in 2020 and 2022. A very likely outcome in the following years is at the very least a continuation of the current level of articles, with a high probability of either increases in number of articles, or spikes following further conflicts over the funds.

H3 “Recovery and Resilience Facility’s Hungarian operation was politicised in its inception” is validated in the data. Having been created with an immediate connection to a rule of law criteria, which led to conflict between the EU, and Hungary and Poland, it is perhaps not surprising that the RRF was conceived into high attention in EU media. Despite this, there is still a case to argue that the RRF can be tied to the broader politicisation of the EU funding for Hungary, and the Cohesion Policy specifically. In 2020, the RRF would take much attention away from the Cohesion Policy, almost entirely overtaking the latter. The ability of the newly crafted funding mechanism to overtake the Cohesion Policy indicates an interconnection between the coverage of both. As both hypothesis H2 and H3 are validated, a broader politicisation of the funding provided to Hungary can be observed, but further studies would be required to be able to make comprehensive observations beyond this.

H4 “The politicisation of the EEA-grants has affected the politicisation of the Cohesion funds” can be decidedly invalidated in the data. For the hypothesis to be proven, certain conditions must be observed in the data. The primary manner would have been to see an increase in politicisation around 2014 and 2015 in response to the conflict between Hungary and the EEA-grants in the European Media. Secondly, a review of relevant articles must have found considerable mention of the EEA-grants in the articles of 2014 and 2015. When searching for “Norway AND Hungary” in Euractiv, only one of 11 articles in 2014 mentions the conflict between Hungary and Norway, arguing that the union should follow Norway’s lead in the matter. In 2015, the search terms received no results. The search term ‘Grant AND Hungary’ yielded no results in either year. EUobserver covered the issue more, with 4 out of 10 articles covering the issue under the search term ‘Norway AND Hungary’. Nonetheless, there is no coverage of the issue in 2015. Given that both papers increase their coverage of the funding in Hungary in 2017, there has not been an increase in coverage of the conflict between Hungary and the EEA-grant affected the coverage of the Cohesion Policy and Hungary.

Limitations

The paper has several constraints connected to the data and its usage.

If the method was to be expanded and altered while keeping its current shape, several steps could have improved the thesis. For one, both the overview and in-depth review could have been expanded. Naturally, to perform an in-depth review of every search term would be preferable. Time constraints hinder this approach and has made it necessary to instead pick two sizeable search terms which are not so large as to be entirely encumbering. For the overview data, additional search terms would also have improved the ability to analyse the contents of the media, but time constraints and the diminishing returns of increasingly unrelated search terms makes this unviable for the thesis.

Continuing on potential improvements given more time and resources, the thesis could also have increased the number of newspapers to give further data. This would however have to be done conscious of the danger of adding news media which has a different scope and leading principle, which already happened in the Norwegian data through the inclusion of one tabloid and one non-tabloid newspaper. Although there are certain influential media in the European Parliament which could have been included, such as Politico EU, the majority of the media which is influential have scopes which do not concentrate on EU affairs, but rather covers the EU when there is news to cover there. A similar problem to the Norwegian data may well occur, with only a fraction of the news covering European affairs, and only a fraction of these covering Hungary and the Cohesion Policy.

If the method was to be changed more substantially, additional limitations could have been satisfied. A natural extension of the logic used in this thesis, in which articles are organised into numbers of articles per year by search term, is to perform a quantitative analysis. This would follow in the steps of, for example, Anna Leupold's "A structural approach to politicisation in the Euro crisis" (Leupold, 2015) who studied four business papers in four countries to understand differentiated integration in the context of the financial crisis. To identify salience in a quantitative study, the search terms would have to be very well chosen. As the studies identifying politicisation through media usually merely attempt to observe links between member states and the EU, the data collection would have to be categorised quite differently from them if this thesis' attempt to conduct research on the EU and national level separately. Additionally, there is a trade-off in terms of qualitative versus quantitative case studies, where

what the quantitative gains in terms of systematisation and clearer objectivity, it will lose in ability to understand the broader contexts of the articles, to comprehend the greater picture of articles over a year and the flexibility which has allowed this thesis to swiftly comprehend discrepancies in the number of articles.

Another limitation comes from the lack of interviews. Although interviews could have provided important insight into the actions of the various actors involved, a combination of time and resource-constraints, and the difficulties of getting relevant and current interviewees in positions such as the Hungarian government led to the decision of not including it. Similarly to increasing the total amount of search terms and media, the inclusion of interviews can be seen as a net benefit in an extension of the thesis, but several factors minimise the utility of this method in this thesis. There has been a consistent focus on narrowing the scope of the thesis given the variety of actors and arenas which have been included. Interviewing state, EU or funding officials, while providing insight into the broader context of the media coverage, runs the risk of defocusing the attention away from the trends in relevant media over to the decisions of the various actors involved and their reasoning.

Finally, the thesis chose to analyse Hungary as a recipient of funding as its only case. On reflection, there is likely space in the thesis for another country. Poland would be a natural second country. In the data, the coverage of only Poland, without mention of Hungary in the context of its conflicts with the EEA-grants or the Cohesion Policy, made up a sizeable portion of the articles which were in the overview of the search terms, but did not fall under the categories of the in-depth review. Additionally, many of the articles which were in the in-depth review contained references to Poland. A comparison of the two countries' media coverage in the context of funding could provide a very interesting insight into how the two countries are covered given Poland's having been tied to suspension of funding over rule of law earlier than Hungary, but has seen its reputation become more complicated because of its relation with Ukraine following the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Beyond more technical decisions and constraints, the RRF constitutes a unique challenge to the framework of the thesis which was inadequately met. If the RRF is ignored in its entirety, the thesis will have a blatant hole in its numbers from 2020, and a major factor in the media coverage of funding provided to Hungary would be ignored. By fitting the more ad-hoc RRF, with its relatively short life-expectancy, into the thesis, however, there is a lesser focus on what became the primary focuses of the thesis, the EEA-grants, and the Cohesion Policy. A decision

should have been made earlier to either emphasise the RRF more closely, or to give it less space in the thesis, possibly even next to nothing.

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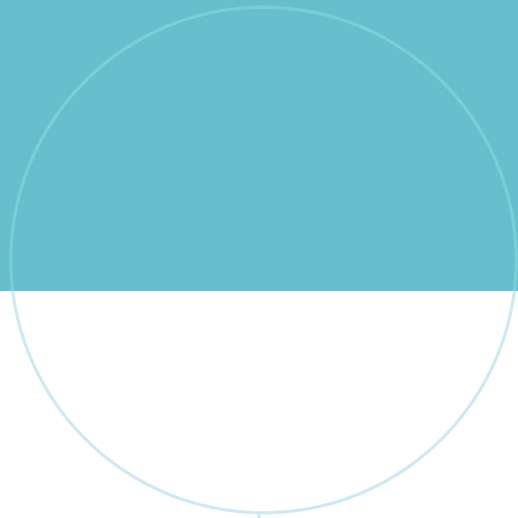
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