Peace, Prosperity and Protection: Narratives of Integration and the 'Justification Jungle' of Europe's Public Spheres

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Abstract

The European Union (EU) is in search of a new narrative to create a sense of common purpose, but it is unclear around which values that narrative should be built. To analyse how different narratives resonate in Europe's public spheres, this article presents a novel dataset based on claims analysis of newspaper articles from Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Poland and Denmark between 2012 and 2019 on the issues of migration, the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), trade and counterterrorism. Descriptive and logistic regression analyses show how different frames have been used for various policy agendas. This reveals considerable variation, but comparatively low levels of explained variance. Europe's public spheres can thus be described as a 'justification jungle', where many actors use a range of arguments to back up diverging political demands. This poses a formidable obstacle to any single narrative of European integration.

Keywords: narrative; European integration; claims analysis; public sphere; European Union

Introduction

As Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, a remarkable unity in discourse throughout the European Union (EU) appeared. Across the member states, there was a focus in public debate on the biggest war on the continent since 1945, outrage at Russian aggression and an outpouring of support for Ukraine. German Chancellor Olav Scholz spoke of a 'Zeitenwende'. A political scramble ensued to increase the security of the continent through strategic autonomy. Yet, within weeks, this unity in discourse receded. Where the focus in the Baltics and Poland remained on the atrocities in Ukraine and ensuing security concerns, the Hungarian and French elections were heavily influenced by economic concerns about inflation. Meanwhile, the German debate turned increasingly inwards, and its blocking of EU sanctions on SWIFT and oil and gas revealed a lack of leadership. Although the war continued to rage in Ukraine with increasing numbers of casualties and war crimes, the focus and unity in the European public political debate melted away and made way for a cacophony of different arguments and concerns. The narrative of strategic autonomy may have already faltered before it really got started. That would not be surprising, given what has happened with earlier narratives of European integration (Nicolaidis and Howse 2002; Manners and Murray 2016; Bouza Garcia 2017; McMahon and Kaiser 2021).

Over the years, a range of narratives have been used to justify European integration, from the 'Nobel' narrative that European unification is a peace project, to the economic narrative that Europe brings prosperity and efficient markets, to a social Europe, a green Europe and various forms of a global Europe (cf. Manners and Murray 2016). The narrative that European integration is a peace project arguably lost persuasiveness during the

course of the 1990s and 2000s (Manners and Murray 2016, p. 188–189). Younger generations took peace in Europe for granted. The new 'economic Europe' narrative focused on the single market as a project to create scales of efficiency and prosperity, and this culminated in the Lisbon Agenda to make Europe 'the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion'.[1]

With the advent of the Euro crisis, however, this second narrative suffered a major credibility crisis: instead of prosperity, there was unemployment. Yet, the Euro crisis did not result in a uniform debate across the EU. Whilst it generated a discussion of the lack of democracy in the south, where EMU rules were considered too rigid and too strictly imposed by northern member states and the Troika, it generated a narrative of betrayal and prodigality in the north, where southern member states were depicted as unreliable and taking advantage of northern solidarity (Risse 2015). One of the most recent attempts to underpin a unifying sense of purpose through narrative came with the instalment of the new Von der Leyen Commission and her controversial attempt to appoint a 'European Commissioner for the Protection of Our European Way of Life', who, in practice, would be a Commissioner for Migration (Foret and Trino 2022). The word 'protection' sounded too xenophobic for the European Parliament, and Von der Leyen was forced to make a minor adjustment. Despite this minor defeat at the European Parliament, the narrative of a 'Europe that protects' (Une Europe qui protège) was born and pushed by French President Emmanuel Macron in particular.[2] This may be seen as a response to the rise of far-right parties, particularly in the wake of the 2015–2016 refugee crisis and a reincarnation of the Fortress Europe narrative (Manners and Murray 2016, p. 198). Besides acknowledging opposition to immigration, it also resonated with French fears about globalisation and the loss of manufacturing and agricultural jobs.

This brief overview illustrates the existence of various existing narratives of integration. Pro-Europeans have already tried out many different stories, and yet the search for a new narrative and its power to unify Europeans and provide a common sense of purpose continues. This article sets out to shed new light on the holy grail of a new narrative for European integration. This article asks the question: *To what extent are 'narrative themes' such as peace, prosperity and protection used to justify EU policies and competencies in political claims?* More broadly, *who* is providing *which* frame for *what* policy agenda in Europe's public spheres? This article builds on the premise that the success or failure of any narrative of integration is partially dependent on pre-existing debates in Europe's public spheres. These debates determine with which kind of policy agenda a narrative of integration will be associated. It studies narratives through the frequency and ways in which European policy questions are framed. This is measured as part of a claims analysis (Koopmans and Statham 1999). This analysis gives insights into how various narratives are likely to be interpreted – by power of association – as they resonate or fail to resonate with various existing political narratives in different member states on widely different policy issues.

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[1]Source: https://doi.org/10.18712/NSD-NSD3047-V3 (accessed 25.08.2021).
[2]Source: https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2019/03/05/inauguration-du-college-du-renseignement-en-europe (accessed 25.08.2021).

The article then presents a comparative analysis of claims about European policy in public discourse by elite and non-elite actors. It analyses four diverse policy fields, designed to capture a variety of different trade-offs and concerns in key European policy areas: migration, trade, counterterrorism and the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU). To analyse the resonance of different narratives in the public sphere, the article proceeds to discuss who contributes to such debates, what their demands are and how such demands are framed. The conclusion is that Europe's public spheres can best be described as a 'justification jungle' in which actors can argue for anything through an appeal to a wide range of different values. The implication is that any single narrative for European integration is unlikely to unite Europe for any prolonged period of time.

1. Theorising Narratives of European Integration

There is broad agreement in the literature that various narratives of European integration are and have been in existence. Manners and Murray (2016) identified six different narratives: (1) the 'Nobel narrative' of the EU as a peace project; (2) the 'new narrative', which is not well delineated, but is perhaps about the principles of human rights, democracy and rule of law centrally; 3) 'economic Europe' centred around the single market, prosperity, EMU and cohesion funds, but at the same time containing technocratic arguments about efficiency; (4) 'social Europe', focusing on social policy, solidarity, worker protection and employment; (5) 'green Europe', with a focus on sustainable development, including climate change policy, as well as environmental and nature protection; and (6) 'global Europe', focusing on the EU as a regional and global player, situated in its geopolitical environment. Yet, whilst proposing this typology of six narratives, Manners and Murray (2016) immediately acknowledged that many of these narratives are not so clear cut. The 'new narrative' was never really uniform, whilst the 'economic narrative' contains arguments about both economic prosperity and technocratic efficiency, and is therefore perhaps two narratives rather than one. The 'global narrative' contains at least three sub-narratives: that of a neoliberal Europe about free trade; the 'taming globalization' narrative, which is close to the social Europe agenda; and the 'Fortress Europe' narrative, which was originally about economic protectionism but has become increasingly associated with limiting immigration over time. In contrast to Manners and Murray, Eder (2009) identified three narratives: (1) a supranational Europe around the 'Jean Monnet success story' of building up supranational institutions and a European legal order; (2) a post-national Europe echoing the Nobel narrative, but with a greater role for non-institutional actors and rituals, such as Holocaust remembrance; and (3) a transnational Europe, focusing on cultural diversity and exchanges. The Erasmus project of student exchanges echoes this latter narrative.

Narratives are not just employed to support or underpin the European project: they are also used to attack and undermine it (McMahon and Kaiser 2021). Counter-narratives include (1) 'bureaucratic Europe', focusing on the EU as a Kafkaesque maze of red tape and technocracy; (2) 'empire Europe' portraying the EU as an unaccountable imperial straightjacket impeding on member state sovereignty and national self-determination; (3) 'wasteful Europe', highlighting corruption and arguing the EU misspends taxpayers' money (cf. Blair in Schweiger 2007, p. 82); and (4) 'capitalist Europe', articulating the influence of business lobbyists and big industry in Brussels as disproportional (Van

Apeldoorn 2002). Several of these counter-narratives draw on similar themes, such as the EU being undemocratic, unaccountable and run by bureaucrats rather than elected politicians.

Four key lessons from the literature on the narratives and counter-narratives of European integration inform the present article. First, much of the construction of narratives is about framing and linking a political programme, such as pooling of sovereignty, to an 'organizing idea' (Gamson 2004, p. 245) to make sense of what is at stake. This is done through discursively linking arguments for more Europe, less Europe or a different Europe to 'narrative themes' (McMahon and Kaiser 2021, p. 7) such as peace, prosperity, democracy, sustainability, solidarity or sovereignty. Second, both institutional and societal actors contribute to the creation and dissemination of narratives, including, notably, EU institutions, national politicians and public intellectuals, who create various 'narrative networks', which may or may not engage with each other, thus creating both the possibility of uniform narratives across the EU and of isolated narratives, resonating only in parts of Europe's segmented public spheres (Eder 2009; Bouza Garcia 2017). Third, it is an open empirical question which narrative themes are connected with which political programmes and whether this is uniform across member states and issues. Fourth, there remains a keen political interest – particularly, but not exclusively, within the European Commission – to search for a single (new) narrative to support the European project, as evidenced by Von der Leyen's flirtation with 'Our European Way of Life', Macron's launch of 'l'Europe qui protège' and the 'strategic autonomy' narrative following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. In light of these four lessons, this article proceeds with a systematic analysis of different arguments made in Europe's public spheres. Are demands for certain policies or political programmes systematically linked to particular narrative themes? If so, where and by whom? What does this empirical pattern ultimately tell us about the prospects of a new narrative of European integration?

To conduct this systematic comparative analysis, this article draws on political claims-making (Koopmans and Statham 1999) and presents a novel database of claims made in newspapers in Germany, France, Spain, Italy, Poland and Denmark on the issues of migration, counterterrorism, the EMU and trade between 2012 and 2019. This design captures a wide range of issues that embody different political trade-offs and questions of distribution and redistribution. They do so among member states with different backgrounds, economic and political situations and exposure to external shocks, over a longer period of time. It is thus designed to maximise possible variation in narrative resonance. Any systematic pattern found to hold across issues and space would thus be a strong indicator of the resonance of a particular narrative and a key informative stepping stone for any political entrepreneur considering championing such a narrative.

Patterns across Public Spheres

Because narratives are sense-making tools, instrumental in establishing the legitimacy of the EU, their power is limited if they do not make sense in similar ways across member states (Eder 2009; Manners and Murray 2016, p. 188; Bouza Garcia 2017). Hence, whether framing happens in similar patterns across the public spheres of member states is a key indication of the legitimating power of the narratives they reflect. Several large-scale comparative studies have found similarities across EU member states in

how EU politics and European integration are framed. This would lead us to expect similarities in framing patterns across countries. Diez Medrano and Gray (2010) have analysed media debates in Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands and Switzerland. They sampled newspaper articles on the policy issues of agriculture, monetary politics, troop deployment, immigration politics, retirement and pensions, education and European integration in terms of enlargement, institutional reform and constitutional discussions between 1990 and 2002. Using claims analysis (Koopmans and Statham 1999), they analysed how various actors have covered their arguments in the news frame when making claims on any of the above-mentioned issues. Their main conclusion was to find relative similarities across time, space and policy fields:

> Actors in the public sphere … represent the European Union as a mainly economic institution formed by democratic countries. The European Union is also described as limiting the states' sovereignty and, to a slightly lesser degree, as contributing to peace and security in Europe. (Diez Medrano and Gray 2010, p. 218)

Whilst also finding similarities across countries and issues, Helbling (2014) found universalistic values such as democracy, freedom and equality to be more dominant as a frame than economic concerns. Studying migration debates, Helbling (2014) concluded that, 'if there is a dominant frame it is not nationalistic, economic, or security argumentation, as is often suggested in the current body of literature. Rather, moral-universal arguments seem to be applied most often' (Helbling 2014, p. 37). Commonalities are also highlighted by Cinalli et al. (2021, p. 82) in their study of the 2015–2016 refugee crisis. They concluded that 'we can speak of a European field of solidarity contestation where attention was focused on the same events, common lines of arguments were developed, and positions were shared by different segments of the public' (p. 82). Looking at the debates around the economic situation in the Euro crisis, Kaiser and Kleinen-von Königslöw (2017) showed how German and Spanish actors framed the challenges at hand in similar ways, contributing to the Europeanisation of public spheres. This does not, however, preclude differences at more detailed level. Whilst Spanish actors predominantly framed the Euro crisis as a banking crisis, German actors framed it more as a sovereign debt crisis (Kaiser and Kleinen-von Königslöw 2017, p. 810).

Whilst these studies have argued that there are commonalities across countries, they differ in terms of which frames dominate. It may well be the result of methodological choices whether it is economic prosperity, moral-universal values, solidarity or yet another frame that dominates. The finding by Helbling (2014) that universalistic values dominate may be a product of his focus on migration policy. Comparing seven policy areas, the study by Diez Medrano and Gray (2010) yielded different findings. When the study was conducted may also affect the findings. The height of the Euro crisis likely amplified different concerns than the height of the refugee crisis. Furthermore, as indicated by Kaiser and Kleinen-von Königslöw (2017), there may be broad similarities in framing at the aggregate level, when studying meta-frames such as the economy, equality, freedom or solidarity. Yet, at a more detailed level – such as whether the Euro crisis is primarily a banking or a sovereign debt crisis – there may also be clear differences from country to country. Notwithstanding such diverse findings, which may or may not be the result of research design and methodological choices, these projects of large-scale quantitative comparative content analysis share the finding that many different frames are used to

make sense of EU politics in the news and that the vast majority of these frames are used to make both positive and negative evaluations of the EU and the integration project.

Differences across Actors and Nationalities

The above-mentioned studies on the framing of European politics in the public sphere document differences across actor types and nationalities. To begin with, several studies have indicated that the partisan affiliation of actors influences their framing of issues, such as European integration (Helbling et al. 2010) and immigration (Helbling 2014): 'While some parties support European integration for economic reasons, others see the cultural potential, and in many circumstances, the EU is perceived in terms of political efficiency and efficacy' (Helbling et al. 2010, p. 517). The radical left tends to employ universal moral arguments more often than other parties, and the radical right disproportionally uses nationalistic frames. Based on their study of the debates on the refugee crisis in many European countries, Cinalli et al. (2021, p. 171) concurred and concluded that '[d]omestic partisan cleavages … matter more than country cleavages to explain solidarity attitudes towards refugees' (p. 171). These differences, however, can be expected to be relative. Political actors strategically choose one or two frames to emphasise but also address the frames of their opponents (Hänggli and Kriesi 2012). Yet even if, in line with framing theory, partisan actors adopt one or two frames as their dominant line of justification, 'public debate and contestation in the news media over the "refugee crisis" emerged as a dynamic process of cultural exchange between European governments, oppositional parties, transnational civil society and segments of the public' (Cinalli et al. 2021, p. 82). A related study has made a similar argument, whilst at the same time pointing out the singularity of UK actors:

> collective actors in the European Union largely share a common frame on European integration issues. This conclusion points to the existence of a shared political culture within Europe. The main contrast observed in this analysis is that between the United Kingdom and the rest of the countries included in this study. British political actors emphasize sovereignty and national interests in their approach to the European Union and fail to see the European Union as a group of countries sharing the same values. (Diez Medrano and Gray 2010, p. 218)

It thus makes sense to compare different nationalities within the EU to see to what extent different narratives resonate across the region. The function and level at which actors operate also matter. Representatives of the EU can be expected to disproportionally defend a European perspective and advocate common European solutions. For example, Cinalli et al. (2021, p. 83) argued that 'data reveal a considerable gap between the more cosmopolitan standing of the EU, on the one hand, against the national revival across member states, on the other' (p. 83). More specifically discussing how different frames are used by different actors to support different policy preferences, they argued that:

> rights-based justifications are often used when claiming solidarity with refugees, while the opposite is true for interest- and identity-based justifications. This finding corroborates the opposition between supranationalism and renationalisation processes: National governments often refused to comply with EU resettlement schemes so as to defend their interests and identities, while EU actors favoured a solution based on universal human rights. (Cinalli et al. 2021, p. 83)

To sum up, in mediated debates on various policy fields in which the EU has diverging degrees of competence, a wide array of different frames comes to the fore. The literature on framing Europe hereby echoes the literature on narratives of European integration, documenting a plurality of frames frequently used in public debates, with multiple frames used to defend a single political demand and the same frame used to defend different – even contradictory – political demands. This plurality stems not only from the fact that different issues have different public goods and trade-offs at stake but also because a diverse range of collective actors contribute. We can expect there to be commonalities across borders, with economic frames, universal value frames and solidarity arguments frequently voiced across member states. No frame is likely to be monopolised by a single actor, but there may be degrees of ownership, which are likely to be more influenced by the ideology of the actor making the claims than by their nationality, as differences in framing are reported to diverge more across partisan lines and between national and EU-level actors than across member states.

2. Studying Narratives through Claims Analysis

This article relies on claims analysis (Koopmans and Statham 1999) on newspaper articles on four issues – migration, counterterrorism, the EMU and trade – in Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Denmark and Poland, published between 2012 and 2019. Newspaper articles were sampled from the LexisNexis and Factiva databases using issue-based keyword sampling around issue-specific episodes of contention in the period of 2012–2019. One conservative and one liberal newspaper were sampled in each country: *FAZ* and *SZ* in Germany, *Figaro* and *Le Monde* in France, *Corriera della Serra* and *La Repubblica* in Italy, *ABC* and *El Pais* in Spain, *Rzeczpospolita* and *Gazeta Wyborcza* in Poland and *Jyllands-Posten* and *Politiken* in Denmark. More details on sampling can be found in the online codebook (Gora and De Wilde 2022). Beyond claims on any of the four policy areas, claims about the overarching constitutional issue of European integration are also coded, if they were made in any of the sampled newspaper articles. What follows is a brief discussion on the key aspects of the claims analysis and the core variables used in the subsequent analyses. The online codebook (Gora and De Wilde 2022) contains a detailed discussion on how claims are defined, identified and coded; examples; and information on intercoder reliability.

Claims always contain three key elements: a claimant (or maker), an issue and a position. In this most basic form, claims come to the fore as 'Wilders argues for Nexit', 'Greenpeace campaigns against TTIP' or 'Greeks reject the bailout package in the 2015 referendum'. Claimants can be individual or collective actors; this includes EU institutions and their representatives, member state governments, experts, journalists, civil society actors and representatives from all kinds of political parties, in government or opposition, but also ordinary citizens. Drawing on Statham (2005, p. 12), a claim is defined as a unit of strategic or communicative action in the public sphere 'which articulate[s] political demands, decisions, implementations, calls to action, proposals, criticisms, or physical attacks, which, actually or potentially, affect the interests or integrity of the claimants and/or other collective actors in a policy field' (p. 12). Claims include evaluations of current policy and/or demands for future policy, sometimes justified through framing the demand as a step towards the realisation of a particular value. The claimant expresses a

desire in a particular political direction in relation to a political issue: for or against more redistribution in the EMU, for or against open borders for trade or for or against more discretion for the executive to counterterrorism. This demand thus consists of an issue and a position on that issue and is a necessary component of a claim. There is no political claim if there is no demand.

Demands are operationalised to load onto one of three dimensions of political conflict: integration vs demarcation, more or less government expenditure and more or less executive discretion. 'Integration' is coded if the realisation of the policy demand would imply a pooling of sovereignty or defended a locus of power at the supranational level (Kriesi et al. 2008, p. 891). 'Demarcation', on the other hand, applies to any claim where the realisation would imply a weakening of supranational institutions or processes or a reaffirmation of borders. If the implications of the policy demands defied the integration–demarcation divide, it is captured through other demands. This applied, for example, to preferences for greater or weaker executive discretion vis-à-vis controlling powers, particular legislative and judicial ones.

Sometimes, the claimant provides a reason to support his or her demand, often in the form of an ultimate aim or value that the claim would serve. This reason is either an implicit or explicit justification of the claim, communicating a common good or value as the ultimate aim (organising idea) to be pursued through the realisation of the policy demand. These reasons or justifications are here analysed as operationalised frames. Framing is here understood as organising 'an apparently diverse array of symbols, images and arguments, linking them through an underlying organizing idea that suggests what is at stake on the issue' (Gamson 2004, p. 245). Three variables capture the reproduction of different narratives of European integration through framing. The first captures key frames that are enshrined in the European Treaties as the EU's core values, particularly in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU), which states:

> The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail.

These include the universalist value frames that Helbling (2014) found to be most prevalent in debates about immigration. Instrumental 'pragmatic arguments' (Sjursen 2002) are captured by the second variable on 'other frames'. Whilst previous studies have tended to construct a single framing variable, implying the coding (and existence) of either pragmatic, ethical-political or universal-moral values in the public sphere, they are here separated to enable isolation of the explicit instrumentalisation of Article 2 TEU values by both EU actors and other actors in debating EU politics and the possibility that moral or ethical framing co-occurs with pragmatic framing in claims-making. Finally, the third variable captures the presence of the protection narrative. Whilst the protection narrative clearly resonates with the pragmatic value of security, as does the peace narrative, this allows us to analyse the explicit usage of the word 'protection' or 'to protect' in the public sphere.

The article proceeds with a descriptive overview of the various frames in the public sphere in general, as well as by issue and country. It continues with a more in-depth

analysis of the six most frequently used frames: democracy and rule of law, solidarity, economic prosperity, efficiency/effectiveness, security and protection. The use of these frames is regressed on the level, nationality and party of the claimant, as well as the issue and position of the claim, using logistic regression (see Appendix S1 for further details).

3. Six Prominent Narratives in Europe's Public Spheres

Descriptive statistics revealed that just over 78 per cent of claims do not have an Article 2 TEU frame. In other words, only in about 22 per cent of the cases do individuals and collective actors frame their political opinions and demands with one of the key moral or ethical-political values included in the TEU as key European values. Compare this to pragmatic framing, such as invocation of the values of economic prosperity and security, which are present in 58.5 per cent of claims. Furthermore, the explicit protection narrative of 'l'Europe qui protège' is used to frame only 4 per cent of claims. Also, it is worth noting that 30.6 per cent of all claims did not contain any framing. In other words, following our logic of analysing narratives through framing in claims, three out of ten claims do not contribute to the reproduction of narratives in Europe's public spheres.

Based on the initial overview shown in Table 1, I proceed to analyse the occurrence of the most theoretically relevant and most frequently used frames in depth. This includes the underlined variables in Table 1 – democracy and rule of law, solidarity, economic prosperity, effectiveness/efficiency, security and protection – recoded as dichotomous variables like the protection variable, where 1 = *present* and 0 = *absent*. I start with a basic descriptive comparison by national public sphere from the six countries included in the analysis. This is then repeated for migration, EMU, trade and counterterrorism as well as the overarching constitutional issue of European integration.

Framing by Public Sphere and Issue Debates

Table 2 shows the percentages of claims in which frequently occurring frames are used in each of the six countries. A chi-square test for country differences reveals significant differences across countries. There is quite some variation in how skewed the occurrence of

Table 1: Framing in Claims in the Public Sphere

Article 2 TEU Values	Freq.	Percent	Other Values	Freq.	Per cent	Protection	Freq.	Per cent
None	4213	78.25	None	2235	41.51	Absent	5162	95.88
Freedom	64	1.19	Culture	184	3.42	*Present*	*222*	*4.12*
Democracy & Rule of Law	*555*	*10.31*	Sovereignty	133	2.47			
Equality	81	1.50	*Economy*	*976*	*18.13*			
Human Dignity	67	1.24	*Effectiveness*	*558*	*10.36*			
Justice	73	1.36	*Security*	*634*	*11.78*			
Solidarity	*219*	*4.07*	Sustainability	64	1.19			
Tolerance	30	0.56	Other	600	11.14			
Human Rights	82	1.52						
Total	5384	100	Total	5384	100	Total	5384	100

Table 2: Framing of Claims by National Public Sphere, Percentages

	Democracy & Rule of Law	Solidarity	Economic Prosperity	Effectiveness/ Efficiency	Security/ Peace	Protection Narrative
Country						
Germany	15.59	2.91	15.06	12.60	8.35	.97
France	6.83	3.55	17.29	5.14	14.36	11.35
Italy	2.48	4.04	29.35	11.96	7.61	1.09
Spain	12.84	5.56	21.36	13.21	10.25	3.58
Denmark	10.42	5.28	15.00	4.44	14.44	.14
Poland	9.99	4.18	14.71	15.52	16.73	5.94
Total	10.31	4.07	18.13	10.36	11.78	4.12
χ^2	103.52***	12.73**	79.92***	97.53***	57.45***	233.36***

$^{**}p < 0.05.$ $^{***}p < 0.01.$

particular frames is. Solidarity is invoked by claimants roughly equally in all countries under study; between 2.91 per cent of claims in Germany and 5.56 per cent of claims in Spain are justified with concerns for solidarity. In contrast, the protection narrative does not travel far beyond France, where it has its origin in President Macron's speech. Whilst 11.35 per cent of claims in French newspapers linked up to the protection narrative, the numbers in the other five countries are much lower; the protection narrative is next to non-existent in Germany, Italy and Denmark. Table 2 also shows the predominance of the economic prosperity frame throughout the EU. It is the most frequently used frame in five out of the six countries studied, Poland being the exception. It is by far the most prominent frame in Italy and Spain, two countries particularly hard hit by the Euro crisis.

The difference in exposure to frames by issue debate is much stronger than the difference across countries, as shown in Table 3. In particular, economic prosperity and security – two of the most frequently used frames – are highly issue sensitive. This illustrates that different political questions often have their own narratives. Whilst there is a disproportionate usage of economic prosperity framing in debates on the EMU and – to a lesser extent – trade, the security frame is heavily concentrated in debates on counterterrorism. This is not very surprising, as it is easy to see how the Euro crisis, as well as the

Table 3: Framing of Claims by Issue Debate, Percentages

	Democracy & Rule of Law	Solidarity	Economic Prosperity	Effectiveness/ Efficiency	Security/ Peace	Protection Narrative
Issue						
EMU	7.46	4.98	42.29	9.74	0.78	1.07
Counter- terrorism	10.82	2.00	1.68	11.03	42.86	6.72
Migration	11.37	5.97	5.04	14.82	9.93	2.45
Trade	8.58	1.85	21.72	3.80	3.58	8.14
European Integration	15.41	4.20	13.31	10.50	6.16	4.76
Total	10.31	4.07	18.13	10.36	11.78	4.12
χ^2	37.33***	38.03***	906.61***	73.49***	1100***	97.81***

$^{**}p < 0.05.$ $^{***}p < 0.01.$

EU-USA Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) and the EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) negotiations, triggered concerns for economic prosperity, whilst terrorist attacks and the debate on preventing future terrorist attacks triggered concerns for security.

The analysis also shows that core European values, as enshrined in Article 2 TEU, are the most evenly used frames across public spheres and issue audiences. Solidarity, in particular, is used as frame across countries and issues with comparatively little variation.

Logistic Regression of Key Frames

A series of logistic regressions for each of the six highlighted frames – democracy and rule of law, solidarity, economic prosperity, effectiveness/efficiency, security/peace and protection – reveals patterns in who tends to employ them, and for what. Coefficient plots are shown in Figure 1, with full results and detailed discussion reported in Appendix S1.

The democracy and rule of law frame is often presented by judicial actors. This is unsurprising, given the prominence of rule of law issues in several newer member states and the professional concern judges, courts and lawyers have with these issues. It is also disproportionally used by far-left actors and Germans whilst being much less likely to come from French or Italian actors. Democracy and rule of law is a frame that is clearly more often used to justify demands on European integration and its associated constitutional issues than it is in any of the other four policy issues studied here. When invoked,

Figure 1: Logistic Regression Coefficient Plot.
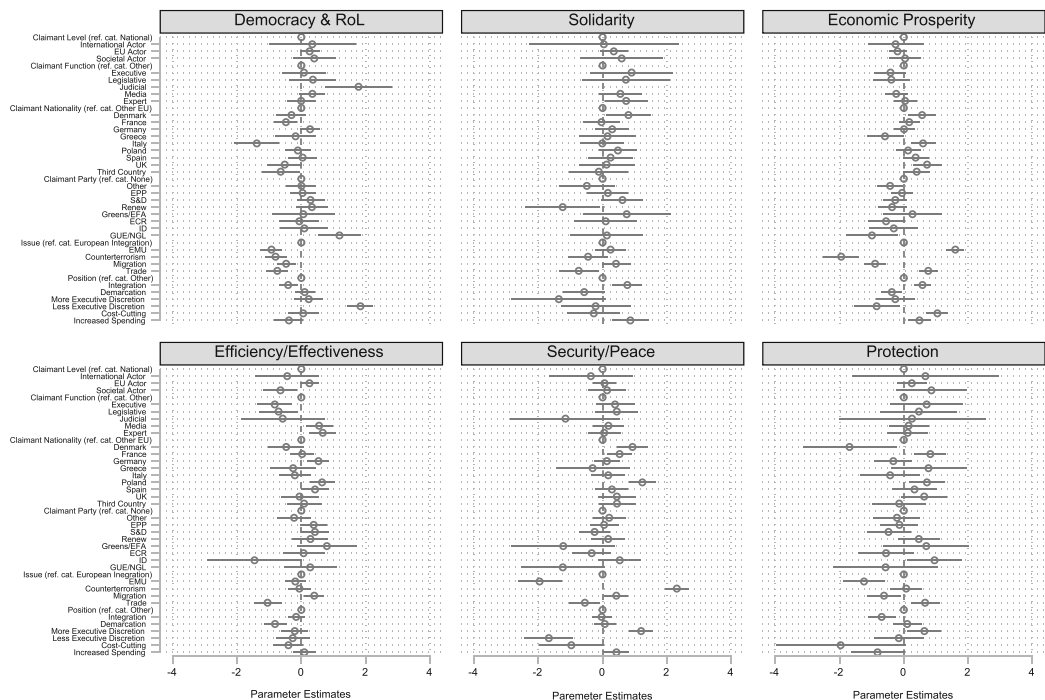
democracy and rule of law as a frame tends to be used to argue against executive discretion. Arguments in favour of more pooling of sovereignty or open borders are less likely to be justified by a concern for democracy and rule of law. With a pseudo R^2 of 0.090, this model has low-level explanatory power, indicating that even when the maker of the claim is known, as well as what the issue and the demand are, there is still just a weak basis to predict the use of democracy and rule of law as a frame.

The frame of solidarity is slightly more likely to be used by experts and Danish actors and less likely to be used by liberals. Arguments in favour of integration and increased spending are more frequently supported with concerns for solidarity, whilst it is a comparatively rare frame in debates on trade. That said, linking up to the discussion in the section above, the explained variance of model 3 is low. This means that solidarity is used as frame for different policy agendas by different actors across member states and issues.

Whether or not claims are justified by concerns for economic prosperity is something the actor and argument-based model predicts best. British, Danish and Italian actors are more likely to raise concerns about economic prosperity, whilst Greek actors are less likely to do so. This is in line with findings by Diez Medrano and Gray (2010). It may at first seem surprising to see comparatively low attention to prosperity amongst Greek actors, given how strongly the Euro crisis affected that country, but this does correspond with previous research finding that much of the bailout referendum campaign in Greece was debated in terms of sovereignty rather than in terms of the economic consequences of bailout vs default (Michailidou 2017). Whether demands are framed in terms of economic prosperity is heavily influenced by the issue at hand and features prominently in debates on the EMU and trade and much less so in debates on migration and counterterrorism. It is clearly associated with the integration–demarcation conflict, as integration is argued to be good for the economy, whilst those arguing for demarcation shy away from the prosperity frame. Concerns about too much executive discretion are rarely justified with economic prosperity, whilst both claims for and against spending are often supported by arguments that it would be good for the economy.

Effectiveness/efficiency is the frame that escapes the explanatory model the most. Neither the nature of the actor nor the nature of the argument tells us much about whether claims are justified with a concern for effective or efficient governance. In other words, all kinds of actors frame their demands as pursuing effective and efficient government, no matter what they want. Societal actors, in general, are less likely than others to justify claims as furthering efficiency and effectiveness, although media actors and experts – two key societal actors – stand out as relatively frequent contributors to this frame. Executive and legislative actors employ this frame comparatively rarely. This is interesting, given the strong attention some key arguments using this frame – Margaret Thatcher's argument that There Is No Alternative (TINA) and Angela Merkel's argument that saving the Eurozone through bailouts was 'alternativlos' – have received in the media and in scholarly literature on European integration (e.g. Liebert 2016; Zürn 2016). Perhaps, given the storm of critique such arguments may face when made by government leaders, many executive actors shy away from explicitly stating they see certain policies as unavoidable.

Compared to other nationalities, Danish, French and Polish actors are more likely to raise security concerns. This frame features prominently in debates on counterterrorism, but rarely in EMU debates. This clearly aligns with the line of conflict between degrees of executive discretion, as arguments in favour of more executive discretion are often

justified with security concerns, whilst arguments against it rarely do so. To a lesser extent, it also resonates with conflicts over spending, as it used in arguments for higher government spending. Of the six narratives and their respective frames studied more closely here, this is the one whose usage is best explained by our model, as indicated through a comparatively high pseudo R^2 (0.300).

Finally, the multivariate logistic regression confirms that the protection narrative is mostly a French habit, although Polish actors also use it more often than others. Danish actors, on the other hand, do not often employ this frame. Politically, it is associated with the far right. The protection narrative is relatively prominent in debates on trade and less so in debates on the EMU and migration. It is used comparatively often to support demands for more executive discretion.

Conclusion

The European Commission's search for a new narrative remains a formidable challenge. The Commission may be eager to support the integration process with a unifying story, but Europe's public spheres feature a cacophony of voices in which various policy demands are being framed in all kinds of ways. Where the Ukraine war briefly seemed to provide impetus for a new narrative on strategic autonomy, this impetus appears to have dissipated within weeks. Framing patterns change quickly and are highly context dependent. Agile political actors manoeuvre to gain the political upper hand and will use whatever frame resonates more at the time and place at hand. In that sense, the mapping of framing patterns in the public sphere conducted here shares some commonalities with the 'narrative ju-jitsu' described by McMahon and Kaiser (2021). However, ju-jitsu is a rules-based competition with two players. In Europe's public spheres, there are far more than two players, and they do not play by the rules. Debates about European politics do not just evolve around the question of integration vs demarcation; there are debates about the degrees of discretion executive actors should enjoy and about whether money should be spent to tackle policy problems, as well as demands that do not load onto any of these three dimensions. It would therefore be more accurate to speak of a 'justification jungle' rather than narrative ju-jitsu, where many different political actors – including EU institutions, national politicians and societal actors – try to gain a discursive upper hand by justifying their policy demands using many different frames. They do this through an appeal to various values, linking their policy agenda to a particular value and portraying their policy demand as the realisation of that value. These values include the moral-universal values listed in Article 2 TEU and many more. The fact that few frames are 'owned' by any particular actor or agenda is shown through attempts to explain the occurrence of a particular frame in public discourse based on the key characteristics of the claimant and the nature of the political demand. The comprehensive regression analyses presented in this article only account for limited explained variance.

In contrast to previous findings in the literature on framing Europe, the most pronounced differences in terms of how European politics is framed are not found to be along national or partisan lines. Rather, the issue at hand has the most significant impact on which frames tend to be used. The fact that the EU, as a political system, now regulates or touches upon a vast range of different policy fields with widely different trade-offs and questions of distribution and redistribution thus provides a formidable challenge to

the creation of a unifying narrative of European integration. It shows the limits in terms of unifying power, particularly for ethical and pragmatic values that are not contained in Article 2 TEU. Take the narrative of 'green Europe' as an example. Whilst this is a prominent narrative in the literature and the European Commission recently made a strenuous effort to present itself as a champion of sustainability through the European Green Deal, sustainability as a frame rarely occurred in the public debates analysed in this particular study on migration, the EMU, counterterrorism and trade in the period of 2012–2019. In debates on climate change, this picture almost certainly would have looked radically different.

As with any study, the present one has certain limitations. Care has been taken to include a great variety of political issues about which to sample newspaper articles and to do that from many different EU member states over a prolonged period of time. Nevertheless, it cannot aspire to be fully representative of Europe's public spheres. Times change, and data from the present Ukraine war period are not included. Given the large variety of EU member states, it may well be that different patterns would have been uncovered had even more member states been included in the sample. The relative focus on large- and medium-sized member states in the sample might underestimate unique framing patterns of EU politics in small and tiny member states. Finally, this study relies on newspaper material as the sole source of political debate. Whilst there is solid empirical evidence that other media sources, such as social media, tend to replicate and resonate stories in newspapers (De Wilde et al. 2013; Cinalli et al. 2021), there might still have been different findings had such sources been included. The question of which policy agendas are framed in which ways in Europe's public spheres thus remains an open one, and the present study can but hope to be one piece of the larger puzzle.

That being said, the partial and short-lived unifying resonance of the strategic autonomy narrative following Russia's invasion of Ukraine seems to support rather than to challenge the findings presented here. Whilst EU actors were quick to seize the opportunity provided by this new crisis to argue for closer European cooperation on defence and energy, these arguments resonated to different degrees in different member states; other actors were quick to join the fray and use the exact same frames to argue for very different policy agendas. Most importantly, other concerns than security from Russian aggression quickly entered the debate, notably economic concerns about rising inflation due to high energy prices. This is in line with the 'justification jungle' argument presented here. Frames are a notoriously difficult concept to code in quantitative content analysis projects such as this one. They appear in all kinds of different forms, more or less explicitly, and are often dependent on context for correct interpretation. As a result, intercoder reliability scores are generally low, which should lead to caution in interpretation. The data presented here meet the standard requirement of at least 0.70 percentage agreement (Lombard et al. 2002, p. 593), but I advise against over interpretation of small differences or informing policy decisions by this study, unless supported by additional research.

If there are any policy implications of this analysis, it is primarily that any single narrative for European integration is unlikely to be successful in generating a prolonged common sense of purpose within the EU. If the European Commission or other pro-European actors are serious about surviving the justification jungle, they would do well to remain discursively agile and be willing to use any and all frames to justify their arguments at any given issue debate, depending on the national audience that is listening. When talking

to a French or Polish audience in the context of counterterrorism debates, it makes sense to argue that the EU exists to protect its citizens. When talking to an Italian or Spanish audience in the context of the EMU, however, it makes more sense to argue the EU is all about promoting economic prosperity.

This type of nimble strategy may, however, be too difficult to maintain. Spokespersons would have to react quickly to different situations without time to obtain consent from superiors and may well forget which argument to make where. This could lead to embarrassing and potentially disastrous mix-ups. The European Commission might want to opt for a more defensive strategy. If there is any single frame that lends itself as a narrative of European integration, the present article points to solidarity as the strongest candidate. Solidarity is a frame that resonates across Europe, as indicated in the comparatively even spread of its occurrence throughout nation- and issue-based audiences. It is not clearly owned by any actor, but – if anything – associated with pro-integrationist arguments. That is a foundation pro-European actors, including the European Commission, could build upon if they wish to do so. The caveat is, of course, that once they start such a campaign to discursively weaponise solidarity as the backbone value of European integration, opponents of European integration will search for opportunities to 'use their strengths against them' and argue how the EU is ruining solidarity in Europe. If the narrative is not firmly grounded in a policy that systematically and consistently furthers solidarity, these will be easy pickings.

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information may be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of the article.

Supporting info item
Appendix S1: Peace, Prosperity and Protection: The 'justification jungle' of Europe's public spheres.