

Crisis Discourses in Europe: Media EU-phemisms and Alternative Narratives

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Eurocrisis in the
Press

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It would be catastrophising to claim that euroscepticism won the European elections earlier this year – but it certainly staked a claim. Two years ago, we predicted the capturing of Europe by populist parties in our study of progressive activists in Europe, *The 'Bubbling Up' of Subterranean Politics in Europe* (Kaldor and Selchow 2012). What that report found was that Europe, as a political space, was invisible to the majority of these activists; at worst, it was considered part of the problem in the current moment of crisis.

In a recent [background paper](#), we set out to explore the dominant discourses around the euro crisis to understand why there appears to be such a mismatch between the concerns of these actors and the way in which the crisis is framed in the dominant discourse.

What we found confirmed what was suggested by our initial report: that these (primarily mediatised) narratives have (mis) represented the crisis as a predominantly economic one, rather than addressing the political concerns of these subterranean actors. It is a framing that discursively rules out alternatives to the prominent executive actors and their prescribed solutions, and which maintains political Europe as a distant 'other' to the majority of Europeans.



Furthermore, in the course of investigating the sources of these narratives, we found that there is a frequent misreading of 'media discourse' as 'public discourse', which both assumes that there is a dialogical relationship between European citizens and European policy makers where none exists, and leads both researchers and policymakers to overlook genres of discourse that have the potential to revitalise the European project from the bottom-up.

In partnership with the *Euro Crisis in the Press* team, the [background paper](#) reviews the latest empirical studies on media coverage of the euro crisis across the continent, analyses national and trans-European polling data, and draws upon collaborations with academics from across Europe who are working on projects related to perceptions of the crisis. The paper thus acts both as literature review and (non-statistical) meta-analysis of the current research available.

Four primary themes emerge across this data:

- The crisis is portrayed as an **abstract given**, virtually a 'supernatural phenomenon', and almost exclusively as an economic one. This rules out discussions of agency, of causes, or of how the crisis might be overcome; indeed one of the findings is that there is a lack of in-depth coverage of the potential political and economic roots of the crisis across the data.
- The European Union is regularly represented, in the narrative/s of the crisis, as a **foreign 'other'**, linked to, if not directly blamed for, suffering – of the home nation, of the so-called PIGS/PIIGS, and of the member states in general. Member states may also be 'othered' in relation to the home nation; by contrast, solidarity is rare.
- This framing of Europe as 'foreign' takes place despite the fact that the crisis discourse reveals a high-level of **European integration**, with both political actors and the media taking part in, and responding to, crisis

debates occurring in other European nations than the home nation.

- However, this narrative is also skewed almost entirely to coverage of national and European executives and economic ‘experts’. It is a **discourse of elites**. The Europe of the crisis is not framed as an arena for European citizens, but rather one that is imposed upon them from a remote, bureaucratic and decidedly top-down machine.

The result is a de-politicisation not only of the crisis, but of the European institutions that are seen to manage it. ‘Politics’ becomes remote machinery, led by executives, which the average European has no chance of affecting. It is a narrative that perpetuates the opinions of the actors interviewed in our first study: that formal politics have failed, and that Europe, as a political space, is invisible.

Thus the key implication of this paper is that ‘Europe’ must be politicised. Rather than pander to the eurosceptic victories, it is necessary for both policymakers and the media to prioritise new political conversations over formal mechanisms; to open up the narrative on the future of Europe so alternative voices can be heard, to create a genuine ‘public discourse’ that looks to the future rather than one that hides in the past.

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Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of the Euro Crisis in the Press blog, nor of the London School of Economics.

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