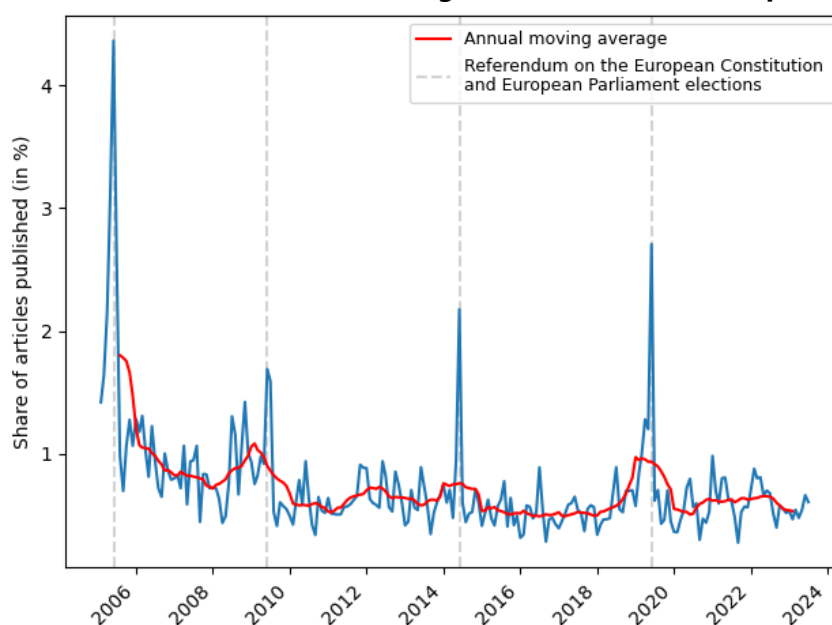


Twenty years of press articles on the European Union

By Camille Jehle and Florian Le Gallo

Using automated text analysis methods, we show that coverage of European issues by the French press has remained limited and stable over the past two decades, peaking mainly during European election periods. Unlike the national press, the local press is more interested in concrete EU initiatives, which are generally presented in a positive light.

Chart 1: Share of articles relating to the EU in the French press



Source: Jehle and Le Gallo (2025), based on Factiva data.

Note: the share is calculated as the ratio between the number of articles identified as dealing mainly with the EU and the total number of articles published.

The foundation of public policy action and effectiveness lies in particular in the confidence that citizens have in public decision-makers ([OECD, 2024](#)). In the case of the EU, taking citizens' opinions on public policy into account is now an important step in the decision-making process ([Commission, 2005](#)). The aim is to incorporate citizens' expectations, gather their opinions, and maintain trust in the actions of the various European institutions, including the European Central

Bank, which, together with the national central banks, ensures that the public has confidence in the euro.

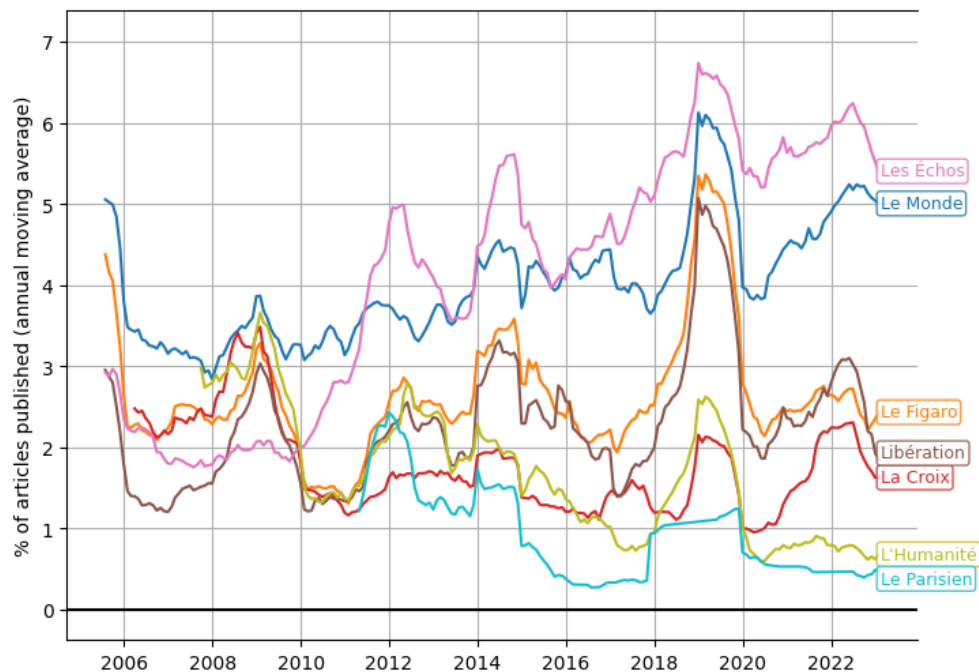
With this in mind, we looked at how the French press covers the EU (see [Jehle and Le Gallo, 2025](#)). Admittedly, the press is in decline and is not entirely representative of public opinion, due to bias linked in particular to the profile of its readers, who are older and more highly educated than average (Eurobarometer). However, newspapers remain a useful source of information for understanding French opinion, as a forum for debate that contributes to the formation of public opinion ([Vliegenthart and Walgrave, 2008](#)). Furthermore, the importance of the press is not correlated merely with the number of readers or subscribers, as press articles can, for example, be run by other media outlets and social networks. As such, although the press only partially reflects public opinion, it remains complementary to opinion polls in assessing public sentiment.

We conducted keyword searches for the presence of “European” or derivative terms and used a “large language model” (LLM), i.e., an artificial intelligence model trained to process large-scale texts, to select close to 400,000 articles on European affairs published between January 2005 and June 2023 in around 100 French local and national newspapers and magazines. We also determined the topics covered in these articles and their tone towards the EU. The objective of this study, which covers a broad spectrum of the print media, including all national daily newspapers and a large number of local newspapers (a total of 126 newspapers representing a combined 5 million subscribers in 2023 according to the [ACPM](#), compared to one or two newspapers covered in previous studies such as [Papadia et al., 2019](#)), is to gain a better understanding of the image of the EU in France.

Focus primarily on European elections

The results of our analysis show a certain stability in the coverage of European issues. On average, less than 1% of articles published each month feature the EU as their main topic (Chart 1). Significant peaks were identified around the May 2005 referendum on the European Constitution and the European elections, with increasing interest in the latter. However, no lasting effect was observed after the election period. Other major European events (such as the Brexit referendum, the 2015 refugee crisis, and the 2020 NextGenerationEU programme) did not attract any significant interest. These findings on the limited coverage of the EU in the print media are consistent with those of [Broc and Verdier \(2019\)](#) on the treatment of European issues by television news programmes.

Chart 2: Share of articles relating to the EU in the seven national daily newspapers



Source: Jehle and Le Gallo (2025), based on Factiva data.

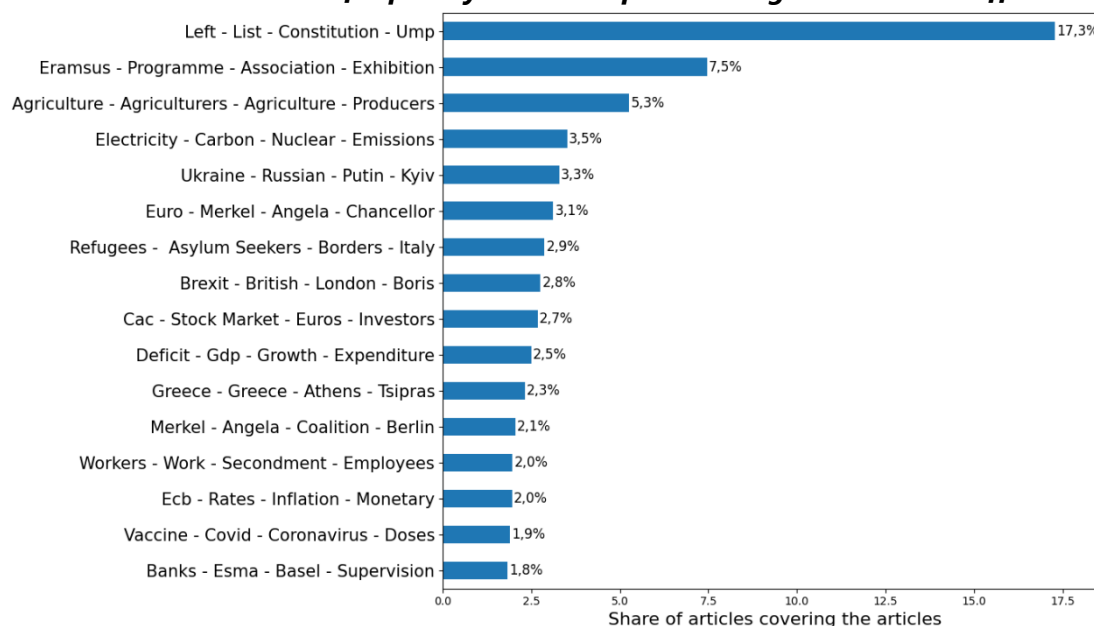
Note: Data include weekend editions and print and digital versions. Data for Le Parisien (including Aujourd'hui en France) is only available from 2010 onwards.

The frequency of articles dealing with European affairs is higher in the national daily press (more than 3% on average), despite significant disparities between the different titles. *Les Échos* and *Le Monde*, for example, devote a greater and growing number of articles to European affairs (more than 5% in mid-2023, Chart 2), whereas this number is trending down in other daily newspapers.

What is the written press talking about?

Using the [BERTopic](#) algorithm, which identifies the different topics addressed in a corpus of documents, we were able to identify the topics covered in articles relating to the EU (Chart 3). The marked interest in European elections logically means that the most frequent topic concerns political parties. Ranking second and third are educational and cultural exchanges for young people - notably the Erasmus programme - and agricultural topics, reflecting the importance of the Common Agricultural Policy. Next come several topical issues related to the crises recently experienced by the EU, such as the migration crisis, the euro area crisis, Brexit, and the invasion of Ukraine. It should be noted that issues directly affecting central banks, financial institutions, and the euro account for less than 10% of the total.

Chart 3: Most frequently covered topics relating to EU current affairs



Source: Jehle and Le Gallo (2025), based on Factiva data.

Note: the algorithm selects the four most representative words for each topic. Only topics covered in more than 1.5% of articles are presented here.

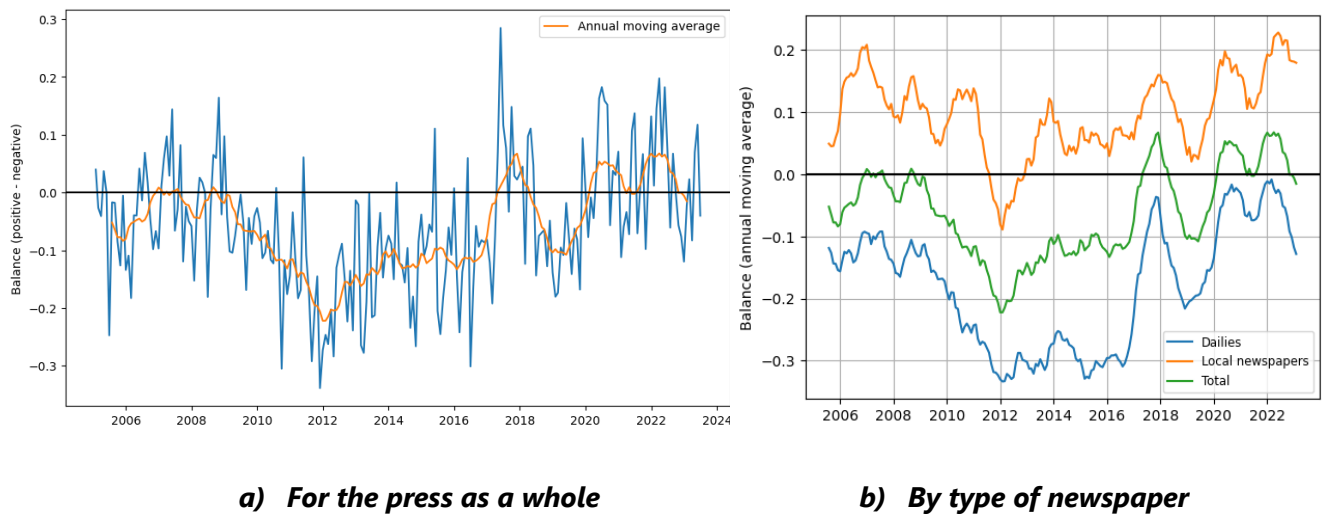
We also showed that local newspapers devote more articles to concrete topics. The topic of cultural and educational exchanges, for example, is primarily a local topic: around 70% of articles on this topic come from the local press, whereas the latter accounts for a quarter of all articles. The same holds true for agricultural issues, with 35% of articles published on this topic, mainly in the local press. These results echo the study by [Mendez et al. \(2020\)](#), which shows that the Spanish and British local press focuses on concrete European policies related to local concerns. Conversely, national daily newspapers focus on national and international issues and cover a wider range of topics.

The EU's image has improved over the past decade

Finally, using our LLM model, we showed that a slightly higher volume of articles adopts a negative tone towards the EU – 36% compared to 30% positive and 34% of neutral articles. This result illustrates the relatively critical tone of the press towards the EU.

We calculated a press sentiment index towards the EU, defined as the difference between the number of positive and negative articles relative to the total number of articles (see Chart 4).

Chart 4: Index of French press sentiment towards the EU



Source: Jehle and Le Gallo (2025), based on Factiva data.

Note: The sentiment index is calculated monthly as the difference between the number of positive and negative articles and the total number of articles.

While the number of positive and negative articles was similar between 2005 and 2008, the sentiment index began to plunge in 2009, reaching a low point in December 2011. At that time, 55% of articles published on the EU were negative and only 20% were positive. The situation was similar for national daily newspapers, even when weighted by the number of subscribers to each newspaper. This decline can be attributed to the various crises experienced by the EU during that time, including the financial crisis and the sovereign debt crisis. Issues related to the euro area and public deficits, often addressed in a negative tone, took centre-stage in media coverage of the EU, contributing significantly to the decline in the index.

This was followed by a staggered recovery, with the sentiment index declining further between 2018 and 2019, then stabilising from 2021 onwards at levels higher than those observed prior to the 2008 crisis. In the recent period, positive articles have slightly outnumbered negative ones.

While the sentiment index shows a similar trend across the different press categories, local newspapers' coverage of European Union topics is characterised by a more positive tone. Two factors explain this trend. On the one hand, the local press places greater emphasis on the EU's concrete achievements — such as school exchanges — which are generally viewed positively. On the other, this difference can be seen in the way topics are covered: for 90% of topics, the average sentiment index of local press articles is higher than for national newspapers.