

Two elections in Hungary

– EU-related news in the campaigns



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Executive Summary

- In the period between 15 February and 25 May only 8% of news dealt in some shape or form with the European Union. More than two-thirds of news items dealing with the EU appeared between April 7 and 25 May, during the EP campaign period which followed the Hungarian national election of 6 April. There was hardly any mention of the EU during the campaign for the election to the Hungarian Parliament, even though the assessment of the European Union and the desired relationship therewith was one of the most significant cleavages between the government and the opposition.
- An overwhelming majority of EU-related news items had little to do with the Union itself; it merely discussed the EP election as an exclusively domestic political event.
- There was hardly any discussion in the Hungarian media of issues initiated by the EU or political debates within the Union. News items framing certain issues as *Hungary v. Brussels* were not at all rare, however. News items that genuinely dealt with the Union tended to be published in the business sections of online newspapers, but even there they were rather infrequent.
- The share of news items which mentioned something that had been built using EU funds, or which referred to EU funds in any context, was a mere one in seven of all EU-related news. This is all the more remarkable since there was no major public construction project in Hungary that did not receive funding from the European Union.
- The EU was presented as a positive example in only 6% of online and 8% of broadcast news.
- In 62% of EU-related news the Union was presented exclusively in the context of domestic politics, and this was especially true of the EP campaign period.
- The share of EU news presented as foreign politics items was highest in the public radio show called *Déli Krónika* (Noon Chronicle). This observation also meshes with the fact that foreign politics generally play a greater role in the public radio's news stream.
- EU-related news items associated with the government side tend to be more focused on factual statements than EU-news linked to the left-wing opposition alliance. Opinions tend to prevail in the latter; they typically involve criticisms of the government or some positive assessments lauding the EU's role. Factual statements by the government side tend to appear in news involving foreign politics, addressing the use of EU funds or discussing the formal workings of the EP election.
- Nevertheless, EU-related news items involving government politicians also often paint a negative picture of Union, while opposition politicians never sought to convey an image of the "EU as Moscow."

Methodology

Two important elections were held in Hungary in the first half of 2014. The official campaign period of the parliamentary election began on 15 February and lasted until 6 April, the day of the election. Practically the very next day, on 7 April the campaign for the election to the European Parliament commenced, and ended on 25 May, the day of the European ballot. The staffs of Mertek Media Monitor and Prospect Foundation tracked the news streams of the most relevant Hungarian media outlets in the designated three and a half months period. Among **online media** outlets, our analysis included the domestic and business news section of leading newsportals origo.hu and index.hu. This was complemented by the highest circulation daily newspaper, *Metropol*, which is distributed for free and is also available online. We will refer to this segment of the news stream as print/online news.

Among **broadcast news**, the evening news show of the public channel m1, the *Tények* (Facts) news show on TV2, the evening news show of RTL Klub (both the latter are commercial channels), and the *Déli Krónika* (Noon Chronicle) of Kossuth public radio station were monitored.

In our quantitative analysis we regarded clearly distinct **headlines** as “cases,” and this provided the framework for coding individual items in the news stream. In the case of online media offerings the main news items were those articles that were published under their own title, regardless of how long the article in question was and whether there were more or less clearly identifiable subsections and/or boxed texts within the article.

In the case of broadcast news we also considered clearly distinct headlines as news items. In most cases the boundaries of individual headlines are also designated by taglines, but even in their absence it was always possible to determine based on the anchors’ lead up whether a new headline was about to begin or a sub-item expounding on the main item was being aired. This was possible even when two successive headlines were thematically related to one another, which is not an infrequent occurrence in broadcast news. This distinction also implies that there is substantial variance in the average length and character of the main news items we classified as individual “cases,” from 15 second briefs to interviews spanning 10 minutes or even longer.

In the online news stream we coded 7,031 unique news items based on a variety of factors; in broadcast news we classified 8,664 items. In the current analysis we will examine how the topic of the European Union was presented in the news stream. Eight percent of online news was associated in one way or another with the broader theme of the EU, which meant 565 items in total. In broadcast news the ratio of EU-related news stood at only 8%, which meant a total of 660 items.

The presentation of EU-related news

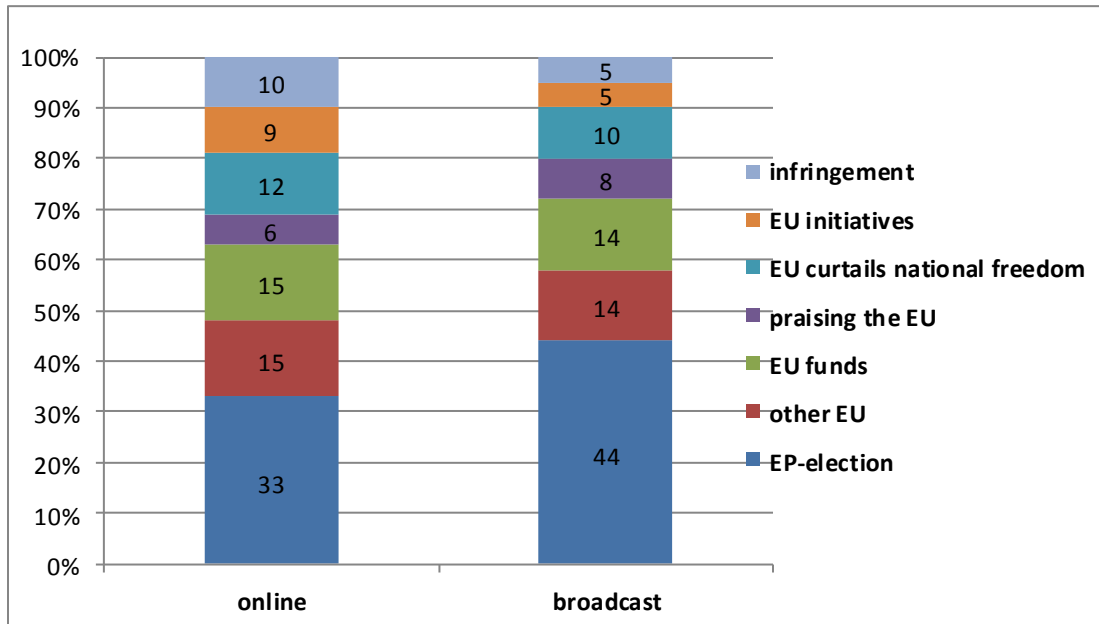
Even in and of themselves these ratios and numbers have significant implications: **the most important sources of news do not at all devote substantial space to covering European Union-related issues**, and this is of course also true of the campaign period preceding the national parliamentary elections (from 15 February to 6 April). Naturally, EU-related news become somewhat more frequent in the EP election's campaign period (7 April – 25 May), but a vast proportion of these **were exclusively domestic political items that were only linked to the EU because the coverage of the item in question also referred to the impending EP election**. In many cases the given news items will simply refer to statements by the National Election Office (Nemzeti Választási Iroda, NVI) and/or by the National Election Commission (Nemzeti Választási Bizottság), which provided information about administrative details concerning the EP election. This is also one of the reasons why two-thirds of all EU-related news in the print/online news stream were published during the EP campaign period, while in the case of broadcast news this ratio was 71%.

Correspondingly, two-thirds of EU-related news items published in the online news streams were disseminated during the EP campaign period, while among broadcast news this ratio was 71%. Yet the EP campaign period led not only to an increase in the coverage of EU-related topics, but also to a change in news content, especially in the case of broadcast news streams.

It is in part because of the latter that the share of EP election-related news is higher in broadcast news than in online news streams. Nevertheless, in the news stream broadcast online there was more frequent coverage of the **infringement procedures against Hungary or public policy issues initiated by the EU (for instance the cut in roaming charges)**. Such issues typically appear in business sections and are rarely published as domestic news. In the case of the EP campaign such news were relegated to the background by the general issue of the EP election, at least as far as their respective share in the news is concerned. This is especially true of *origo.hu*, where the presentation of the EU issue was far less varied than on *Index* or *Metropol*.

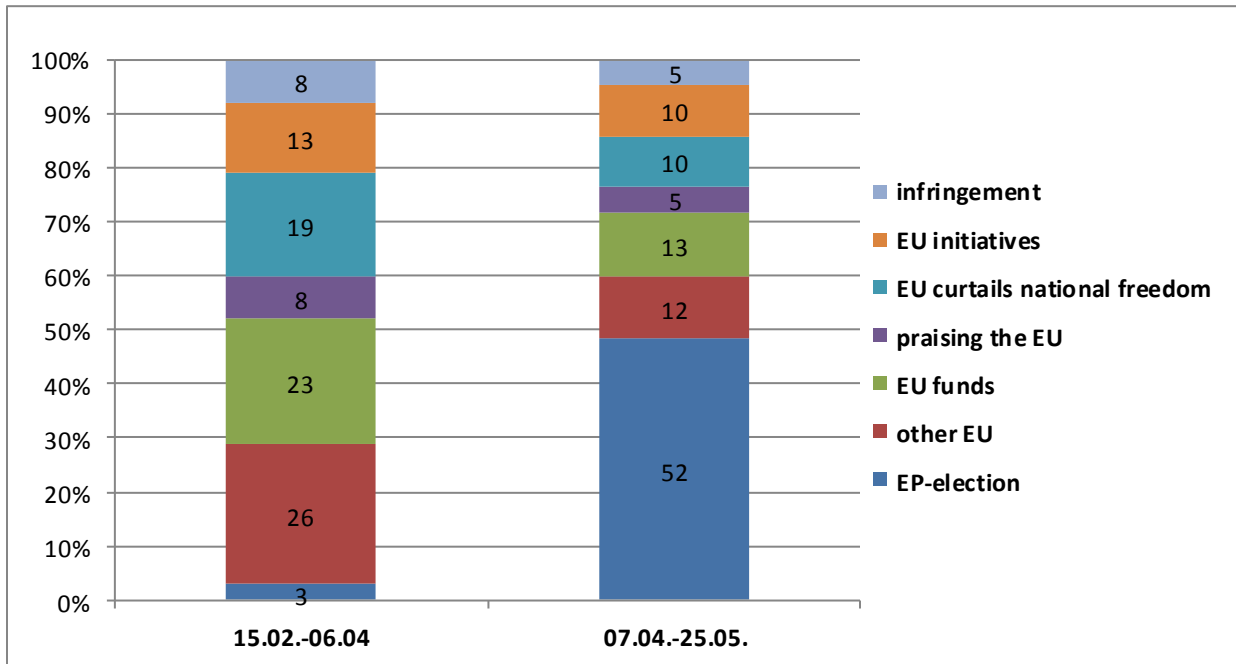
What is especially striking is that **only one in seven items among all news classified as "EU-related news" featured any mention of something being built with EU funds, or even EU funds in general**. This is all the more remarkable since recently there was no major construction project in Hungary that was not financed or partly financed by the European Union, and the national parliamentary campaign frequently featured news items involving the "inauguration" or "ceremonial opening" of new or restored facilities.

Topics of EU-related news items

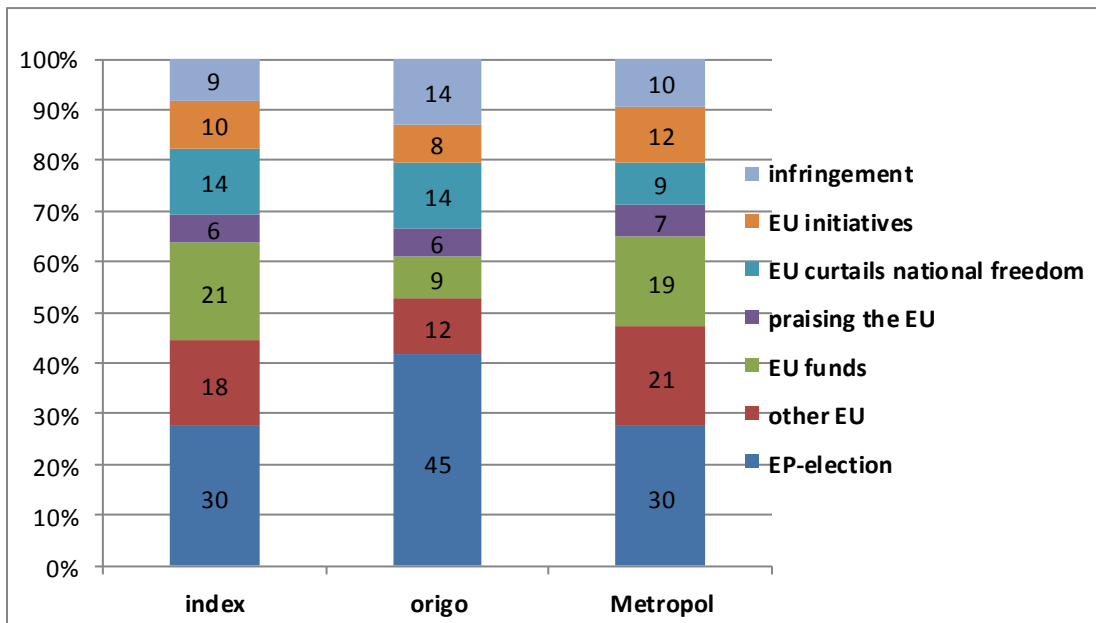


Online news streams feature more news items on policy-related or political issues that were initiated by the Union than broadcast news. This trend was clearly attributable to the role played by the business sections of index.hu and origo.hu. At the same time, these economic policy-focused sections hardly mentioned the EP election, however. Reports on issues where the Hungarian position was pitted against the EU's (e.g. infringement) were also primarily reported in business sections.

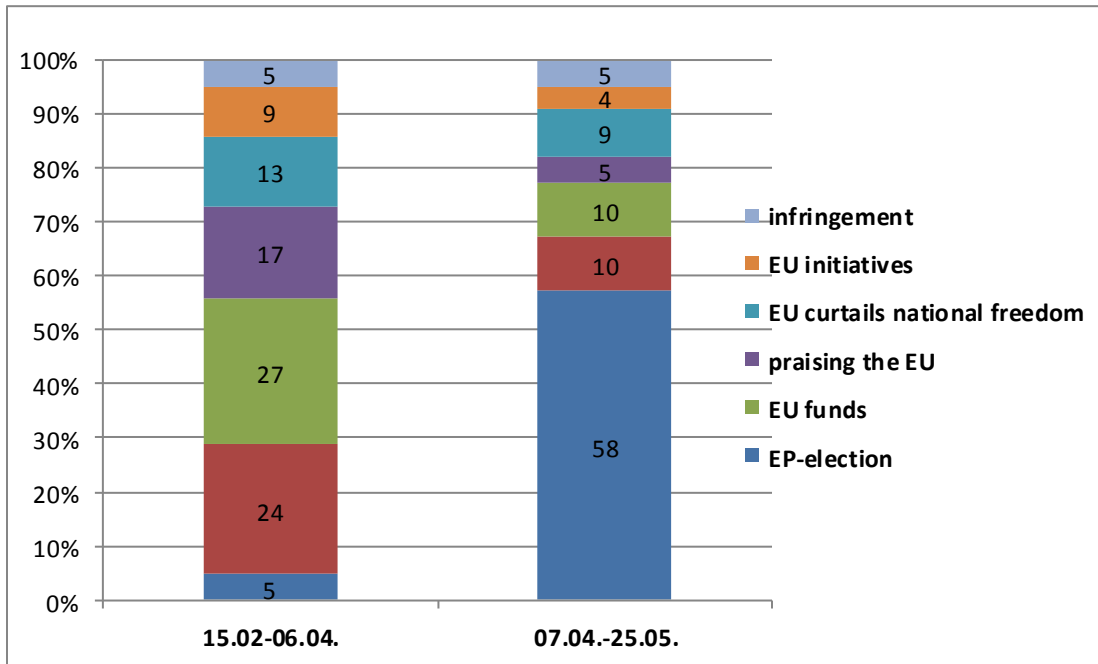
Topics of EU-related news items in the online news stream



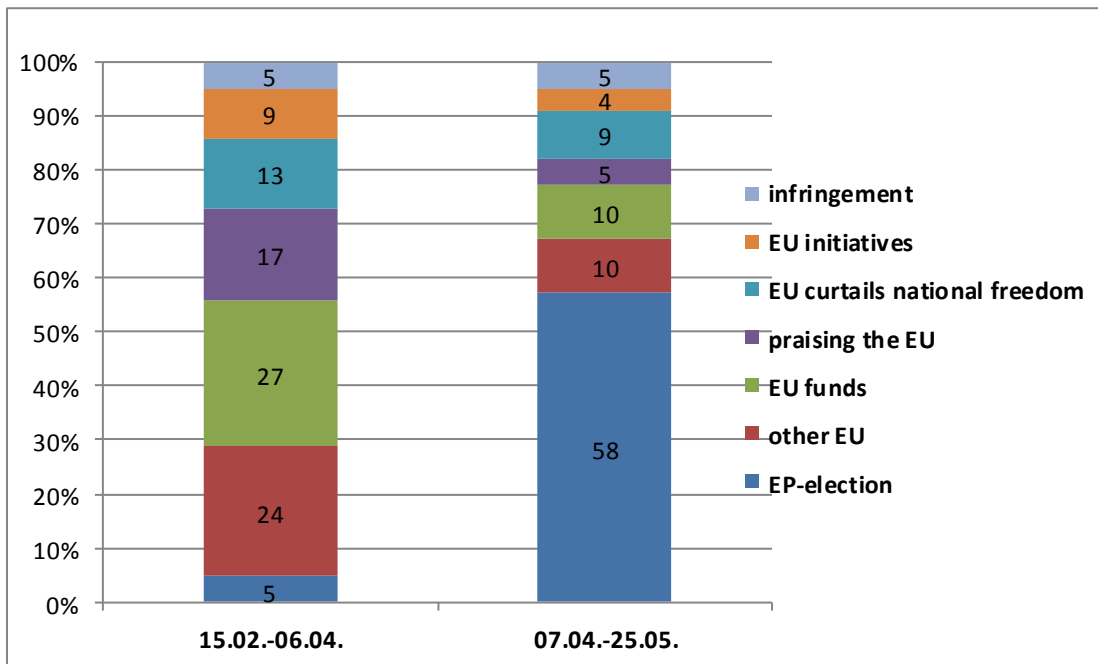
Topics of EU-related news items in the online news stream



Topics of EU-related news items in the news streams of index.hu and origo.hu



Topics of EU-related news items in the broadcast news streams



EU funds

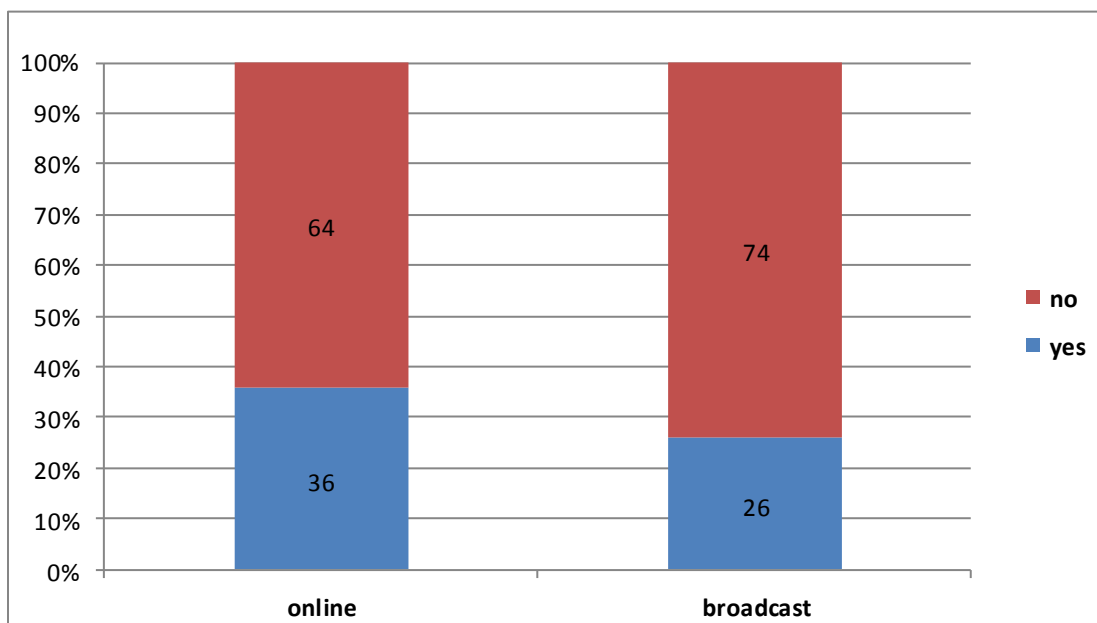
We saw previously that only one in seven items that referenced the EU in some way (also) discussed funding provided by the European Union. Among the persons who appear in the news, however, references to EU funding tend to be more frequent. The reason is that a single item may feature more than one person. Of all EU related items published in the print/online news stream, 36% feature one or more persons who referred to EU funds. At only 26%, this ratio is lower in broadcast news. The significant difference owes to index.hu and origo.hu's business sections, since 55% of EU-related news items published in business sections mentioned EU funds.

EU funds were mentioned more often in EU news on the public service channels than in the news shows of the commercial channels, and between the latter two TV2's *Tények* spoke of EU funds less frequently than RTL Klub's news show.

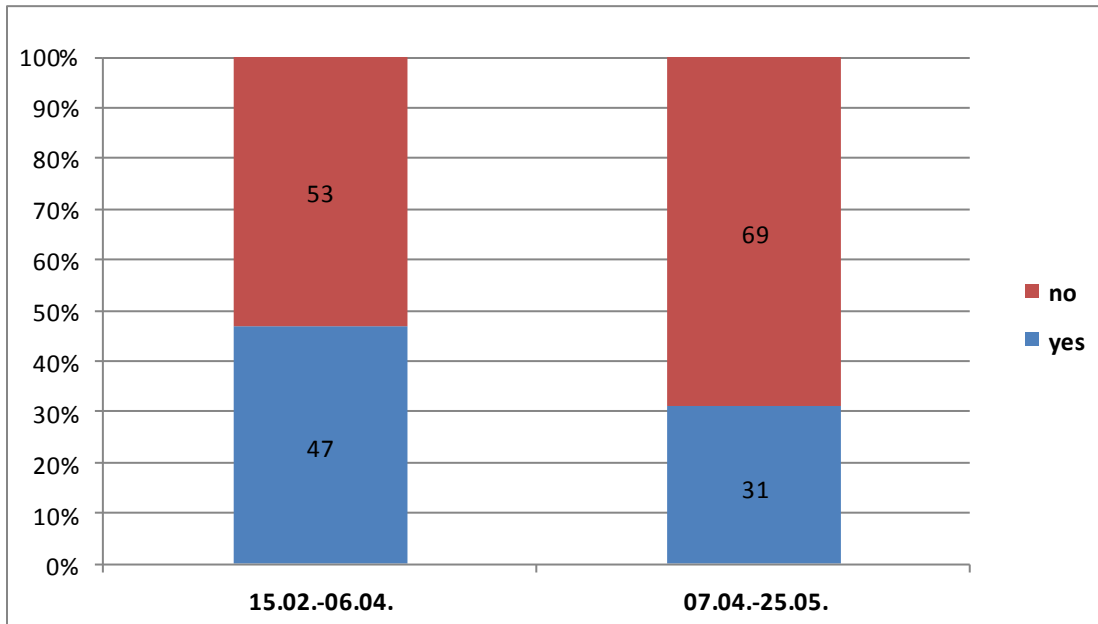
As a percentage of all EU-related news, EU funding was comparatively more often mentioned during the campaign period preceding the Hungarian national election than in the EP campaign, both in the online and the broadcast news stream. Since the latter period featured more EU-related news, however, there is hardly any difference in terms of absolute numbers.

News items featuring Hungarian government politicians inaugurating or opening some facility or public investment played a rather prominent role during the Hungarian national election campaign, and this had the concomitant effect of increasing the relative frequency of references to EU funds (since the EU played a role in financing a majority of these projects). At the same time we can also observe that the news streams in the EP campaign period devoted relatively little space to EU funds. This was congruent with the fact that neither the government side nor the left-wing opposition tried to turn this into a campaign issue.

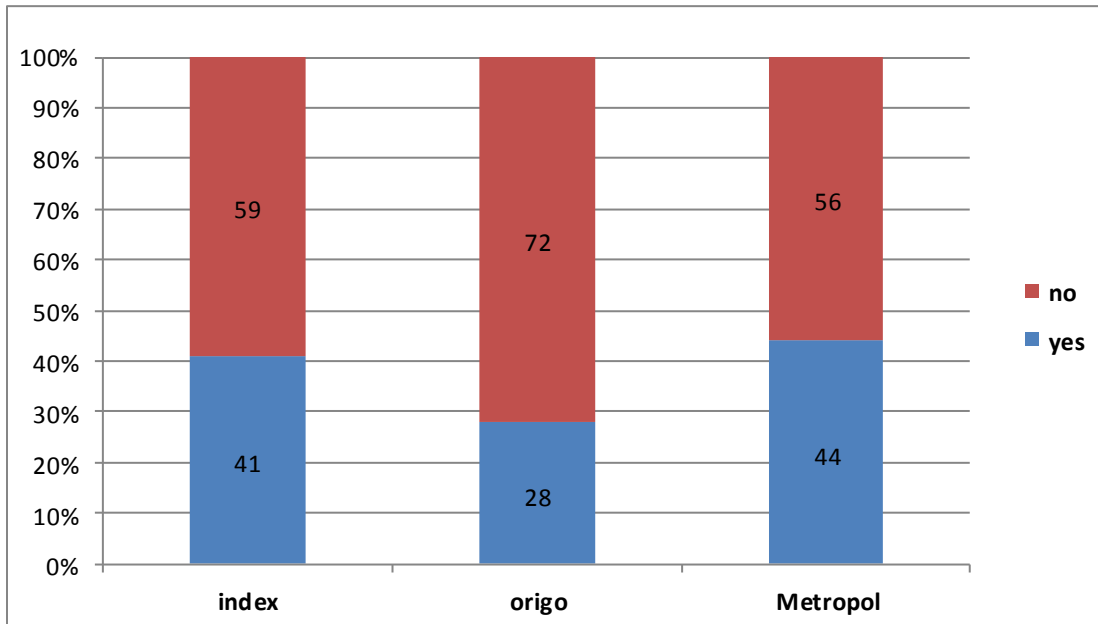
Did EU-related news item refer to EU funds?



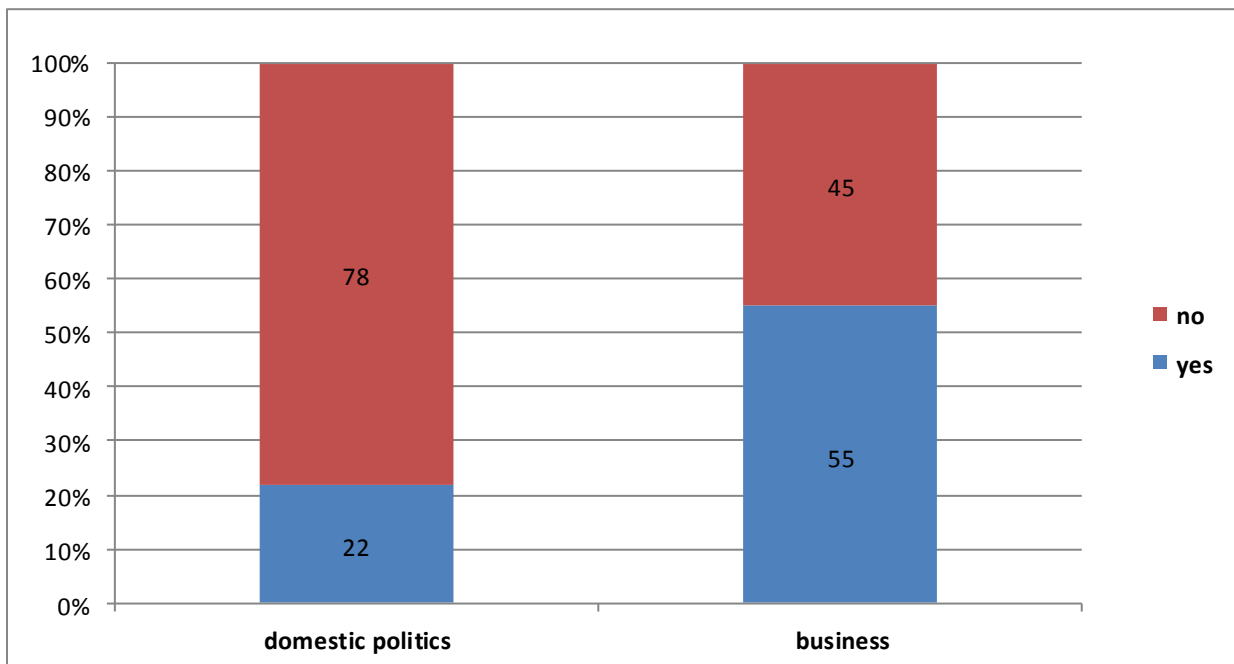
Did EU-related news item refer to EU funds? – online news stream



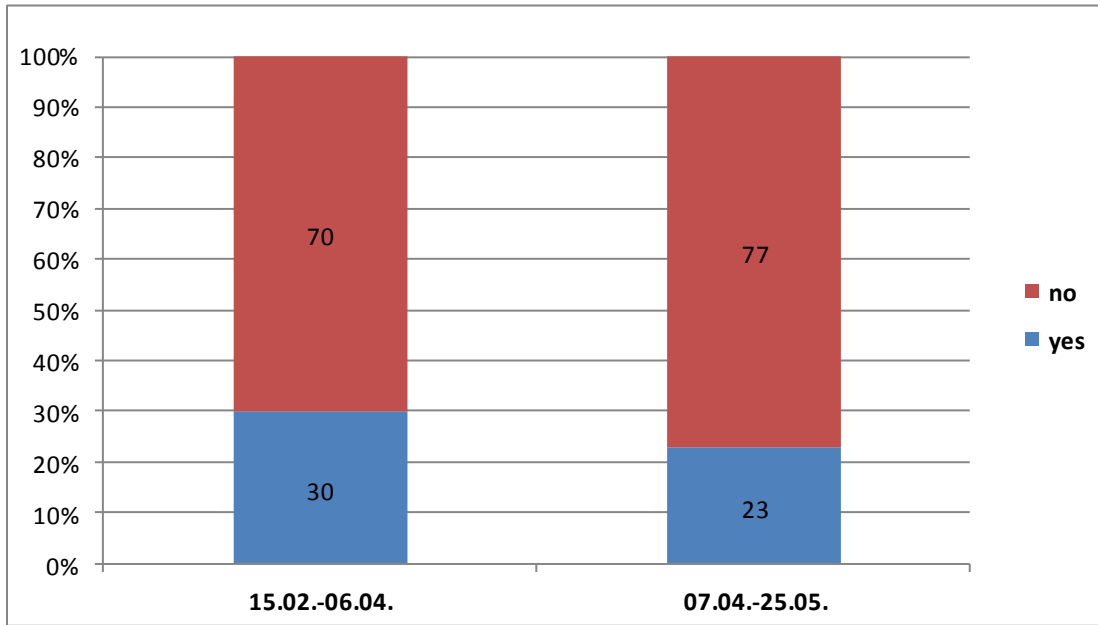
Did EU-related news item refer to EU funds? – online news stream



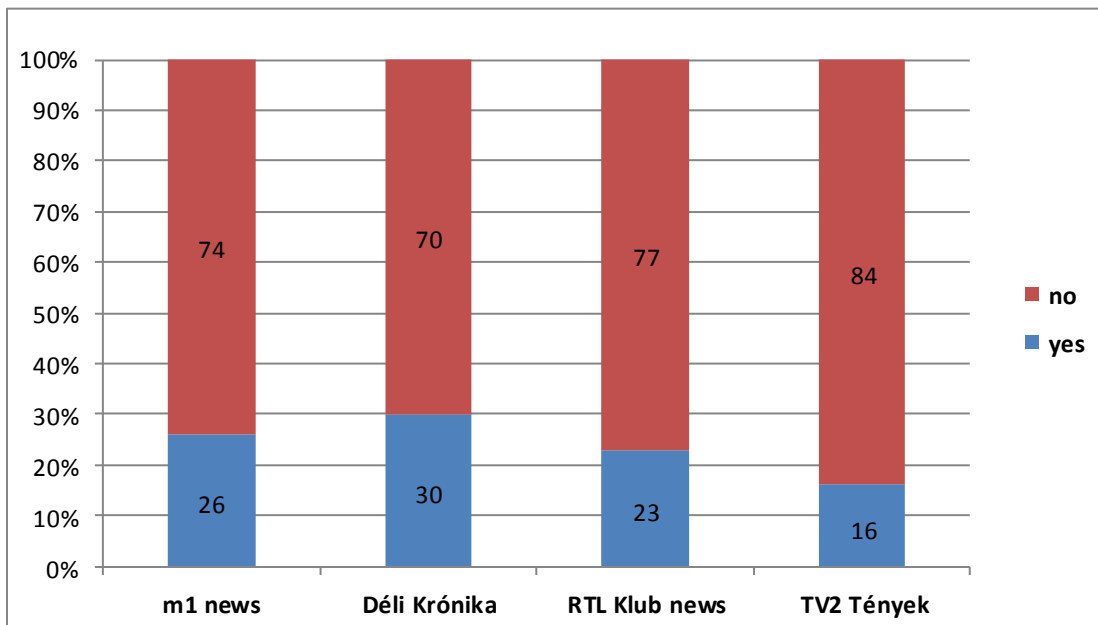
Did EU-related news item refer to EU funds? – in the index.hu and origo.hu news stream



Did EU-related news item refer to EU funds? – broadcast news stream



Did EU-related news item refer to EU funds? – broadcast news stream



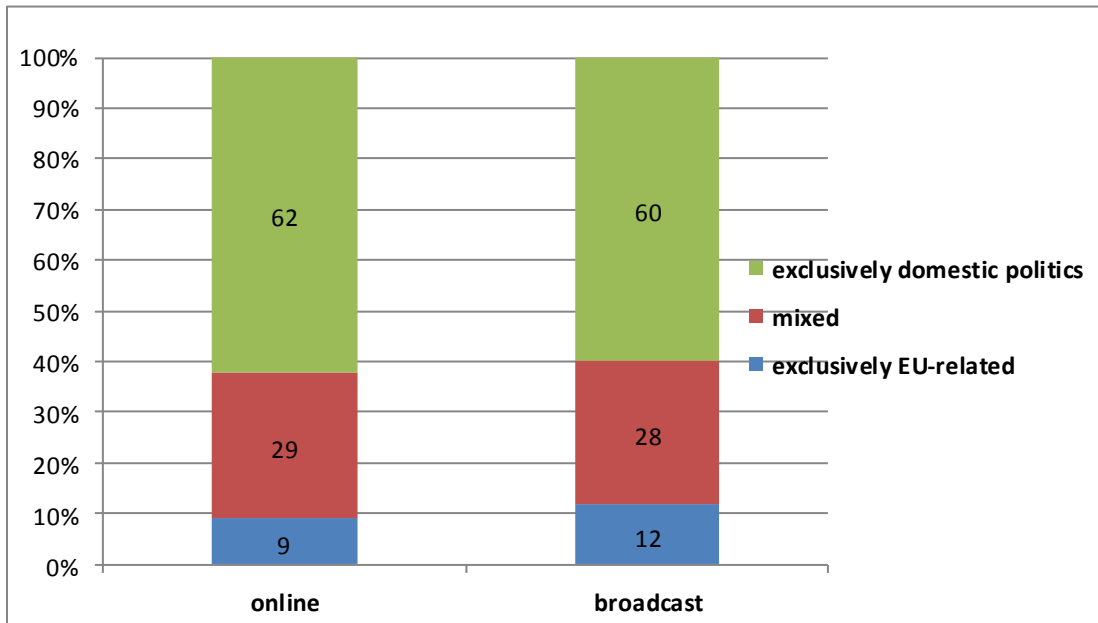
Foreign v. domestic politics

In 62% of EU-related news items in the online news stream the EU was mentioned exclusively in the context of domestic politics, and this was especially true of the EP campaign period. The latter phenomenon is of course also explained largely by the fact that in that time most EU-related news logically pertained to the EP election, which in turn was basically treated as a domestic politics issue by the parties, a stance that was also reflected in the approach taken by news shows. An overwhelming part of such news were items containing purely technical information about the EP election, and these contained no reference to the fact that there are EP elections outside Hungary as well, or that the EP elections also have foreign policy implications. In this respect, the situation in the broadcast news stream was practically the same as in the online news stream. Nevertheless, even as EU news items were “shifted” into a domestic politics context in broadcast news, there was a proliferation in the absolute number of references to the EU in the context of both domestic and international politics.

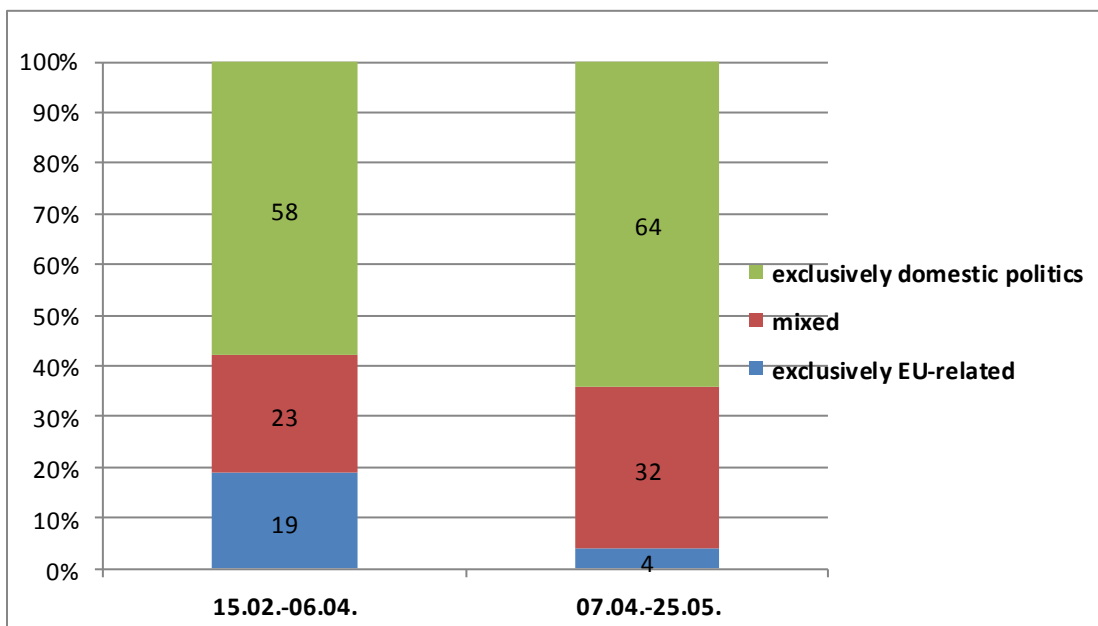
Somewhat surprisingly, the EU news of *Metropol*, which is more of a tabloid-type paper, refer to international issues more often than *origo.hu* and *index.hu*. Obviously, this also owes to the fact that *Metropol* often adopts news from foreign outlets. At the same time the items on *index.hu* and *origo.hu* that referred to the EU but were not exclusively domestic politics-centred appeared mostly in the business section.

Déli Krónika features the highest proportion of exclusively foreign policy centred EU-related news. This meshes with the fact that foreign policy plays a greater role in the public radio news stream than in the other outlets. Nevertheless, even on the public channels most EU-related items centred on domestic politics.

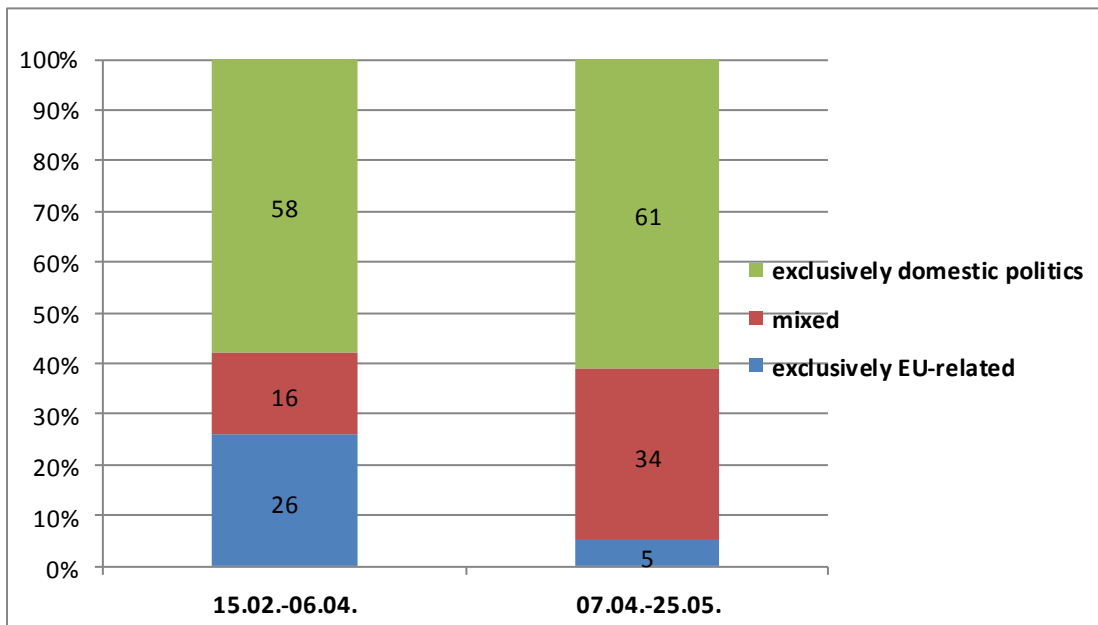
Is the reference to the EU embedded in a foreign or domestic politics context?



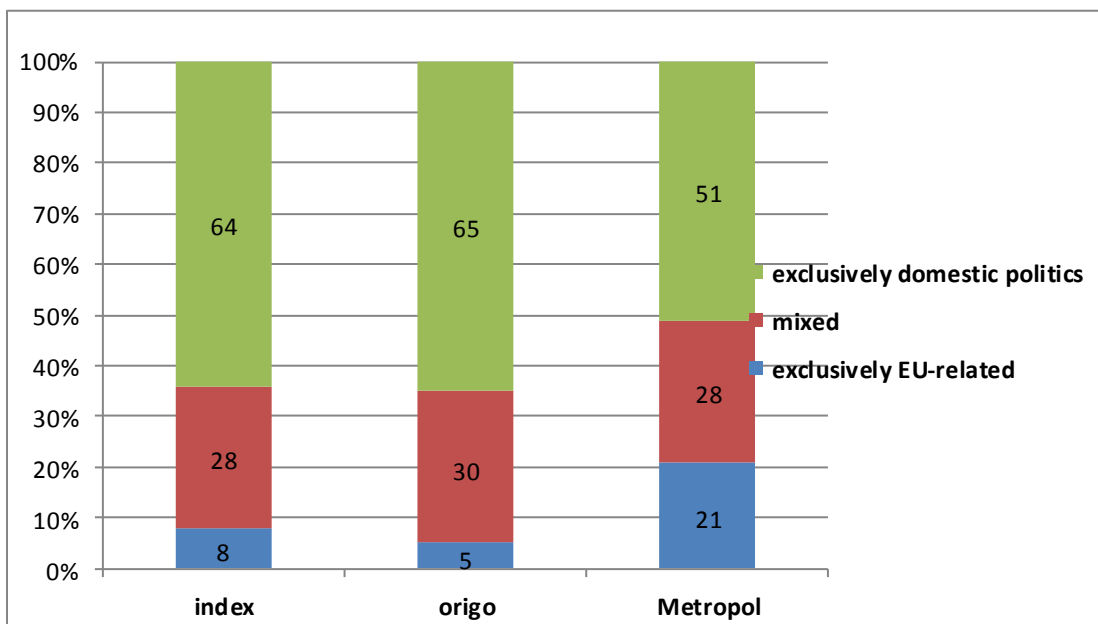
Is the reference to the EU embedded in a foreign or domestic politics context?— online news stream



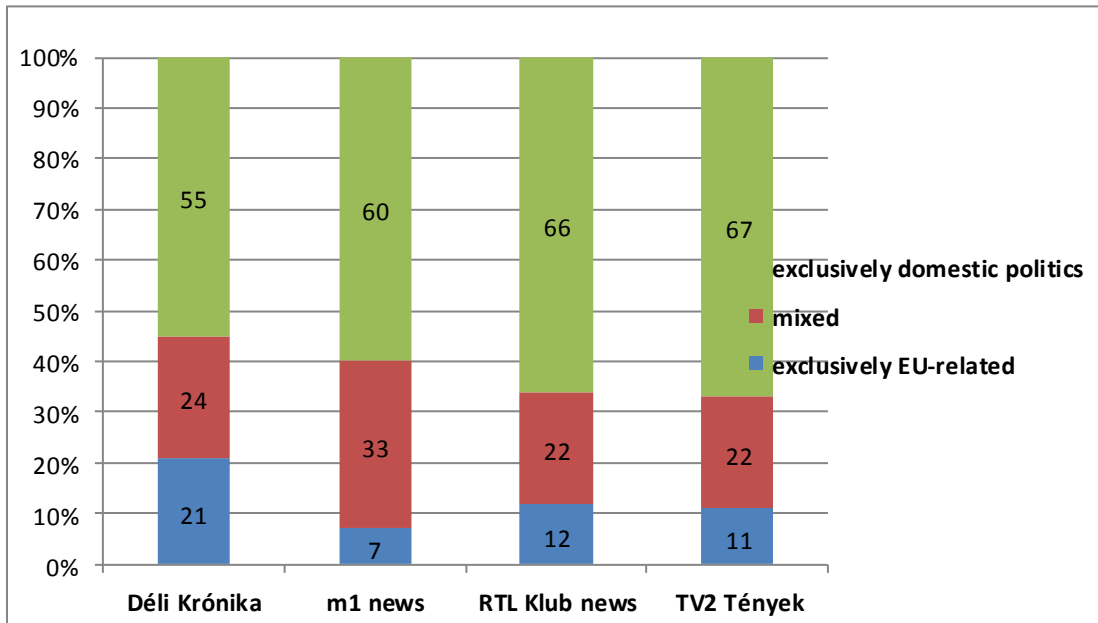
Is the reference to the EU embedded in a foreign or domestic politics context? – broadcast news stream



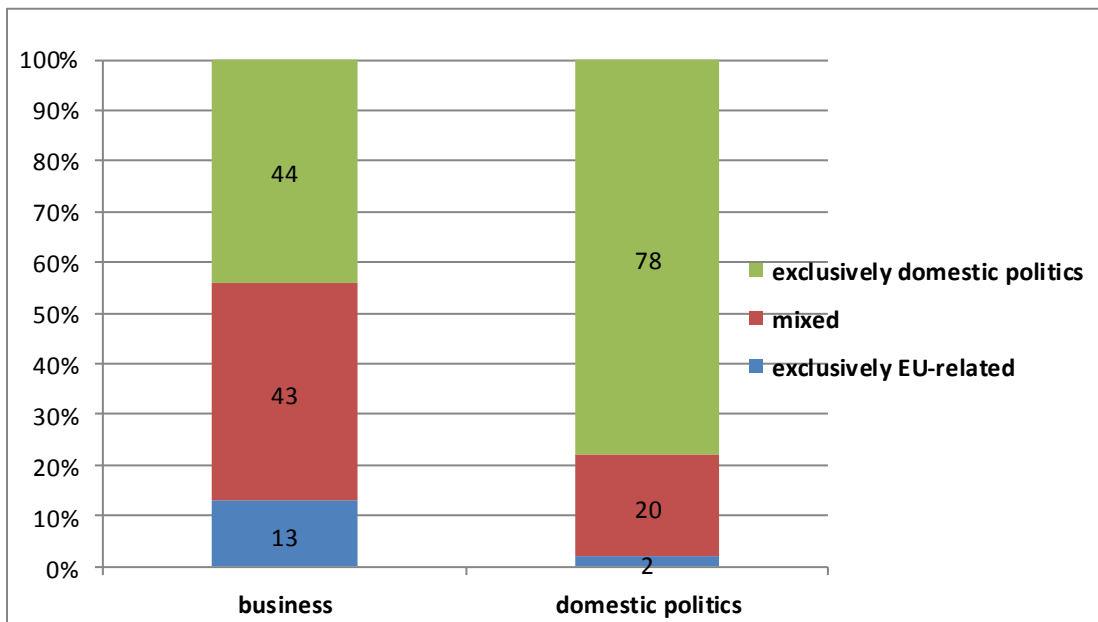
Is the reference to the EU embedded in a foreign or domestic politics context? – online news stream



Is the reference to the EU embedded in a foreign or domestic politics context? – broadcast news stream



Is the reference to the EU embedded in a foreign or domestic politics context?–index.hu and origo.hu



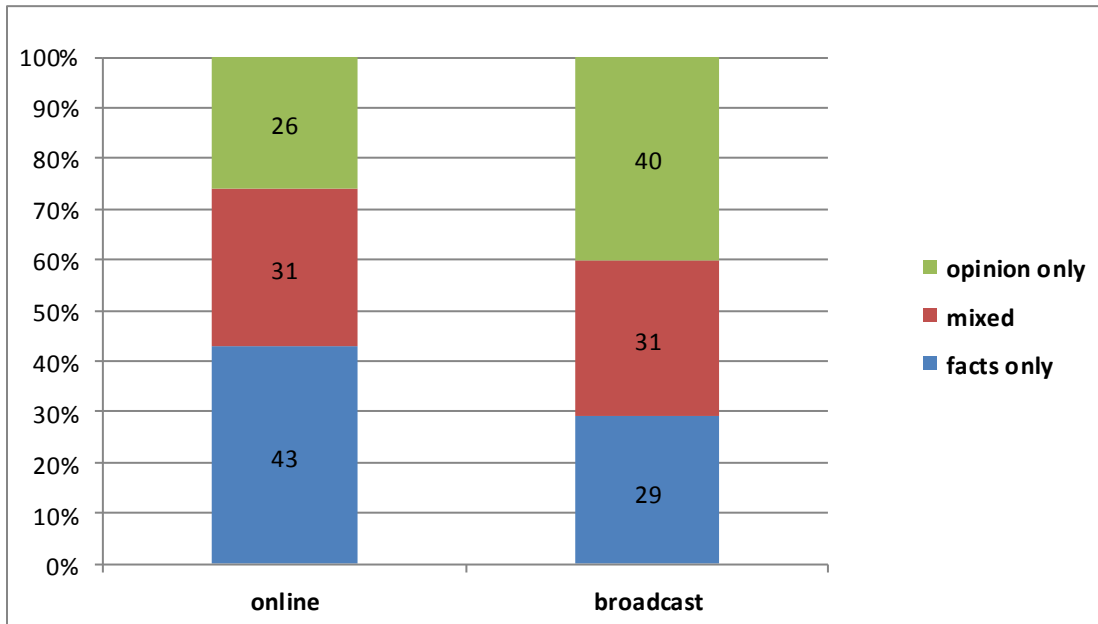
Fact v. opinion

Twenty-nine percent of EU-related news items in broadcast news convey only facts, 31% mix facts and opinions, while 40% are opinion pieces. Whether the given item tends towards opinion or fact is naturally not unrelated to the question of whether said item is foreign politics or domestic politics-centred. In the former category, only 21% of items focus on conveying opinions, while in the latter case this ratio rises to 55%.

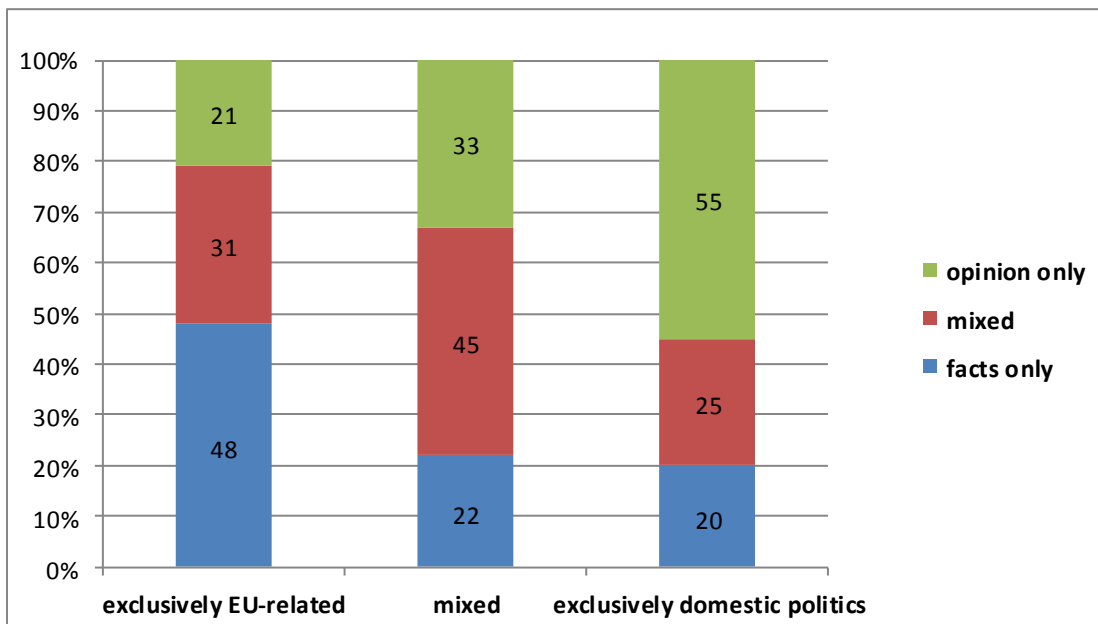
This is part of the reason why **the ratio of opinion items in broadcast news was much higher in the EP campaign period than during the campaign for the election to the national Parliament.** This was true despite the fact that numerous items that made it into the news stream prior to the EP election conveyed information disseminated by the National Elections Office and/or the National Election Commission and dealt with the rules and the organisation of the EP election. These were always coded as purely domestic politics or purely factual report items.

In the online news stream, however, the ratios are reversed: here 43% of all items involve provided factual reporting only, while a mere 26% were pure opinion pieces. Nevertheless, in the online news stream, too, the share of factual items is highest in those news where the EU is discussed in an exclusively foreign politics-centred report. At the same time, during the EP campaign period there was an increase in the share of opinion pieces in the online news stream as well.

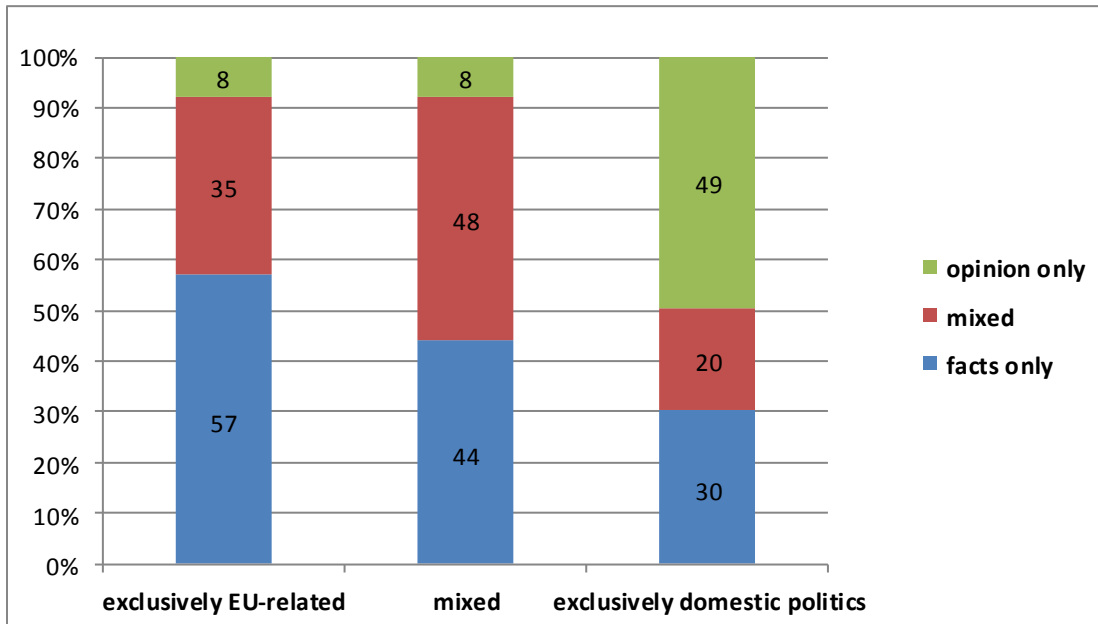
Facts v. opinions in news items concerning the EU



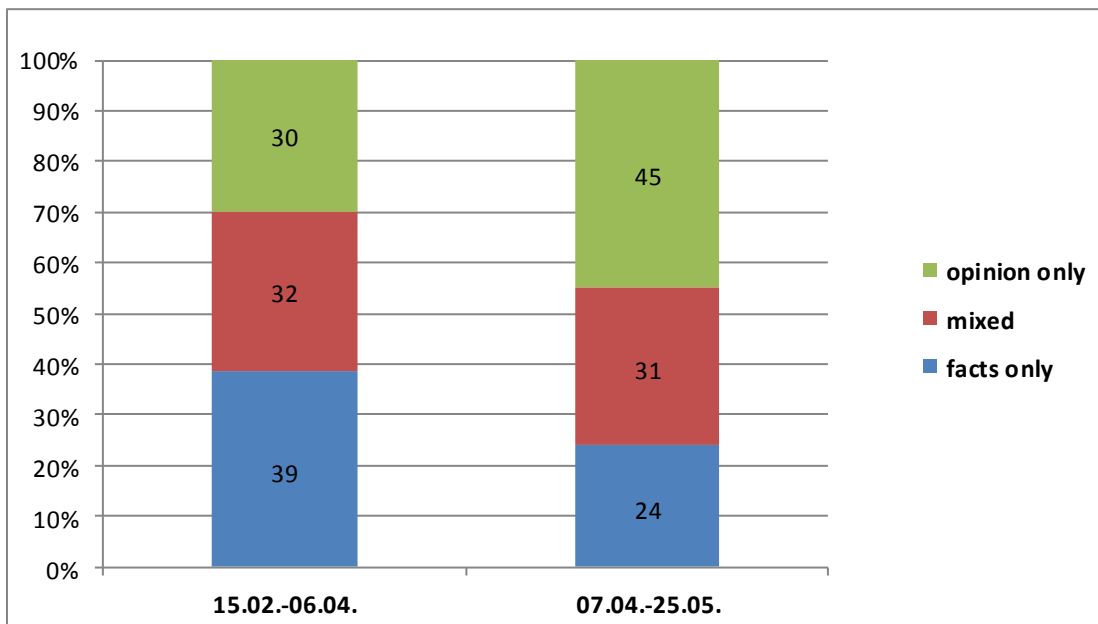
Facts v. opinions in news items concerning the EU – broadcast news stream



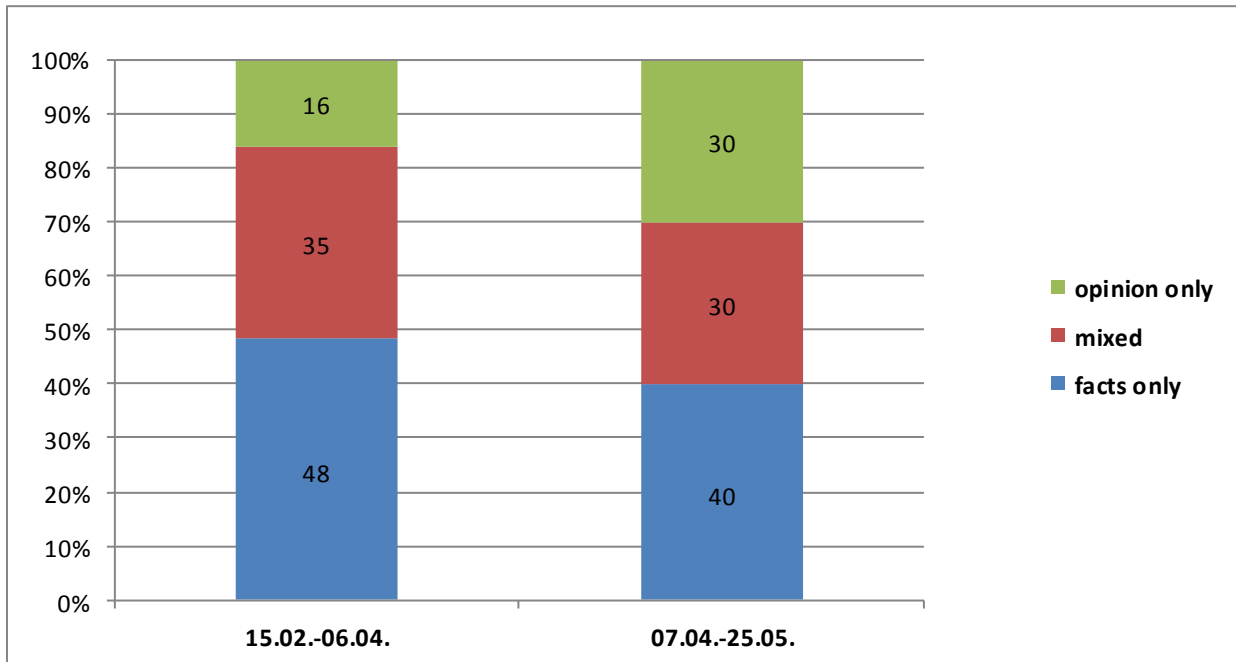
Facts v. opinions in news items concerning the EU– online news stream



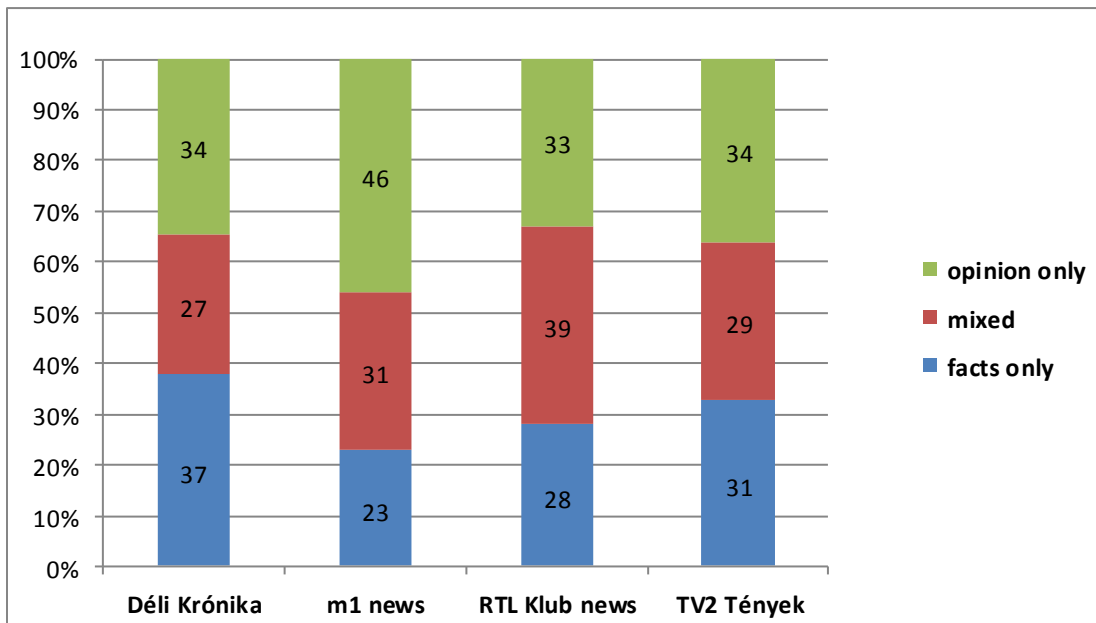
Facts v. opinions in news items concerning the EU– broadcast news stream



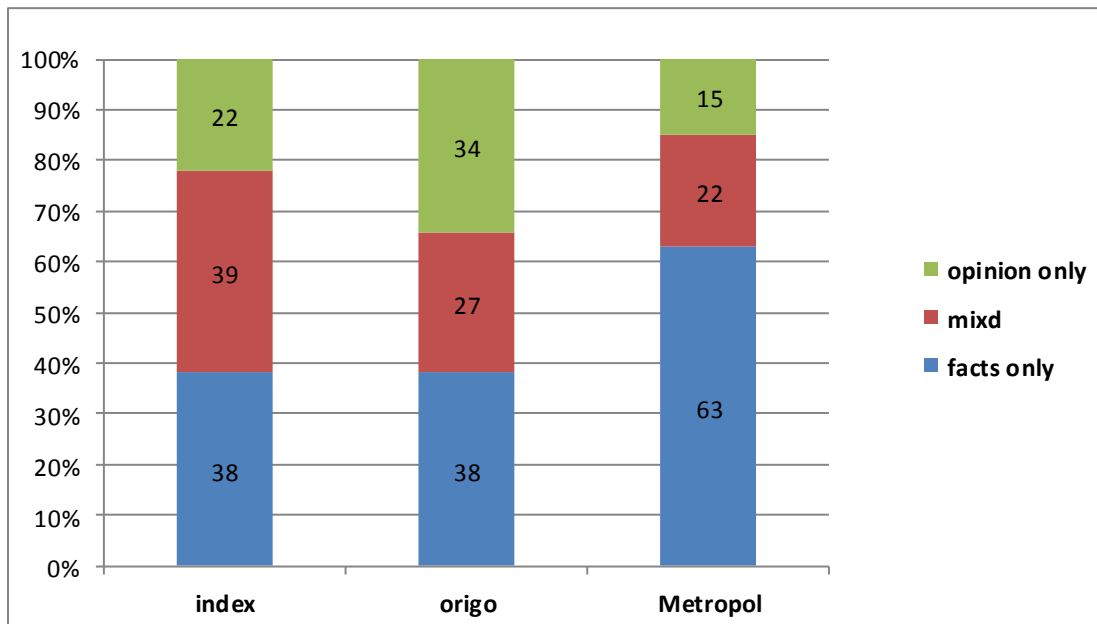
Facts v. opinions in news items concerning the EU – online news stream



Facts v. opinions in news items concerning the EU – broadcast news stream



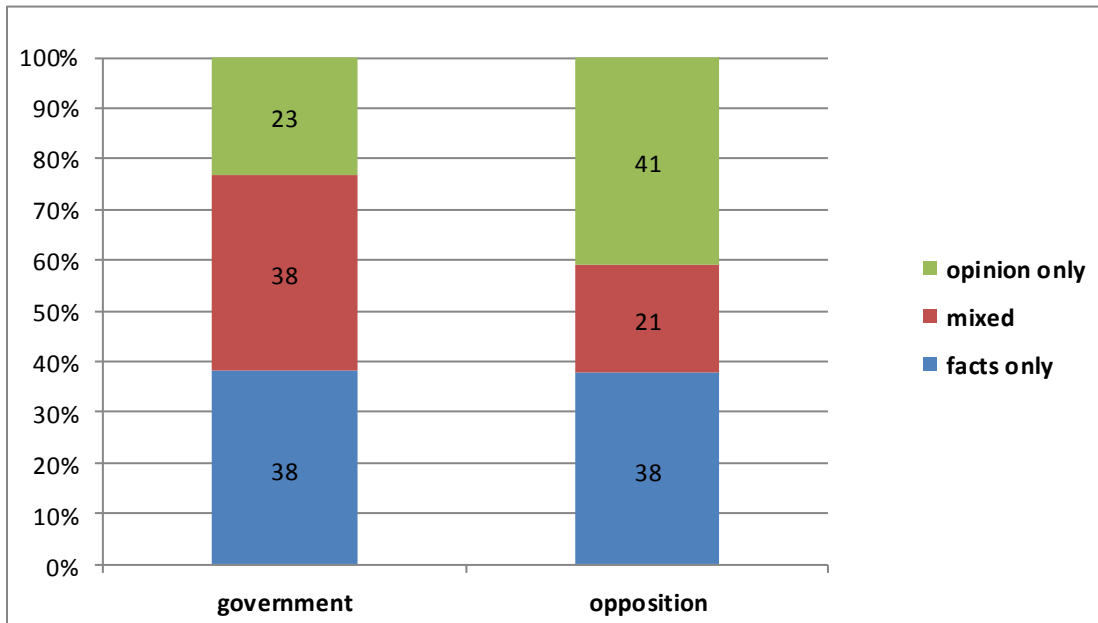
Facts v. opinions in news items concerning the EU – online news stream



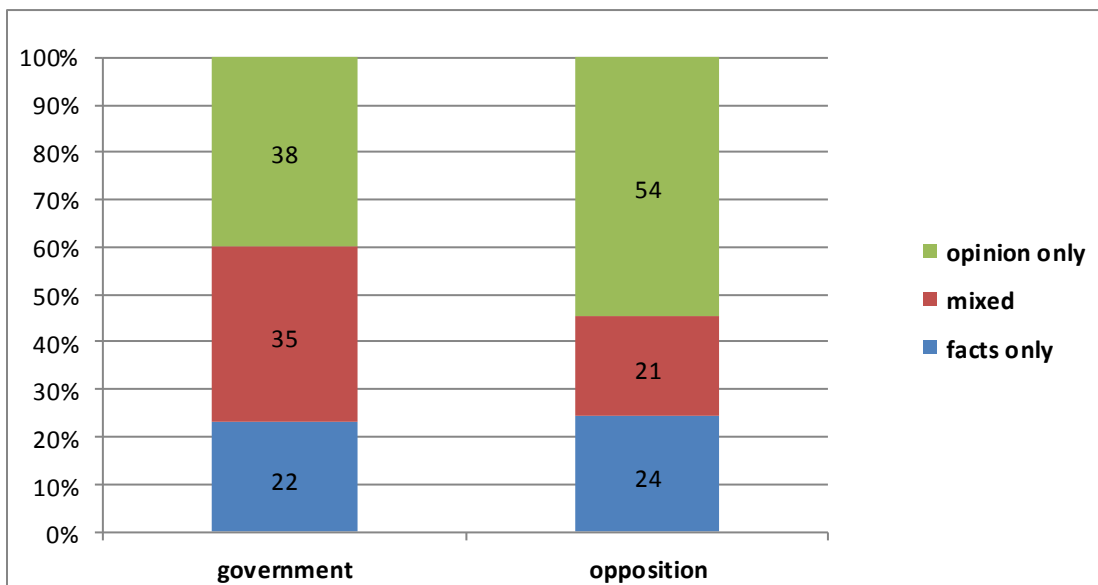
There are remarkably few articles in *Metropol* that are exclusively opinion-based. The reason may be once again that it also features the highest proportion of news items taken from foreign media or news agencies; but the explanation may also be in part that the paper is intent on avoiding the dissemination of overt political opinions.

Looking at the online news stream, the government side (the government itself and the two governing parties) were the newsmakers in twice as many EU-related items as representatives of the left-wing opposition alliance (MSZP, Együtt-PM, DK and MLP). Jobbik and LMP rarely sought to become "newsmakers" when it came to items involving the EU, and they rarely were, in fact, which is why we cannot make any relevant statements about the two political formations that pursue their own independent political course. The ratio of purely factual reporting is the same in the items generated by the two sides, but the governing side was far more often engaged in mixing factual statements with opinions. We observed the same in the broadcast news stream.

Facts v. opinions in news items concerning the EU, categorised by “newsmakers” – online news stream



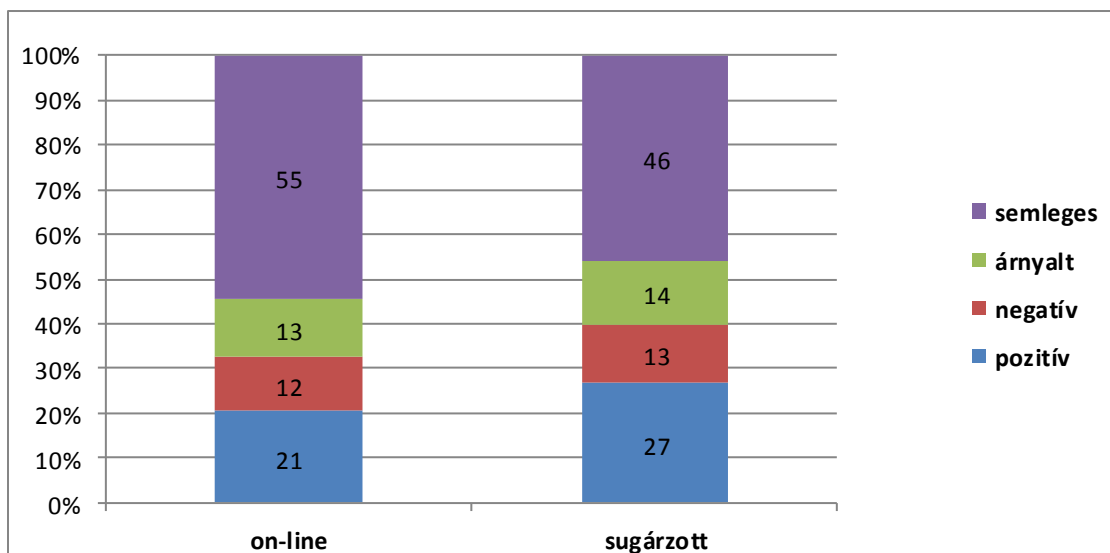
Facts v. opinions in news items concerning the EU, categorised by “newsmakers” – broadcast news



Portrayal of the EU

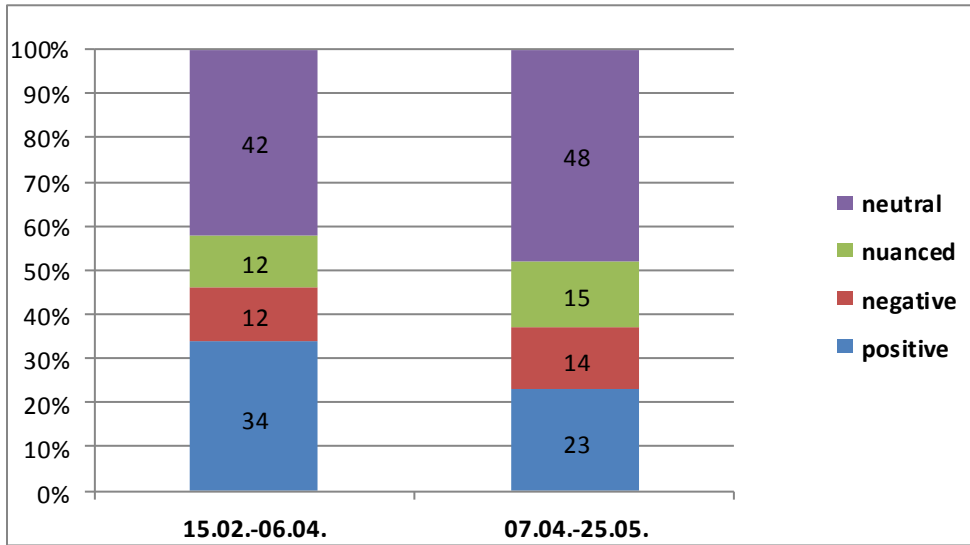
During the analysis we also coded what image of the EU is presented by persons who appear in EU-related news. We used four categories, which we found were helpful in classifying the attitudes of all those persons who appeared in EU-related items: 1) positive EU portrayal, the EU is the key to development and wealth; 2) negative portrayal of the Union, the EU as Moscow; 3) nuanced portrayal; and 4) neutral EU portrayal. The last category is most typical of the attitude of persons who appear in EU-related news. In broadcast news, 46% of all appearances are neutral, while in online news this ratio stands at 55%. (Any given item might have more than one person appearing in it, of course, and the picture that various players paint of the EU might differ).

How was the EU portrayed by the persons who appeared in the news?

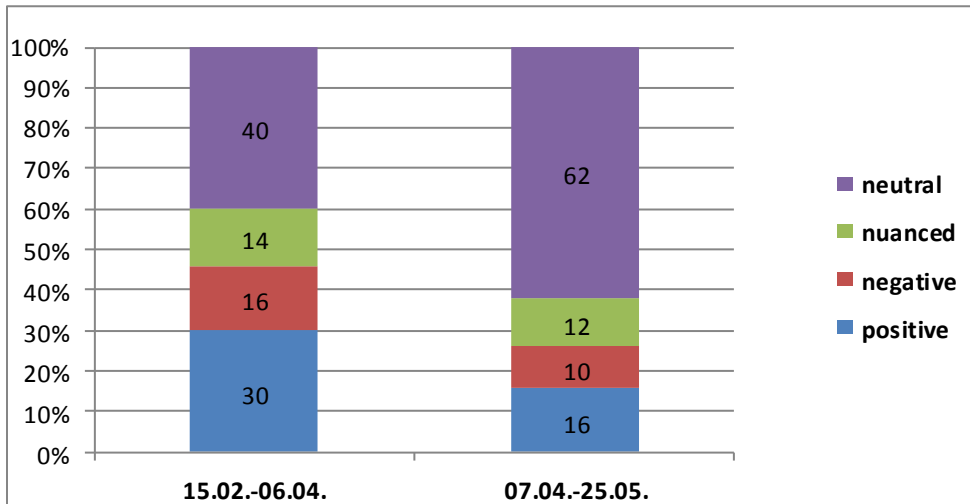


The good news is that **among the persons who appear the news, conveying a positive image of the EU is far more typical than spreading a negative one. Still, during the EP campaign period the ratio of items in which a positive image was presented did not rise, in fact it declined significantly.** The primary reason, of course, is that the campaign for the EP election predominantly focused on domestic political concerns, while the campaign for the election to the Hungarian Parliament often featured items involving ceremonial openings and inaugurations, in which the EU naturally played a positive role by providing funding. This holds for both broadcast and online news, though in the latter the ratio of negative portrayals has also declined, while there was a very substantial surge in neutral items. That was not the case for broadcast news.

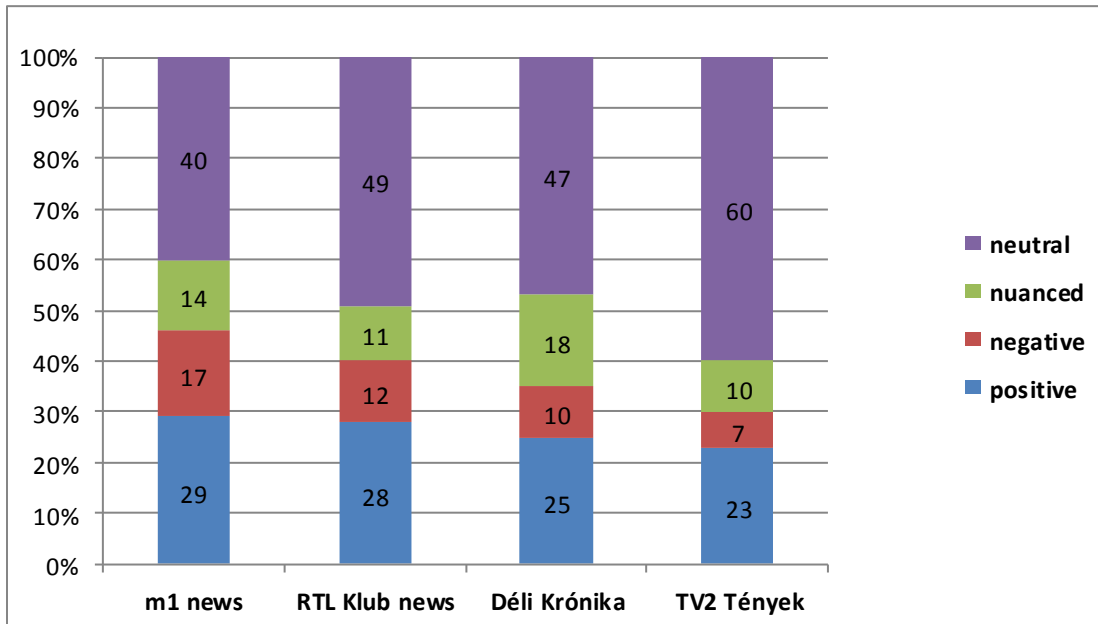
How was the EU portrayed by the persons who appeared in the news? – broadcast news stream



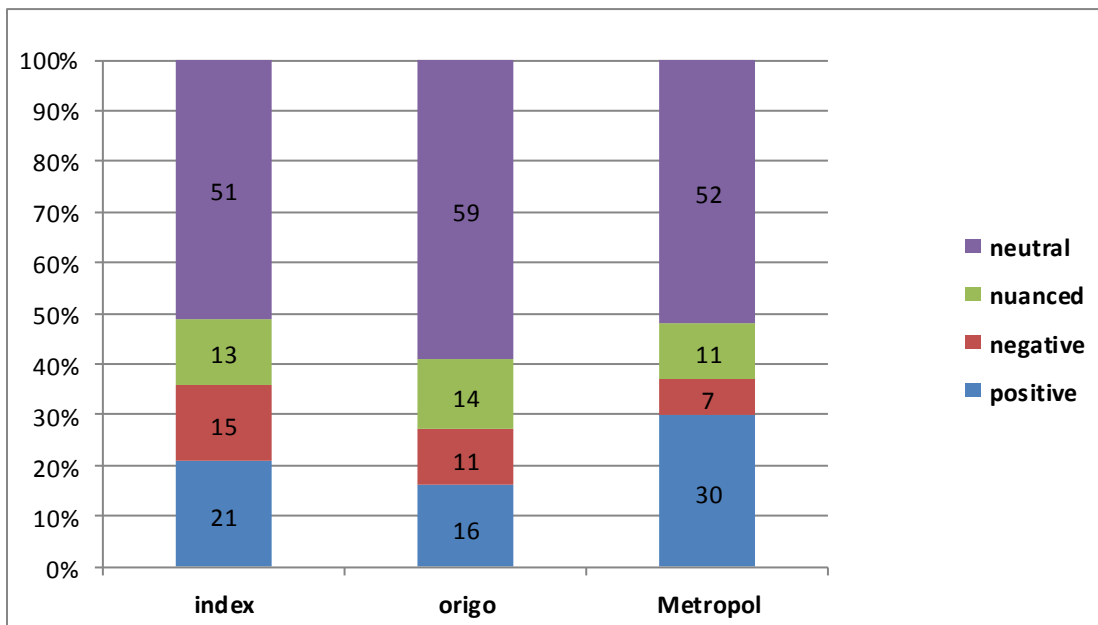
How was the EU portrayed by the persons who appeared in the news? – online news stream



How was the EU portrayed by the persons who appeared in the news? – broadcast news stream



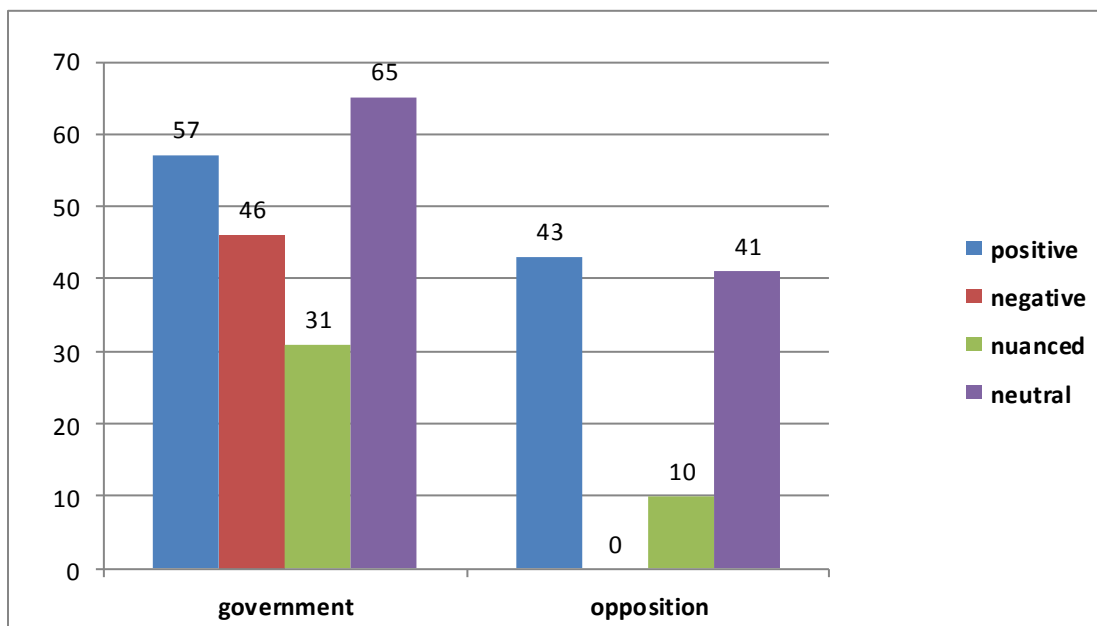
How was the EU portrayed by the persons who appeared in the news? – online news stream



Comparing all channels and websites we first found that the image of the EU presented on **m1's news is more polarised than that conveyed by the other three channels: both positive and negative EU portrayals are more frequent here than on the average of all news streams**. Neutral presentations of the EU appear most frequently on TV2's *Tények*. What is remarkable is that **a positive image of the EU appears most frequently among those public players who appear in the EU-related news published by *Metropol***. And what may be surprising in light of the foregoing: there is no significant difference between domestic politics and business sections.

Since relatively few news items relate to the EU, and still fewer involve Hungarian political players, it is impossible to provide a detailed and nuanced assessment of how the portrayals of the EU differ by party. Our data are sufficient, however, for reliably comparing the appearances of politicians from the government side (cabinet members, Fidesz and KDNP politicians) with those of the left-wing opposition alliance (MSZP, Együtt-PM, DK and MLP). The most characteristic feature of the latter's appearances was that **there was no negative portrayal of the EU at all, while a negative approach was relatively common among politicians associated with the governing parties**. The data in the graph display absolute numbers. These also show that **governing party politicians appeared far more often in EU-related news (too) than opposition politicians**. Correspondingly, in terms of absolute numbers they lead not only in conveying a negative image of the EU, but also in terms of portraying a positive picture of the Union. Nevertheless, in the 46 broadcast and 35 online news during the campaign period, all governing party politicians spoke of the European Union as an institution that curtails Hungary's freedom. Such an attitude most likely exerted an impact on public opinion. Moreover, in online news streams governing party politicians conveyed a negative image of the EU more frequently than a positive one.

How was the EU portrayed by the politicians who appeared in the news? – broadcast news stream (No. of cases)



**How was the EU portrayed by the politicians who appeared in the news? – online news stream
(No. of cases)**

