EU Political Agenda of COVID-19 Crisis: Mechanisms and Financial Instruments to Mitigate the Economic Effects of the Pandemic in Newspapers 'El País' and 'El Mundo'

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With approximately one fifth of the world population in blockade, the COVID-19 has radically changed individuals' way of life. The virus has infected million people and more than 200 countries (Worldometer's COVID-19 data). But the effects of the virus go far beyond its biological capacity to cause disease. Beginning in the city of Wuhan, China, it rapidly spread across national borders, and has drawn attention to the porous and interconnected world in which we live. The economic results from the lockdown measures put the question of the European Union project. This article intends to analyse how the press in Spain, one of the Eurozone countries most affected by COVID-19, reflected the decisions

of the EU (mechanisms and financial instruments) to mitigate the economic effects. The corpus of analysis includes articles published by the newspapers 'El País' and 'El Mundo'. The analytic period starts on March 1 and ends on April 24, the day after the European Council approved the Economic Recovery Fund. The results show that the published news reflects the recommendations and decisions of the EU institutions, framing the mechanisms and financial instruments into coordinated Economic Strategy from EU, so essential to the economic recovery of Member States.

Keywords: European Union, COVID-19, political agenda, Spanish newspaper, content analysis.

Since its outbreak in China, the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) has stopped the world, through various forms of blocking, social detachment and self-quarantine. In Europe, as in other parts of the world, the pandemic has affected all walks of life, including travel, education, business, the informal sector, religion, health, and entertainment. The pandemic has attracted enormous media attention, and the effects on the economy have highlighted many of the weaknes-

ses and divergences at the institutional level of the European Union (Eurogroup, European Parliament, European Council and European Commission), with divergent positions also taken amongst leaders of various Member States. The issues related to the health crisis and the effects on the European economy have gained prominence both in terms of news information and in opinion columns, with the publication of numerous articles focused on the COVID-19 crisis by economists, politicians, journalists, and other experts. The information about the crisis went far beyond the news plan, becoming the subject of debates in forums open to citizens' intervention by telephone, and in videoconferences external to the public media space, where concerns and criticisms of the citizens were expressed about the way the pandemic was being managed; and how the European Union institutions were intervening to mitigate the effects of the crisis between the various Member States. On the other hand, the health crisis provided the pretext to test the role of the EU institutions, through existing financial instruments and mechanisms or the creation of more innovative ones. The main objective of this article is to analyse the EU's political agenda reflected in the news coverage (news) on a set of key topics/events on responses to the COVID-19 crisis, relevant to Member States, in the newspapers *El País* and *El Mundo*, using the technique of content analysis, and narrative critical analysis (ACN), based on the assumption that there is a strong propensity by the media to emphasize crises (Raboy and Dagenais, 1992).

ABOUT THE CONCEPT OF CRISIS AND SOME OF ITS DIMENSIONS OF ANALYSIS

Etymologically the word crisis comes from the Greek *Krisis*. According to Thucydides it means judgment, result of a judgment, critical point, selection, decision, but also contention or dispute (according to Plato). According to Cunha (1982) in Latin, crisis means "change, sudden imbalance; state of doubt and uncertainty; tension, conflict" (Ferin-Cunha, 2013: 25). In the Dictionary of Politics (Bobbio, Matteuci, and Pasquino, 2004), a crisis can be defined as a moment of rupture in the functioning of a system, and can be characterized by means of three elements: unpredictability, limited duration and impact on the functioning of the system. For Bobbio, Matteuci, and Pasquino (2004) political and economic crises are linked both nationally and internationally. The general economy tends to conceive of society as governed by a general tendency towards equilibrium, in which crises and changes are only temporary deviations from the stable state of a normally well integrated system (Streeck, 2011). For others, a crisis can still be defined as "an interval of decline over a long period of growth and development" (Boin *et al.*, 2005: 2). A crisis occurs "when policy makers are faced with a serious threat to the basic structures or fundamental values of a given system, which, under the pressure of time and the uncertainty of circumstances, requires vital decisions and has three main components:

1. The threat: the more people's lives are governed by values and structures that are under threat, the deeper the crisis is.

2. The urgency: crises demand immediate responses to solve problems, but they also demand immediate decisions.
3. A crisis is usually associated with a high degree of uncertainty (Boin *et al.*, 2005: 2). When a crisis occurs and it is necessary to face it, governmental political leaders and their respective parties, as well as their competitors outside the government, are faced with five fundamental tasks: creating meaning, making decisions, interpreting meaning, ending/learning, policy options/policy change (Boin *et al.*, 2005).

Academically, a crisis can be described as “a phase of disorder in the development of an apparently normal system” (Boin *et al.*, 2005: 2). The crisis as a conflictual arena reveals that when political leaders are faced with a serious crisis, there are three types of situations for their framing:

1. The crisis is defined as a non-event (denial of the crisis), it is not possible blaming, and the consequences for policies are nil.
2. The crisis seen as a threat (Boin *et al.*, 2005; Boin, Hart, and McConnell, 2008: 84; Hart and Tindall, 2009: 25). A crisis is confirmed, but it represents a critical threat to the collective good within the status quo, and, therefore, there is “a predisposition to defend agents (incumbent office holders) and tools (policies and organizational practices) of the status quo against criticism” (Boin, Hart, and McConnell, 2008: 84).
3. The crisis seen as an opportunity. In this form, the crisis is assumed both as an opportunity, both to blame incumbents and to criticize the policies associated with the status quo and, consequently, to replace such politicians, in power, and change policies.

In addition to the crisis framework, two dimensions of the political exploitation of the crisis are also presented: the political game that can be related to the attribution of responsibilities and blame to incumbents, whether from the opposition initiative, whether from the media, or from the voters; and the policy game related to the “interaction between policy advocates’ guidelines in the face of the status quo (“pressure to change the public policy paradigm” or “pressure for incremental reforms”) and the attitudes of the “status quo players”, “Resist policy change” or “contain policy change” (Boin *et al.*, 2005; Boin, Hart, and McConnell, 2008: 89-90; Hart and Tindall, 2009: 29-31).

Although the COVID-19 pandemic crisis is neither a political nor an economic crisis, it ends up having an effect on the economy and people’s social lives. Political crises and economic crises are inextricably linked (Bobbio, Matteuci, and Pasquino, 2004), but a public health crisis that requires the compulsory confinement of citizens in almost all countries of the world and the closure of most sectors of society, with the exception of essential goods such as supermarkets and pharmacies, inevitably leads to an economic crisis on a global scale as the COVID-19 pandemic crisis has demonstrated. In the European Union, several measures have been projected to mitigate the effects of the pandemic on the Eurozone economy.

THE POLITICAL AGENDA: PUBLIC POLICIES IN THE CONTEXT OF CRISIS

The State as an integral part of a nation, has a *modus operandi* that reflects into political action, i.e., the act of *making* public policies. In this process of *making* public policies (*policy making*), decisions are taken inherent to the formation and development of policies (*formulation* and *implementation*) which is part of a life cycle of the policy, and where relationships are naturally established between government actors and non-governmental actors. Several authors have studied the process of agenda building, public policy developments and policy formulation (e.g. Cobb and Elder, 1971; Hofferbert, 1974; Hoppe, Graaf, and Dijk, 1985; Kingdon, 1984; Lasswell, 1962). Other authors reflected, how an economic crisis (which naturally apply for public policy decisions) was reflected in the media (e.g. Boomgaarden *et al.*, 2011; Dreijere, 2013; Kaitatzi-Whitlock, 2014; Mercille, 2015; Mylonas, 2012; Touri and Rogers 2013; Tseronis, 2014), but the literature is non-existent on the EU's financial mechanisms and instruments, mediated by the media in a context of health crisis of COVID-19.

Thus, it is important to reflect, how in each of the phases of the development of public policies —agenda construction, policy formulation, policy implementation and policy evaluation—, a set of variables are present that interfere in the process, namely the social environment and political, the actors, the entities that implement the measures, and the policies themselves (goals and objectives to be met). In a context of crisis with the dimension of COVID-19, with reflexes at the political, economic, and social level, several political entities are called on to take decisions that require coordinated actions amongst several countries, and in the case of the EU, actions between the different Member States. World Health Organization (WHO), European institutions, governments, and health authorities were some of the entities that, during the pandemic outbreak, studied, recommended, and made decisions regarding containment measures in order to avoid collapse of the national health system in each country, and mitigate the economic effects of the pandemic. It was a demanding process that required decision-making at the level of public policies unprecedented in the area of health and the economy.

Lasswell (1962) was a pioneer in identifying and studying the various phases of the public policy development process: *Intelligence*; *recommending*; *prescribing*; *involving*; *applying*; *appraising*; and *terminating*. In the construction phase of the political agenda, some authors stand out (Cobb and Elder, 1971; Hofferbert, 1974; Kingdon, 1984) who structured explanatory models for the different phases or stages of public policies. Kingdon (1984) separates the policy phases in the elaboration of the agenda; specification of alternatives; choice of an alternative (by the president, legislature or competent authority); implementation of the decision. Kingdon distinguishes between three types of agenda: systemic or non-governmental, governmental, and decision-making. The systemic includes all matters that have been a country's concern for several years, but which are not the Government's concern; non-governmental includes everything that is a government concern; and the governmental one consists of everything that

is part of the list of problems that have to be decided. An issue can move out of the systemic to governmental agenda when dramatic events or crises occur. This was the case with the COVID-19 crisis, which was an unexpected, unpredictable event with economic consequences for countries, and which required rapid responses to resolve the health crisis, which at the same time turned into an unprecedented, serious, economic crisis.

In formulating policies (e.g. Hoppe, Graaf, and Dijk, 1985) the authors classify the phases of the policy in: construction of the agenda; elaboration of the project; adoption of the project; implementation; evaluation; and readjust. For them, the policy-making process oscillates between intentions and actions. Project design (or formulation) and implementation are two important moments in shaping policies. In the formulation and implementation phases, exchanges and in determinations, conflicts and power occur, and perfect interaction between policy makers, implementers and the target audience of policies is necessary for a given measure or measures to be successful. The implementation, according to the authors, goes through the following subphases: definition of the problem regarding its normative and causal aspects; decomposition of the problem; demonstration that it is possible to address parts of the problems and identify alternative solutions; gross estimates; and definition of implementation strategies.

The European Union's decision-making process has been reflecting the negotiation, often shrouded in conflict, operated between the various Member States, and the strategies that have been designed so that there is convergence in the resolution of the pandemic crisis, which better serve the interest of the target audience: Eurozone citizens and businesses. The forward and backward model (identification of external and internal aspects) on the aspects that influence Richard Elmore's policies have been shown to be relevant in this regard.

THE ECONOMIC RESPONSE TO THE IMPACT OF COVID-19: THE EU'S FINANCIAL INSTRUMENTS AND MECHANISMS

The COVID-19 pandemic crisis which affected part of the world and Europe was a different crisis from the sovereign debt crisis which began in 2008, but that put (five years after the end of the crisis) proof of the capacity of Europe to deal with a new economic shock. The European Central Bank (ECB) was called and decided about measures to contain the negative economic impact of the coronavirus. The ECB, as a European monetary authority, was still forced to adopt internal emergency measures against the disease. An analysis by the European Commission delivered to the Eurogroup, in early March 2020, pointed to the possibility of some countries entering recession. In a statement, ECB confirmed they were prepared to take appropriate and targeted measures, to the extent that they are necessary and proportionate to the existing risks (European Central Bank, 2020).

The Eurogroup President, Mário Centeno met on March 4, 2020 by videoconference emergency with all EU finance ministers, to coordinate the assessment of countries in the expansion of COVID-19, following economic and financial developments. At the end of the meeting, a brief statement was approved, which

allowed to European Commission to deviate from the application of fiscal rules. The main beneficiary of this measure was Italy, which was facing a severe recession with a public debt that already exceeded 135% of GDP. Central banks prevented the Stock Exchanges from continuing to fall at this point. The ECB was beginning to monitor the developments of pandemic. And Mário Centeno said:

Given the potential impact on growth, we will coordinate our responses and stand ready to use all appropriate policy tools to achieve strong, sustainable growth and to safeguard against further materialization of downside risks (Council of the EU, 2020a).

By monitoring the evolution of the virus, European institutions admitted that epidemic would reach euro area, more or less strongly, depending on its duration and the extent of the measures to fight it.

At this point, doubts remained about Europe's ability to react to a new economic crisis. On 12 March in Germany (Council of the EU, 2020b), the ECB revealed what measures it intended to take in response to the economic impact of the virus. Christine Lagarde, had to deal with the usual disagreements within the bank's Board of Governors, and was put under pressure by her counterparts in the US Federal Reserve and the UK Bank of England. At the March 10 meeting of European leaders by videoconference, Christine Lagarde, warned that "we will see a scenario that will remind many of us of the great financial crisis of 2008", if there is no coordinated action at European level in the response to the crisis. An answer came from the European Commission, with the € 25 billion plan, which showed a sign that there was a will to act, but the figure (just over 0.1% of EU GDP) revealed the limitation of a policy of stimulus based on the limited European joint budget. Attention was turned to Germany with Angela Merkel giving some hope of the possibility of seeing a new boost in fiscal policy in Europe's largest economy. The European Commission, meanwhile, mobilized € 37 billion for investment in response to the coronavirus in the health sector, labour market, and support for SMEs. The European Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen, stated that the "initiative for investment in response to the coronavirus" could grow from the 25 billion euros originally envisaged, through "financial engineering" that involved the mobilization of a portion of EUR 8 billion delivered to the Member States as pre-financing for cohesion policy, complemented by an amount of EUR 29 billion corresponding to the Community co-financing entered in the multiannual financial framework. The European Commission's aim was to have the co-decision procedure completed in two weeks.

The ECB launched on 20 March, a new program of buying public debt —Pandemic Emergency Purchase Programme (PEPP) (European Commission, 2020)—, dedicated especially to fighting the crisis of pandemic, injecting 750 billion euros into the economy until the end of 2020, and assumed the possibility for the future, changing the 33% limit for the percentage of debt, which could be held in each country. With European economies suffering an accentuated reduction of their activity due to the pandemic, and the states obliged to participate with several types of financial support, there was concern that inevitable deterioration of public accounts would scare the markets and lead to significant increases in

the financing costs of some countries. Ursula von der Leyen leader of the European Commission, revealed on March 20, “crisis is beyond the control of governments” and proposed the activation of the so-called general exclusion clause of the Stability and Growth Pact (PEC), suspending the obligation on Member States to limit the budget deficit to a maximum of 3% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Leyen, 2020). After classifying the coronavirus crisis as an “exceptional event and beyond the control of governments”, the European Commission defended a regime of total flexibility for the application of the fiscal rules that regulate budgetary and economic policy, to free countries from the constraints that prevented them from accelerating investment and public spending. “This is unique and has never been done before, but today we have activated a general exclusion clause” said the European Commission leader, in a message by twitter, where she also said: “We relaxed our budget rules to give the opportunity of national governments of injecting money into their economy” (Leyen, 2020). The exceptional situation would be “applied for the time necessary to the Member States to implement measures to contain the coronavirus outbreak and mitigate its negative socio-economic effects”, i.e., the activation of the general exclusion clause, derogating from the Stability and Growth Pact (PEC), would allow Member States to respond effectively to the COVID-19 pandemic (Leyen, 2020). The discussion about how public spending to combat the effects of COVID-19 would be financed, gave rise to an open letter to European Council, published in the *Financial Times* (Financial Times, 2020) and subscribed by Aidan Regan, Matthias Matthijs, Catherine de Vries, Thomas Piketty, Mark Blyth, and in Portugal, by Francisco Louçã, that requested to the European Council to create European federal debt securities —“eurobonds”—, arguing that, response to the pandemic had to be European and financed by the EU budget. They talked about the possibility of debt be launched by the European Investment Bank (EIB) or European Stability Mechanism (ESM).

The pandemic crisis exposed old divisions of the European Union. Several European leaders pledged solidarity and cooperation, but had not reached an agreement about “coronabonds” to support the countries most affected by the pandemic. The heads of state and government of the 27 countries of the EU participated in an extraordinary summit dedicated to pandemic crisis by videoconference (Council of the EU, 2020c), to agree or disagree about the issue of European debt securities to support the efforts of the countries most affected by the pandemic. Italian and Spanish Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte and Pedro Sánchez (leaders of the two countries that suffered a lot from new coronavirus crisis in Europe), disagreed with the idea, proposing to the European Council to ask a group of five leaders —from the Commission, Council, Parliament, European Central Bank and Eurogroup— to explore other proposals ((Herszenhorn, Barigazzi and Momtaz, 2020). Guntram Wol, director of the European *think tank* Bruegel said in an interview, the issue of launched debt of at least one billion euros. He believed in a more decisive action by the Eurozone that was not happening yet, because the pandemic crisis had not affected all countries in same way. The solution he proposed involved issuing joint debt in the very long term, with interest to be paid according to the weight that each economy ha in the

euro zone. Guntram Wol defended also, a mutualization of debt, through the European Stability Mechanism (ESM), or through a new agency, which allowed countries to spend the necessary money, to avoid an even deeper crisis (Aníbal, 2020: 8).

Northern Europe refused to share risks (Germany, Holland, Austria, and Finland) and in the south, there was a fear of similar help of troika's time. The Eurozone was still struggling to find a consensual solution. Klaus Regling, the German who heads the European Stability Mechanism (ESM), argued in an interview to the *Financial Times*, that it would take two or three years for the Eurozone to complete all the legislative changes to put a new European institution to launch "coronabonds" —too much time in order to be useful to the present crisis fight (Fleming, 2020)—. Ursula von der Leyen, leader of the European Commission, recognized flaws attacking the European crisis, and argued that it was necessary to strengthen the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for 2021-2027 in order to promote recovery at the end of the pandemic —a Marshall Plan— an idea also defended by the President of the Eurogroup, a solution without the stigma of austerity. On April 23, the European Council met and approved a recovery fund (Council of the EU, 2020d), based on a review of the next MFF. But divisions still remained about how to finance it. The European Commission leader, Ursula von der Leyen, pledged to present in May a comprehensive and ambitious proposal of "billions of euros" to promote the economic recovery of the UE; and as requested by the heads of state and government of the European Council, included a fund for economic recovery and a review of the next MFF for 2021-27. The President of the European Council, Charles Michel, said:

We also agreed to work towards establishing a recovery fund, which is needed and urgent. This fund shall be of a sufficient magnitude, targeted towards the sectors and geographical parts of Europe most affected, and be dedicated to dealing with this unprecedented crisis.

Ursula von der Leyen said also:

We will indeed carry out a thorough assessment of the impact of the crisis on the overall European economy, on our Member States, but certainly also on some specific sector.

At the same time Eurogroup will continue to monitor the situation and prepare for a robust recovery.

THE EUROPEAN UNION OF THE COVID-19 CRISIS IN THE SPANISH PRESS: METHODOLOGY

The main objective of this article is to analyse how the press in Spain, one of the Eurozone countries most affected, reflected the decisions of the EU (mechanisms and financial instruments) to mitigate the economic effects of the pandemic. In view of the main objective, we seek to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What were the main issues addressed related to the EU's financial response to the COVID-19 crisis in *El País* and *El Mundo*? RQ2: What was the main "framing" that structured the logic of the journalistic narrative? For analysis of the press we used mixed quantitative and qualitative methods, first making a content analysis of the journalistic articles of the two newspapers (units of analysis), proceeding to a codification of the articles taking into account the content variables: "issue" (substance of the political agenda) and "framing" (aspects of decision/negotiation of the EU agenda) for later, we proceed to the interpretation of its indicators through narrative critical analysis (ACN), to understand how the media promote certain narratives of the EU, how do they select and frame issues, and how these processes are affected by the health crisis. The categories/indicators of the "issue" variable were established according to the content of the news. For the structure of the "framing" category, we started from the definition of Entman, that is:

Framing means selecting some aspects of a perceived reality and making them more salient in a communicative text, in order to promote a particular definition of the problem, a causal interpretation, a moral assessment and/or a treatment recommendation for the item described (Entman, 1994: 294).

When we use the concept of "framing", we tried to identify the most salient categories of journalistic coverage of the mechanisms and EU financial instruments to respond COVID-19 pandemic, which in the end will be the dominant representation, i.e., the information processing scheme that best serves the logic of the journalistic narrative. Thus, we constructed the following categories:

1. Analysis/ diagnosis.
2. Problem definition.
3. Causal interpretation/responsibility.
4. Recommendation/decision-making.
5. Economic forecast (see Table 1)

The analysed *corpus* involves articles published by the Spanish newspapers *El País* and *El Mundo* (print edition), about coverage of European Union's political decision-making process of the COVID-19 pandemic. The period of analysis begins on March 1 (the month in which, due to the increase number of cases confirmed by COVID-19, the state of alarm, and national blockade on March 14), through the peak of the disease, until slowdown), and ends on April 24, the day after the European Council approved the economic recovery fund to mitigate the effects of the pandemic on the European economy.

Table 1

Categories of “framing”	Description of the categories
Analysis/ diagnosis	Analysis/diagnosis to the European economy during the pandemic crisis of COVID-19.
Problem definition	Discussion about how EU will contribute to the resolution of the economic crisis caused by COVID-19,- for example, preparatory discussion and variety of proposals for financing recuperation plan of the economy and the level playing field.
Causal interpretation/ responsibility	Causes and/or responsibilities in the management of negotiations between Member States and/or EU institutions about the instruments and mechanisms in solving the crisis.
Recommendation/decision-making	Proposal and decision-making at the level of public policies by the EU to mitigate the economic effects caused by the COVID-19 epidemic.
Economic forecast	The impact of the recuperation plan on the economy to Member States in the future.

Source: Own conception adapted from Entman (1994: 294).

FINDINGS

During the period under analysis (March 1 to April 24, 2020), 155 news articles were published in the newspapers *El País* and *El Mundo*: 124 articles from *El País* and 31 articles from *El Mundo*. The newspaper *El País* was the one that published more articles of news about the EU's response mechanisms and financial instruments to mitigate the effects of the pandemic on the economy of Spain and the other Member States. To answer question Q1, what were the main issues addressed related to the EU's financial response to the COVID-19 crisis?, we verified through Graph 1 that in *El País* (30, 24%) and *El Mundo* (17, 55%) most of the “issue” covered are related to the category “Economic Strategy from EU”, which includes the plans and measures addressed by the EU to mitigate the economic effects caused by the COVID-19 epidemic. The “issue” that occupies the second position is the “Economic Strategy of the Government”: *El País* (25, 20%), and *El Mundo* (5, 16%). The third “issue” most debated is related to the intervention of the BCE bank —“The ECB's intervention”: *El País* (17, 14%) and *El Mundo* (5, 16%). The “Critical test for the European Union” category received a high percentage in *El País* (15, 12%) but the issue was not covered in *El Mundo*.

Through content analysis to newspapers, it was possible to determine which were the main issues addressed by the Spanish press in the context of the response to the economic crisis caused by COVID-19, which were part of the EU's political agenda (*policy – agenda*) and which entered the agenda media coverage of the newspapers (*media – agenda*). The issue “Economic Strategy from EU” reflected, in the newspapers *El País* and *El Mundo*, the political actions proposed by the EU for the recovery of the economy:

1. ECB announces €750 billion Pandemic Emergency Purchase Programme (PEPP).
2. State Aid: Commission adopts Temporary Framework to allow Member States to give greater support to the economy in the context of the COVID-19 outbreak.
3. Commission proposes to activate the general derogation clause of the budgetary framework to respond to the pandemic.
4. MEPs approved the provision of 37 billion euros to Member States from EU structural funds to tackle the COVID-19 crisis on 26 March.
5. The Commission and the European Investment Fund (part of the EIB Group) have released EUR 8 billion in funding for 100 000 small and medium-sized enterprises.
6. EIB Group's response.
7. The European Investment Bank created a €25 billion guarantee fund that mobilizes up to €200 billion to help the European economy, in addition to the €40 billion already mobilized.
8. European Parliament approves new measures to mitigate the effects of the crisis: greater flexibility in the use of European funds; support measures for fishermen, aquaculture and farmers; food and material assistance to the most needy people.
9. Financial support from the SURE program, up to a maximum amount of EUR 100 billion, to save jobs.
10. On April 23, the European Council met and approved a recovery fund based on a review of the next multiannual financial framework (MFF) for 2021-2027.

Graph 1. Issues of the 'El País' and 'El Mundo' (%) (n=155)

Source: Content analysis for news coverage SPSS.

To answer the question Q2, What was the main “framing” that structured the logic of the journalistic narrative? Through the analysis of Graph 2, the results show that the issues that are the subject of decision making, was the, fall within category “framing” —“Recommendation /Decision-Making” in *El País* (57%) and *El Mundo* (52%).

Graph 2. Aspects of Decision/Negotiation to the Political Agenda for the implemented measures – Framing ‘El País’ and ‘El Mundo’ (%) (n=155)

Source: Content analysis for news coverage SPSS.

The journalistic “framing” reflects the political priorities of the policy decision-makers and represents the following actions:

1. Analysis/diagnosis of the impact of COVID-19 on the European economy in various sectors of society;
2. Discussion about how EU will contribute to the resolution of the economic crisis caused by COVID-19;
3. Causes and/or responsibilities in the management of negotiations between Member States and/or EU institutions about the instruments and mechanisms to solve the crisis;
4. Discussions around the European Economic Recovery Plan and the impact that the Economic Recovery Plan will have in the future for Member States.

This plan includes proposals and decision-making at the level of public policies by the EU to mitigate the economic effects caused by the COVID-19 epidemic. The “framing” is essentially focused on the European Economic Recovery Plan, and reflects the principal structure of the journalistic narrative, i.e., the narrative begins by explaining what is happening in the economy, and ends up establishing what should be done for an economic recovery. This result derives from

the recommendations and decisions studied, though, and structured by the EU institutions, which, as we saw above, were weeks of negotiation, monitoring, and at the same time, making decisions, in order to respond to the crisis of the COVID-19. Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, and Charles Michel, President of the European Council, were decisive in this phase, which preceded the decision of May 6, on the economic recovery of the EU.

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

Europe and the World are facing an unprecedented, highly unpredictable health crisis with very severe socio-economic consequences, creating a great challenge to citizens, institutions and media due to the dimension of the confinement and social isolation that has been affecting the economic sectors in a global scale.

Since the first cases of contagion caused by COVID-19, the UE committed to do everything necessary to meet this challenge in a spirit of solidarity. The UE developed a coordinated strategy to deal with health emergency needs, to support economic activity and to prepare the ground for the recovery. This strategy combines short, medium and long-term initiatives, taking account of the spill overs and interlinkages between economies of the Members States to preserve confidence and stability. Several measures have already been taken at the national and EU levels. The articles published in *El País* and *El Mundo* in the context of the UE response to the economic crisis reflects the strategies discussed among the Member States and the EU institutions and the way in which the measures will be implemented. The coordinated actions taken so far at the level of the Member States, the EU and the euro area were described in newspapers *El País* and *El Mundo* into the category issue “Economic Strategy from EU”. The “framing” of the news, follows the recommendations and decisions taken by the EU to mitigate the economic effects of the crisis caused by COVID-19; i.e., the newspapers followed the “framing” derived from institutional founts legitimizing EU sources. Thus, newspapers limited themselves to representing in a systematic and objective way the recommendations and decisions that were being made by the EU, incorporated in published official documents (e.g. press releases, letters, reports), resulted of the meetings by Video conferences —a platform of communication used in the context of the State of emergency— among Member States, European leaders, leaders of European institutions and the media. The category issue “Economic Strategy from EU” as the most discussed in newspapers follows the logic of the journalistic narrative in which the “framing” begins by explaining what is happening (analysis/diagnosis) and ends up establishing what must be done (Recommendation/Decision-making) that contemplates the proposals and decision-making at the level of public policies by the EU to mitigate the economic effects caused by the COVID-19 (European Economic Recovery Plan). Thus, the “framing” that serve the logic of journalistic narrative of the *El País* and *El Mundo* follow these key- moments: the proposals approved by the European Commission and European Parliament for the economy, were initially implemented via the ECB’s decision to buy assets worth 750 million

euros that allowed governments and companies to borrow at low interest rates. The European Stability Mechanism (ESM) mobilized 240 billion euros through precautionary credit lines, which although debt, aids the economy; and the European Investment Bank (EIB), with its credit line of 200 billion for small and medium-sized companies, is important for capitalization. The SURE mechanism, a EUR 100 billion loan to pay the “layoffs”, helps governments tackle employment issues. Some Eurogroup decisions have also proved to be important for Member States, such as the flexibility of budget deficits above 3% and debt above 60%. An essential point was the flexibility of the structural funds without national co-financing (100% European). Funds can be implemented without the need for national co-financing; and there is great flexibility to redirect them to priority areas arising from the crisis, and also flexibility in use between various regions. The resolution adopted on 17 April 2020 was a historic moment for the EU institutions. EU parties voted by a large majority in favor of a resolution that called on the Commission and the European Council to put all these measures into practice quickly. An Economic Recovery plan financed by European common debt (debt mutualization), issued by the Commission, guaranteed by the European Budget for Economic Resolution – European Marshall Plan, was requested. The European Commission was also asked to proceed quickly with this Plan, and the European Council was asked to approve it. Parliament approved what the Commission proposed, and on April 23, 2020, the European Council met and the 27 EU countries agreed to create an economic recovery fund. The European Commission points to “billions of euros”, but the details and form of distribution are yet to be defined. In times of economic crisis affecting the world and especially Europe, in the European press, the EU is the entity that takes on greater visibility in the media. This fact can be explained because it depends on the EU, the resolution of the economic and financial problems of the Member States most affected by the crises. The “framing” is essentially focused on the European Economic Recovery Plan, and reflects the principal structure of the journalistic narrative, i.e., the narrative begins by explaining what is happening in the economy, and ends up establishing what should be done for an economic recovery. This result derived from the recommendations and decisions studied, though, and structured by the EU institutions, which—as we saw above—, were weeks of negotiation, monitoring, and at the same time, preparing measures, in order to respond to the crisis of the COVID-19.

As future research proposals, we suggest extending the study to other European newspapers and complementing the “framing” that structure the journalistic narrative of news texts with an analysis of newspaper editorials and opinion articles.

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