CITIZENS, EUROPE AND THE MEDIA
Have new media made citizens more Eurosceptical?

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Siena, April 7, 2017

The puzzle

- Over the past decades, the problem of the attitudes of various political actors toward the process of European integration has attracted growing attention on the part of scholars.

- The pace of integration proposed from the top and some of its side effects—fiscal austerity, transnational redistribution, economic insecurity, internal have created a rise in Euroscepticism.

- Our research investigates the impact of the media on citizens' attitudes toward Europe → we justify our choice through assumption that the information channelled through media becomes part of the cognitive shortcuts adopted by citizens to understand reality, including the complex European actuality.

Past research

- Large literature on citizens' attitudes toward the EU ignoring the influence of the media. Scholarly attention has mainly focused on the personal characteristics of citizens based on cognitive abilities, socio-economic interests, political leaning, feelings of identity and attachment to their nation to explain their attitudes toward the EU.

- Analyses of media representations of Europe that prioritise a descriptive approach, i.e. how the EU and the integration process are discursively construed in the mass media.

- The survey of the EU member states that we present in the volume moves this a step forward: Through an explanatory approach, we investigate the impact of the media on citizens and produce a comprehensive account of how different media influence individual attitudes toward the EU.

- **The novelty of our approach lies in its focus on the ex-post effects of media on consumers.**

Goal & Method

- ❑ <u>Our main goal</u>: to show that the role of the media in shaping public attitudes toward the EU is fundamental.

- ❑ <u>Research design</u>: media and their use considered as *cause*, whereas public attitudes toward the EU constitute the *effect*.

- ❑ <u>Method</u>: a survey of all the EU member states through the analysis of pooled Eurobarometer data (2011–2014).

- ❑ <u>Findings</u>: We show that the use of media influences citizens' attitudes toward the EU. A predominant use of traditional media favours pro-European attitudes, while a prevalent use of new media determines more Eurosceptical attitudes among the citizens.

Figure 1 – Citizens' perceptions about EU membership (mean of all EU member states)
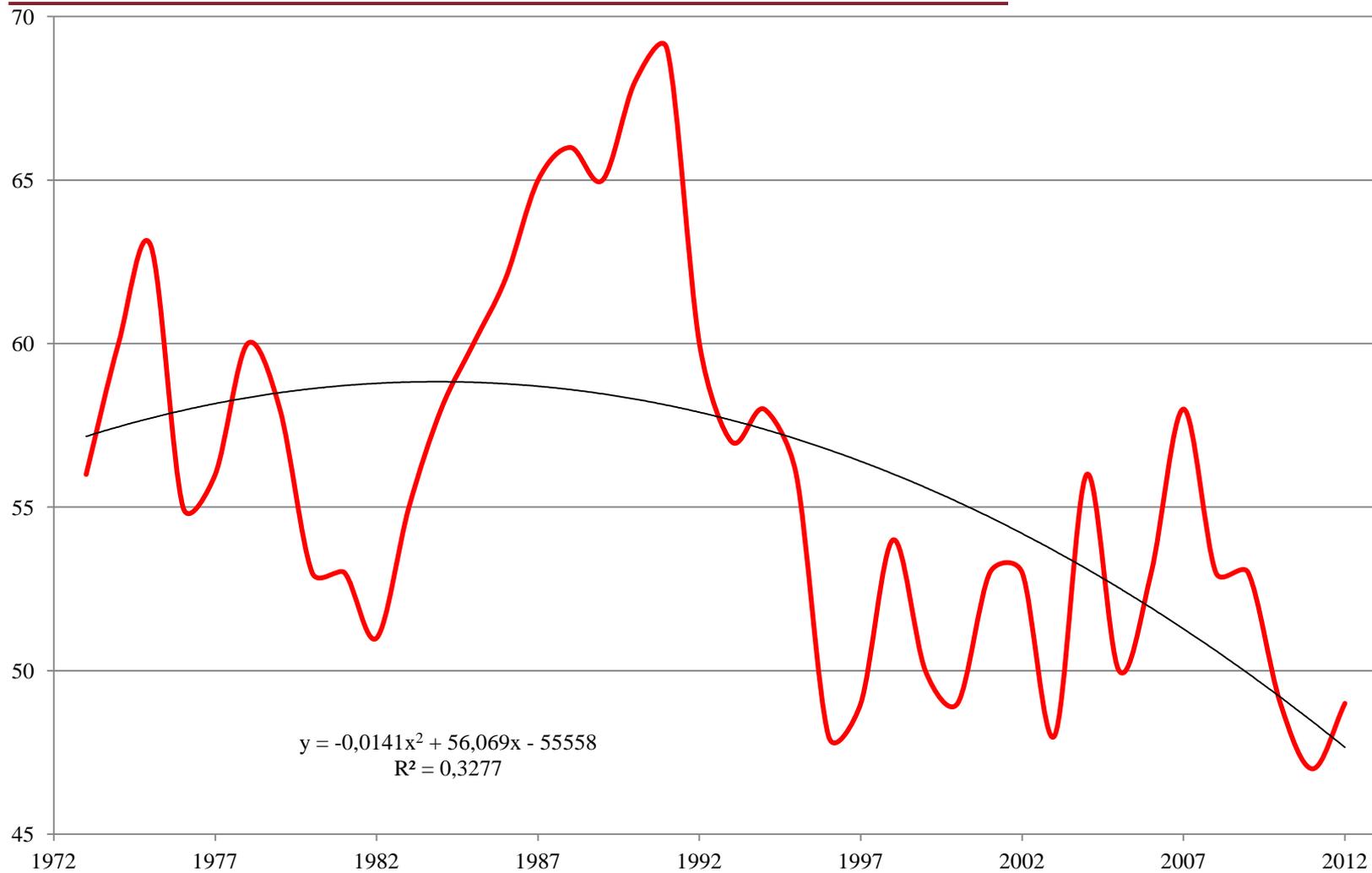
$$y = -0{,}0141x^2 + 56{,}069x - 55558$$
$$R^2 = 0{,}3277$$

Note: Percentage of respondents who considered membership of their own country a positive thing.

Figure 2 – Citizens' perceptions about EU membership (mean by groups of member states)
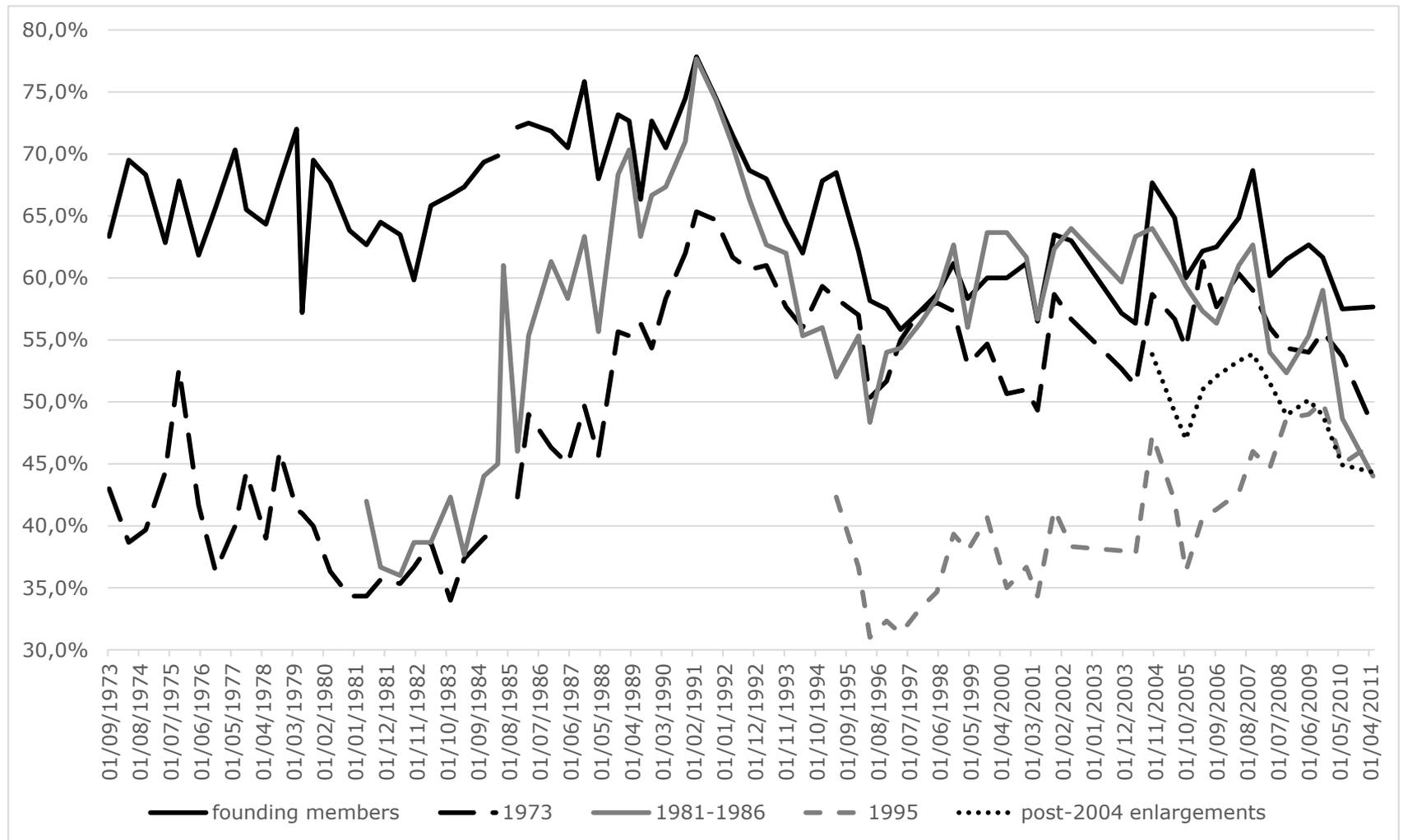
Note: Percentage of respondents who considered membership of their own country a positive thing.

Definition of dependent variables: citizens' attitudes

- Do citizens distinguish different dimensions of the EU process?

  If yes, then their answers should vary in a way consistent with some partition of different aspects of European integration.

- We ran a test to corroborate if, in today's Europe, a multi-dimensional model can be empirically valid to measure citizens' attitudes toward the EU. We built on existing theory and selected issues related to problems of *representation* and *policy*.

- We processed two factor analyses: we found that the European citizens (either consciously or unconsciously) distinguish between the **two dimensions** given that the variables of each dimension co-vary in a way that is consistent with the assumption of their distinctiveness.

- We then used Representation and Policy (both are additive indices) as dependent variables.

Table 1 – Factor analyses of citizens' responses

	Representation	Policy scope
Confidence in EU[12]	0.779	
Confidence in European Parliament[13]	0.892	
Confidence in European Commission	0.901	
Confidence in European Central Bank	0.828	
Satisfaction with democracy in the EU[14]	0.686	
Single currency[15]		0.682
Common foreign policy[16]		0.822
Common defence policy[17]		0.791
Eigenvalue	3.369	1.766
Explained variance	67.4	59.0
Reliability analysis (Cronbach's Alpha value)	0.877	0.647
N	74,148	94,146

Source: Eurobarometer 82.3(2014); 80.1 (2013); 78.1(2012); 76.3 (2011).

Hypotheses

- *Hypothesis 1: To acquire political information predominantly through traditional media makes citizens more pro-European.*

  CONFIRMED

- *Hypothesis 2: To acquire political information predominantly through internet media makes citizens more Eurosceptical.*

  CONFIRMED

- *Hypothesis 3: A frequent use of social networks makes citizens more Eurosceptical.*

  CONFIRMED

- *Hypothesis 4: Among those who acquire political information through online media those who are most exposed to social networks are the most Eurosceptical.*

  CONFIRMED

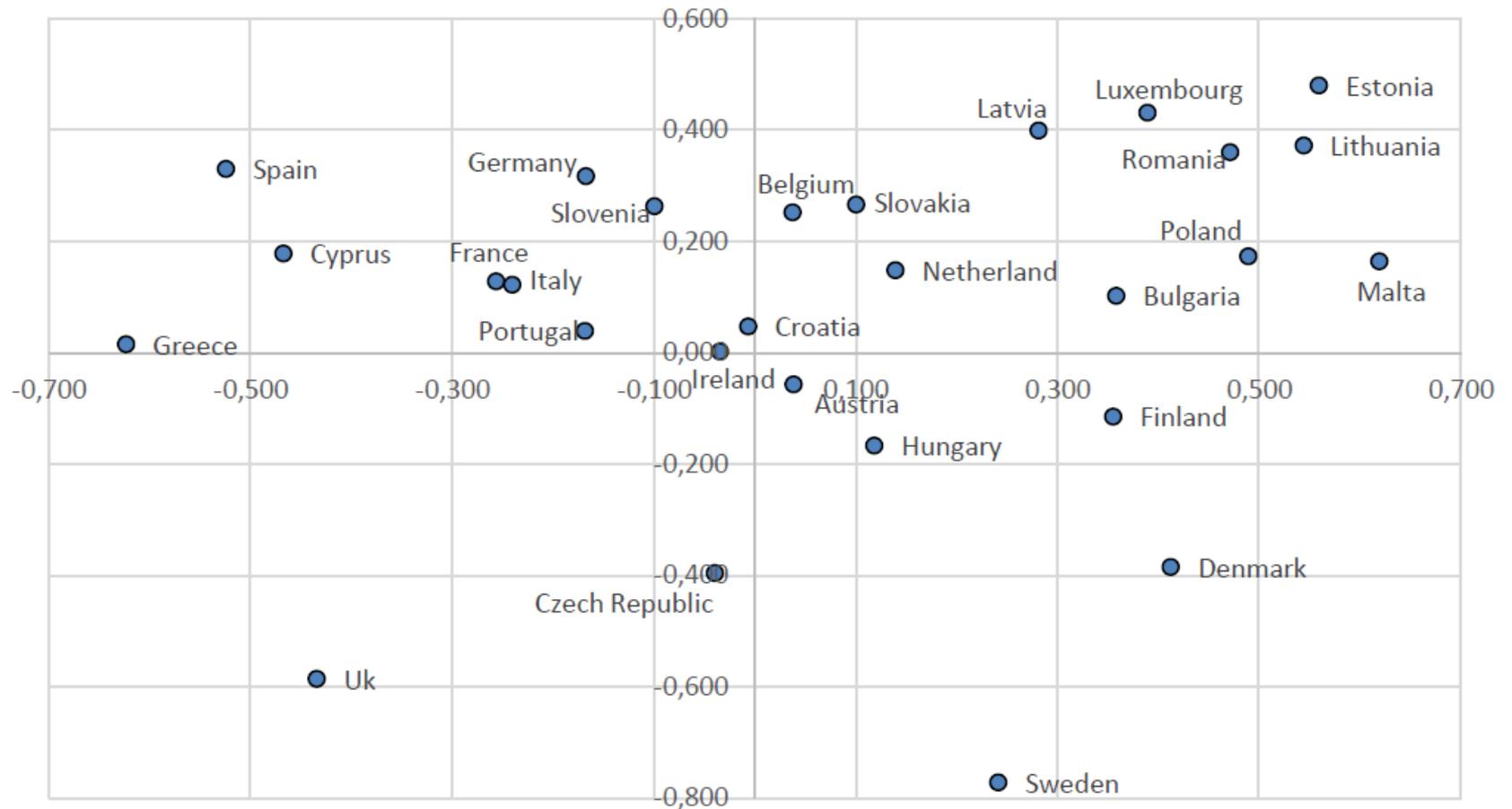# Fig. 3 – Country positions in Representation and Policy Scope in 2014

Fig. 4 – Net difference in use of different types of media between 2011-2014
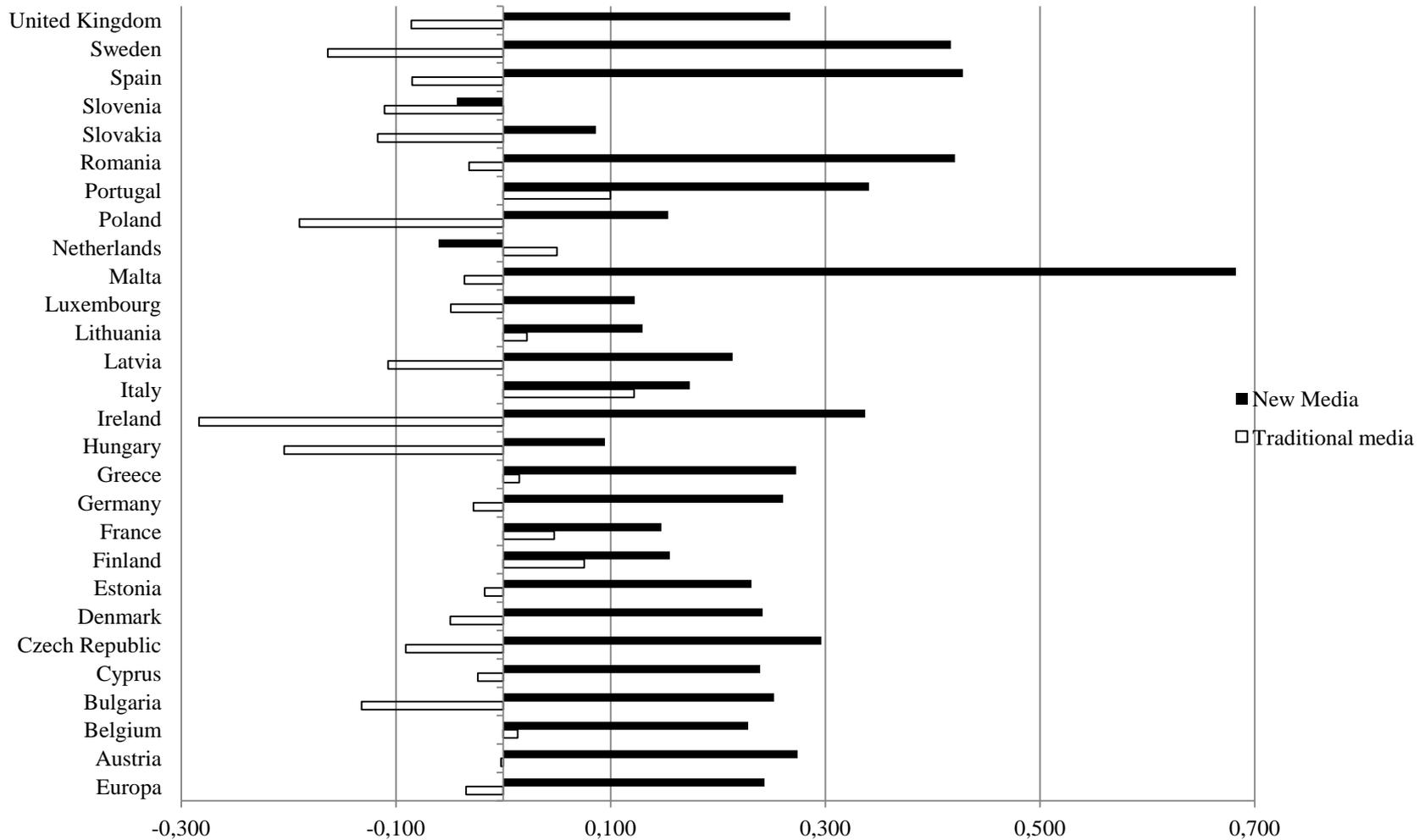
Fig. 5 - Country positions in Representation and Policy scope (2014) by change in the use of new media (2011-2014)
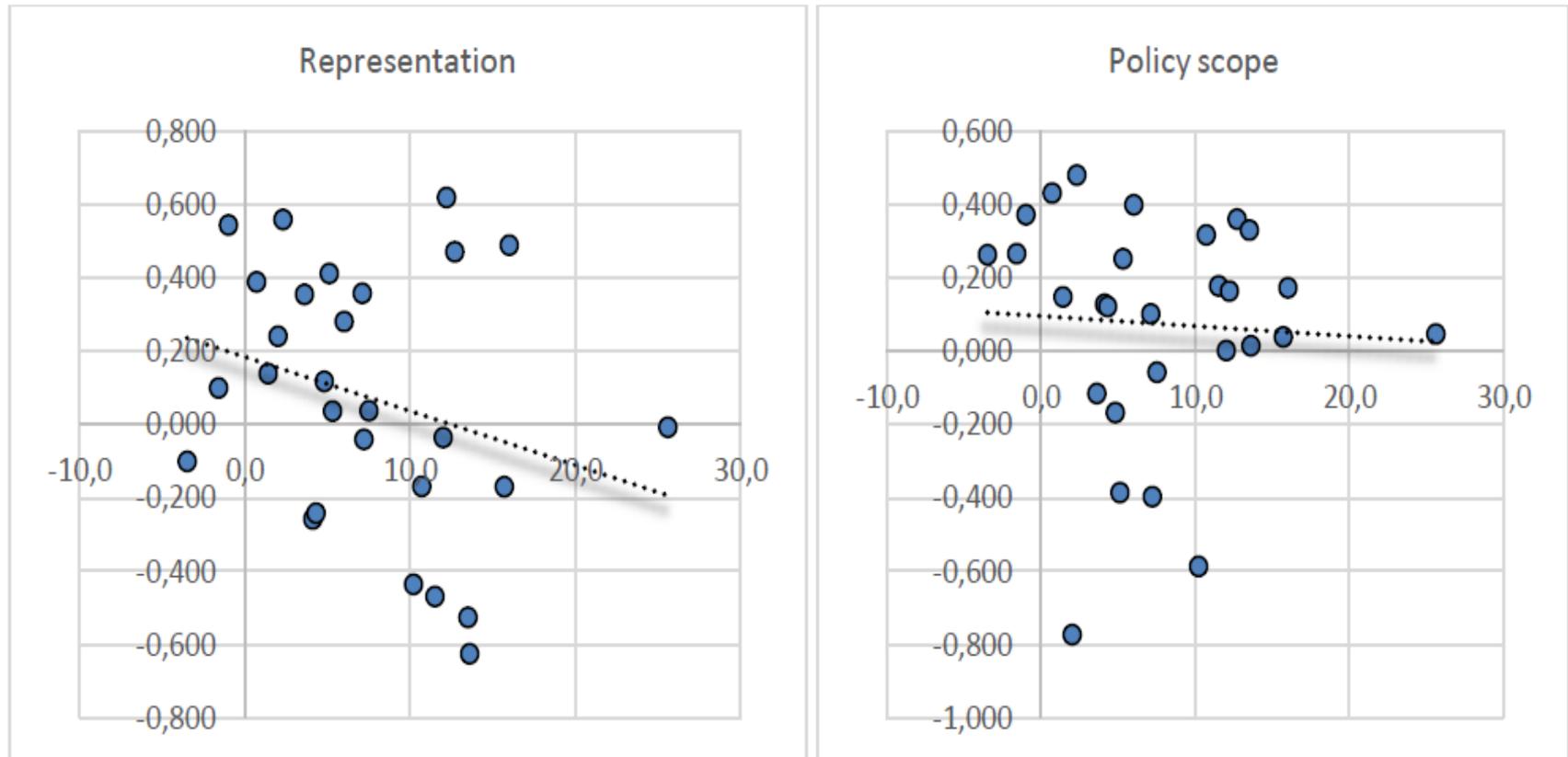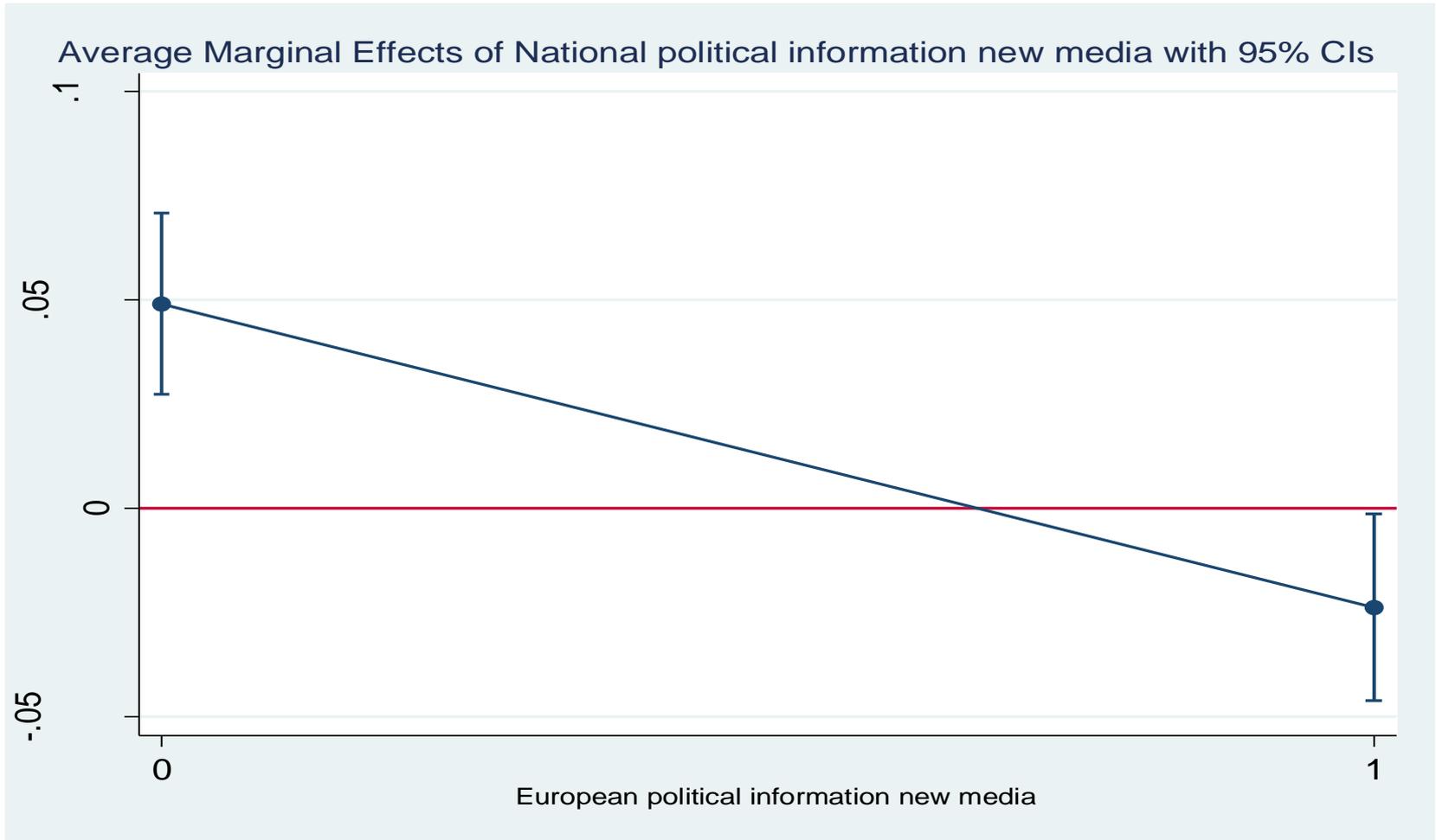
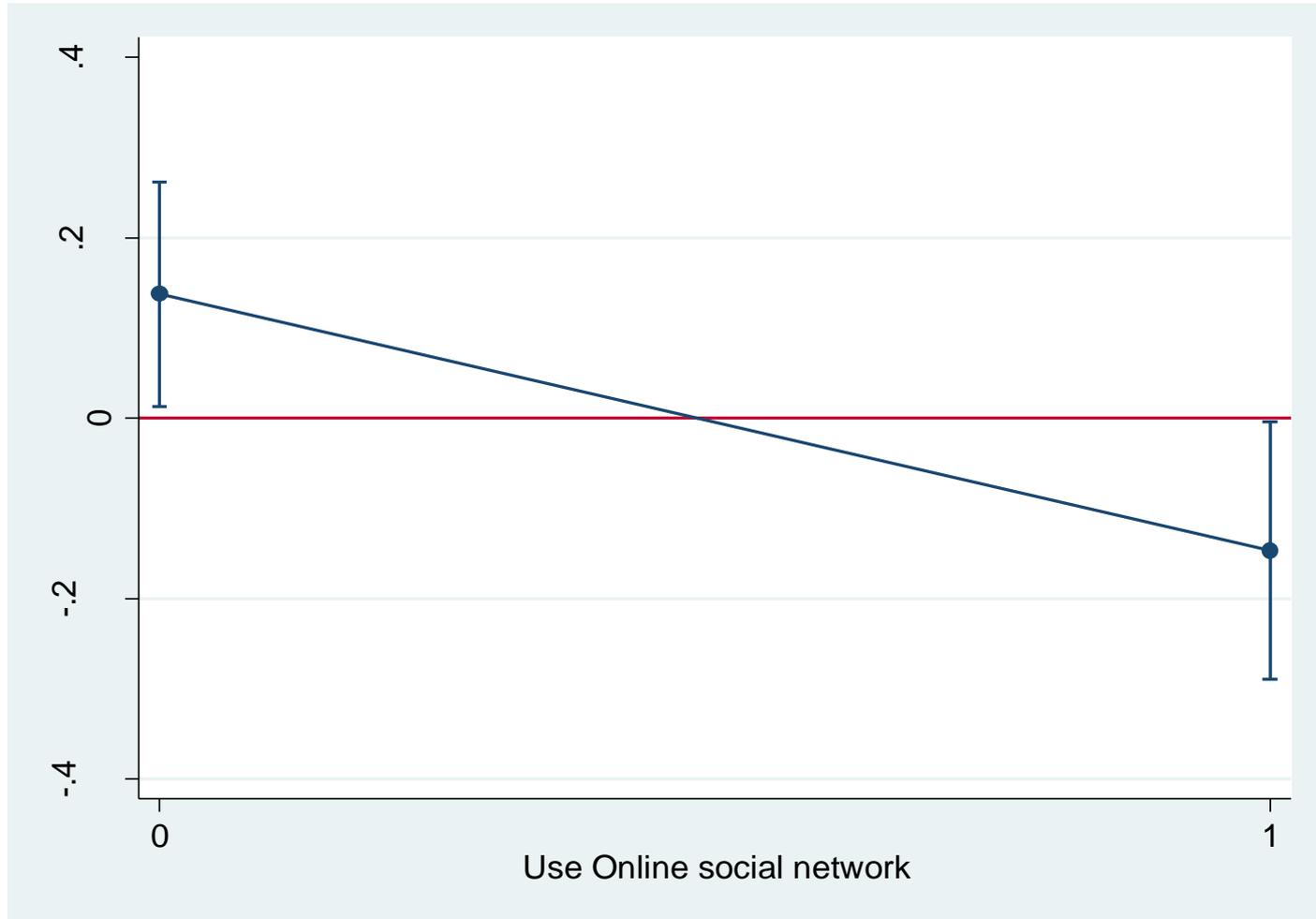# Fig. 6 – Information on national and European politics through new media (dependent variable: Representation)

Average Marginal Effects of National political information new media with 95% CIs

Fig. 7 – Use of internet and of social networks (dependent variable: Representation)

Fig. 8 – Information through new media and use of social networks (dependent variable: Representation)
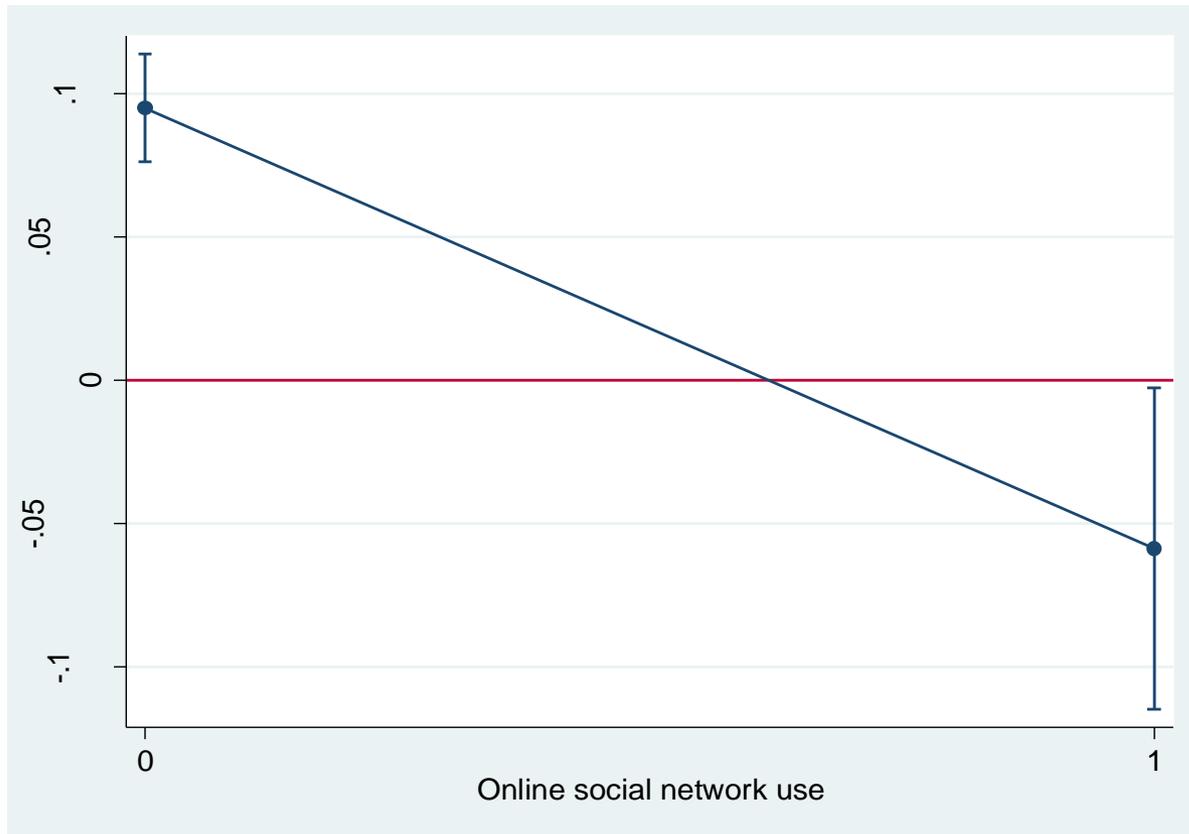
Main findings in brief....

- The media have a definite influence on citizens' attitudes towards the EU.

- This influence is diverse depending on media diets: Frequent Internet users are more Eurosceptical.

- Among the citizens of the web, frequent users of social networks are the most Eurosceptical of all, especially if they make use of social media to become informed about politics.

Analysis and discussion

- First, feelings about the own country membership in the EU have deteriorated among the European citizens.

- Second, attitudes toward the EU (including Euroscepticism) are made up of different components, each revealing a fragment of a broader stance. We examined the two components of *representation* and *policy scope* and we found different results: opposition to the EU is bigger in representation.

- Third, the politicisation of Europe develops along the contrasting channels of traditional and new media: those who are most exposed to traditional media are also more benevolent to the EU process, while those who make large use of the web tend to be more pessimistic about the EU process, its institutions and current political trajectory.

Analysis and discussion

- Fourth, in those countries where the use of the online media has increased the most in recent times, Euroscepticism has also grown the most.

- Fifth, although a frequent use of the web tends to make citizens more critical on the EU, it is especially those who make a large use of the social media (including to be informed about politics) who are more Eurosceptical.

- Sixth, the argument on a convergence toward Euroscepticism on the internet (de Wilde et al. 2013) finds confirmation in our research with respect to internet users.

Analysis and discussion

- Seventh, the capacity of the EU institutions to reach out to and influence those segments of more active media users in the new media has proved very limited (*static advertising but not interactive communication by the EU*): constructive communication on the EU by advocates of European integration would be necessary.

- Eighth, social network users tend to be young, urbanised and highly educated citizens, who may well become opinion leaders one day: their socialisation with the EU follows pessimistic lines, this phenomenon may anticipate massive consequences for the building of a collective will in the Europe of tomorrow.

- Ninth, the EU process has always been about creating an ever closer union, this path becomes more difficult if collective action through the Internet becomes a major challenge.

- Tenth, our study suggests inclusion of the study of citizens' Euroscepticism – so significant in recent times – from a media perspective.