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Myrsini Dogani, Phoebus Voulgaris, Stavros Koutsocheras, Anastasia Kolyva

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The Institutional Image of Femininities in an International Scandal: Analyzing the image of MEP Eva Kaili, in Francophone Press

Myrsini Dogani, Phoebus Voulgaris, Stavros Koutsocheras, Anastasia Kolyva*

Abstract

This study is grounded in the proposition that the organization of news, such as an international scandal, is based on criteria designed to make the content as attractive as possible to the reader. In the case of “Qatargate”, MEP Eva Kaili played a central role in the scandal narration by the Press. The study explores whether MEP Eva Kaili became the face synonymous with the “Qatargate” scandal and how her gender characteristics made her the key figure for the attractiveness of the topic. To this end, quantitative content analysis is applied to Francophone newspapers from December 2022 to February 2023. The subsequent analysis involves both quantitative findings and qualitative characteristics of selected rhetorical narratives concerning the portrayal of gender stereotypes in an issue of extended international interest. To sum up, this research ponders whether and how MEP Eva Kaili's characteristics as a "44-year-old woman, former TV presenter" are presented to enhance the attractiveness of the issue of “Qatargate”.

Keywords: femininities, representation, scandal, Eva Kaili, Qatargate.

Introduction

The contemporary media landscape, particularly in the context of international scandals, is often shaped by a deliberate structuring of news content aimed at maximizing reader engagement. This study explores how news portrays the "Qatargate" scandal in terms of news appeal.

“Qatargate” revolves around allegations of corruption and money laundering involving members of the European Parliament, EU institution employees, and government officials for the sake of the governments of Qatar and Morocco, who influenced the political decisions adopted by the European Parliament by bribing third parties who have important positions in EU institutions (Lefief, 2022). Authorities from Belgium, Italy, and Greece confiscated electronic devices and seized €1.5 million in cash.

* Dr. Myrsini Dogani: Adjunct Lecturer of Rhetoric in University of Thessaly, Department of Language and Intercultural Studies, member of Strategic Communication & N.M. Lab, University of Piraeus, Greece. myrsodogani@uth.gr
Phoebus Voulgaris: Communication Science MSc Student, University of Amsterdam, member of Strategic Communication & N.M. Lab, University of Piraeus, Greece, Onassis Scholar. foivosvoulgaris82@gmail.com
Stavros Koutsocheras: Informatics MSc Student, University of Piraeus. koutsocherasstavros@gmail.com
Anastasia Kolyva: Member of Strategic Communication & N.M. Lab, University of Piraeus, Greece. kolyvaa0@gmail.com

The culprits are numerous, with MEP Eva Kaili emerging as a central figure in this scandal. As one of Parliament's 14 vice presidents, Kaili is a prominent member of Parliament (Wheaton, 2022). Belonging to the center-left Socialist & Democrat (S&D) party, she has specific duties concerning the Middle East as part of her portfolio. She has become one of Qatar's most outspoken supporters, despite serious worldwide concerns regarding the working conditions for stadium construction of the World Cup 2022.

Francesco Giorgi, Kaili's co-parent and partner, has also been taken into custody. He serves as an adviser to the European Parliament regarding matters concerning the Middle East and North Africa in addition to being the founder of the non-governmental organization "Fight Impunity". Importantly, Pier Antonio Panzeri, the president of "Fight Impunity" and ex-MEP also from the S&D, was among those arrested by the Italian police alongside his wife and daughter.

Despite all the evidence, the official way to refer to this case is as an alleged case of corruption and money laundering as its verdict is still pending.

The primary objective of this research is to investigate whether MEP Eva Kaili became the face synonymous with the "Qatargate" scandal, and, furthermore, to examine how her gender characteristics played a pivotal role in making her the focal point of public attention. To achieve this, a comprehensive approach is employed, integrating quantitative content analysis of Francophone newspapers. Beyond statistical findings, the study delves into qualitative characteristics, exploring rhetorical narratives that contribute to the portrayal of gender stereotypes in a news topic of extended international interest.

The theoretical framework of this study is grounded mainly in framing theory from communication and media studies, but also draws analytical tools from gender studies, with a particular emphasis on theories related to the depiction of femininities involved in scandalous contexts.

As the analysis unfolds, the study aims to contribute valuable insights into the nuanced interplay between media representation and gender dynamics in the context of constructing public narratives surrounding high-profile scandals with international ramifications. Through a multidimensional exploration, this research wishes to enrich the broader discourse about gender roles surrounding scandals of international significance.

Framework via theory

To begin with, we should define the term "scandal". Scandal refers to "actions or events involving certain kinds of transgressions which become known to others and are sufficiently serious to elicit a public response" (Thompson, 2000: 13). They occupy the newspapers on an almost daily basis and have always dominated the political sphere. (Cucchi & Cavazza, 2021, Curran, 2011, Curran & Seaton, 2018). In the political sphere, scandals continue to increase to the point where they are

now considered as the "new normal" in Western democracies (Cucchi, et al, 2021). Digital media play a crucial role in covering and reporting events that present political scandals as real 'dramas' destined to an indignant and curious public. This has consequences not only for the politician, but also for the party and its political institutions.

The importance of addressing corruption holds significant relevance within democratic theory. One procedural dimension of democratic quality, namely the rule of law, signifies that corruption should be minimized, detected, and penalized by the political, administrative, and judicial branches of the government (Diamond & Morino, 2004: 8).

From a political standpoint, empirical evidence suggests that individuals exposed to corruption are less likely to believe in the legitimacy of their political system and exhibit lower levels of interpersonal trust (Seligson, 2002). In the effort to prevent this, Stapenhurst (2002) asserts that the media play a crucial role in promoting good governance and controlling corruption. Quoting Luengo and Mesquita (2016: 159):

“Political scandals exposed by the media can often force the political system to respond, either starting legal processes, through the dismissal or resignation of public officials involved in wrongdoings, or simply by statements of political leaders who are forced to give explanations to the population.”

The media's scrutiny of corruption is considered a catalyst for social and political change, with the potential to shape the evolution of political culture towards increased transparency and accountability within the system (Arnold & Lal, 2012). This can manifest either as political leader statements or as the dismissal or resignation of public officials deemed responsible (Luengo & Mesquita, 2016). The traditional Press, being one of these forces of scrutiny, continues to be involved in event coverage. One of the ways through which the scandalous event is mediated by the press is described by the theory of framing.

Framing means selecting certain dimensions of a perceived reality and making them more noticeable in communicating text, aiming to highlight a specific aspect of the issue discussed (Iyengar, 1991, Goffman, 1974). Framing is based on selection and salience (Entman, 1993; 2012). Based on this particular interpretation, frames determine how a problem should be defined, which are the factors and actors that cause the problem and how they should be judged for the repercussions of their actions (Scheufele, 1999)

Furthermore, frames, by accentuating some aspects of information about a subject, use salience. Salience refers to information and data that audiences will find to be more recognizable, significant, and easily remembered. Raising the salience increases the likelihood that recipients will become aware of this issue, analyze it, and preserve it in their memory (Fiske & Taylor, 1991).

Texts can make a piece of information more salient, by repeating it or by connecting it to symbols that are widely recognized in the culture.

Kahneman and Tversky (1984) note that frames concurrently divert attention from other elements of the reality portrayed by illuminating specific features of this reality. This occurs, as frames are defined by what they include and what they exclude in their interpretation of the issue analyzed, in the problem definition explanation and assessment.

Therefore, framing affects how and when most people see, comprehend, and recall a situation, as well as how they approach it and decide how to respond to it. The idea of framing suggests that, while it may not influence everyone, the frame has a common effect on a sizable section of the receiving audience.

The question that arises here, guiding the reasoning of the research, is whether the gender element can be applied as an interpretive framework.

Gender is defined as a fundamental and primary cultural context that contributes to the understanding of the self in relation to others - in order for individuals to interact and organise relationships. Individuals identify both themselves and others on the basis of gender, through cultural systems of categorization (Fisk & Ridgeway, 2018). More specifically, gender categorizes people according to cultural norms developed by society that classify people as male or female. This categorization is done unconsciously. People categorize others based on their gender, unconsciously, in an instant, without realizing it (Fisk & Ridgeway, 2018).

In this research, we use the term “femininities”, that according to European Institute for Gender Equality (n.d.a), describes:

“The different notions of what it means to be a woman, including patterns of conduct linked to a woman’s assumed place in a given set of gender roles and relations. It involves questioning the values and norms that traditionally apply to women’s behavior in a given society, identifying and addressing issues connected to women’s and girls’ subordination as well as related discriminatory gender stereotypes that sustain gender inequality.”

The reason we choose the term “femininities”, instead of the term “women” is because we argue that it encompasses better the social and cultural aspects we wish to highlight. Accordingly, we use the term “masculinities”, that is defined as:

“the different notions of what it means to be a man, including ideals about men’s characteristics, roles and identities, which are constructed based on cultural, social and biological factors and change over time” (European Institute for Gender Equality, n.d.b)

The question that arises here is the following: In which way do people unconsciously categorize others based on gender? This happens using the common knowledge that actors possess. This knowledge is not only shared between actors, but it is also common for everyone in the society. It is a concept, a knowledge, and an attitude that everyone is familiar with, so the actor knows how to act based on it. Common knowledge is shared between individuals and is taken for granted.

Therefore, when individuals identify the other on the grounds of gender, this categorization emerges by common knowledge and from this categorization, cultural beliefs about 'who' masculinities and femininities are and how the two genders behave and should behave also emerge. We are essentially talking about cultural gender stereotypes (Budgeon, 2014, Fisk & Ridgeway, 2018).

There is a stereotypical belief that women possess communal characteristics in their personality (relational, caring and receptive skills), while men possess agentic characteristics (self-confidence, dynamism) (Budgeon, 2014, Cucchi & Cavazza, 2021). Based on this differentiation, femininities in the position of leadership are perceived as more compassionate, calm, understanding and honest, while masculinities are perceived as more assertive, authoritarian and confident (Cucchi & Cavazza, 2021). Essentially, these are the expectations that are developed about femininities, and therefore, the perceptions we have when we read a news story about a woman.

Expectation violation theory predicts that negative behaviors are judged more harshly when the offense goes against the public's expectations of women and men (Cucchi & Cavazza, 2021). Individuals who act contrary to these expectations are often isolated from the group and evaluated negatively. As Lorber (1994:26) points:

“In the social construction of gender, it does not matter what men and women do; it does not even matter if they do exactly the same thing. The social institution of gender insists only that what they do is perceived as different.”

A politician involved in a scandal, then, should be punished more severely when the scandal violates a homogeneous gender stereotypical expectation than an opposite gender stereotypical expectation (Cucchi & Cavazza, 2021).

A female politician is evaluated more negatively than her male counterpart in a scandal when her actions are inconsistent with expectations about her social role, e.g., when she claims self-promotion in the workplace, behavior contrary to the trait of modesty attributed to her (Courtemanche & Green, 2020).

Furthermore, she is evaluated more harshly than the man in a scandal, because in being implicated in a scandal, she violated honesty, a stereotypical attribute of femininities. Society, based on stereotypes, expects a femininity to act with honesty or else morality is lost. Taking into

consideration that scandals represent a form of interference with moral behavior and can affect credibility, individuals involved in scandals are evaluated negatively in terms of their character (Courtemanche & Green, 2020). If femininities are automatically considered more trustworthy than masculinities, they should face a greater reaction when accused of breaking these rules (Cucchi & Cavazza, 2021).

In a scandal, there is, on the one hand, the internal attribution of causality (i.e., the perpetrator has deliberately violated and is responsible for the scandal) that harms the image of the political person. On the other hand, there is the external attribution of causality (causality is attributed to external factors) and implies greater leniency from citizens, because responsibility lies on other factors, instead of the personal one. In the external attribution, masculinities and femininities are evaluated the same. However, when causality attribution is directed to the person involved, people are more lenient with a masculinity rather than with a femininity who commits the same misbehavior, due to the high expectation of maintaining moral integrity on the part of femininities (Cucchi & Cavazza, 2021).

A supplementary, yet significant, concept in the context of the present research is the distinction between soft and hard news. This distinction differentiates news related to issues of high politics (such as politics, foreign policy, and major economic matters) from issues of social interest (such as personal aspects of politicians and melodramatic life stories behind critical events). These concepts were normalized in academic discourse by the widely cited work of Tuchman (1973) on the nature of news. More contemporary terms for this distinction include ‘infotainment’ and ‘tabloidization,’ which encapsulate this differentiation between, we might say, critical and less critical issues, but primarily describe the merging of critical issues with social and melodramatic framing (Uribe & Gunter, 2004). According to Baum (2002), this distinction is significant for democracy because the selective political coverage provided by entertainment-oriented, soft news media inadvertently exposes individuals, who might otherwise remain politically uninformed, to information about prominent political issues. In the present study, this distinction is noteworthy since we are discussing the personal dimension of an international political issue, specifically the dimension of gender.

Delving more into the gender dimension of the “Qatargate”, this effort focused on typologies that were applied when examining differential media representations on the basis of gender. The categories are based on the study of the following scientific texts: Ross (2000), Devitt (2002), Peng et al. (2022), D’Heer et al. (2022), but also on empirical osmosis with the material.

As regards the conceptualisation of femininities in the field of politics, the gender of the journalist has been identified as a relevant parameter in uncovering gender stereotyping in the media (Devitt, 2002). More specifically masculine reporters have been found to be more likely to highlight a female politician’s personal characteristics. Peng et al. (2022) delve deeper by proposing that the

mention of a politician's gender is mainly done for women. This would mean that politician is a word traditionally assigned masculine characteristics and special explanation is required in the case of a femininity having that role. From these two contributions of the literature already the gender of the reporter, mentions of personal characteristics and of the gender of the politician emerge as helpful variables measuring the underlying concept of gender stereotyping.

Furthermore, news prominence represents an additional measure of the image of femininities. D'Heer et al. (2022) who studied media representation of politicians point out that news prominence is defined by how important and engaging a story is for the public. It refers to the number of times politicians are presented and mentioned in the media, for example, whether femininity is named first in a story, named several times, or named in a headline. It has been found that female politicians are portrayed in a gendered manner that emphasizes how different they are from masculine ones, while there is a more explicit reference of the female gender in the media coverage (D'Heer et al, 2022). Thus, news prominence is not only dependent on a number of political factors (including political party, electoral prefecture, position in the electoral ballot etc.), but it is also influenced by the gender of the politician.

The last parameter of importance at the intersection of gender and politics is the existence or not of "sensational" vocabulary for the description of femininities in media. Ross (2000) pinpoints that femininities are portrayed in an emotional and tabloid manner compared to masculinities. Media sensationalize femininities and have as a goal to impress the public by writing "spicy" comments, promoting provocative stories and adding photos related to public figures.

All the above body of theory could serve as a foundation for formulating research hypotheses, which would predict the relationship between two or more variables of the research. Examples of such working hypotheses could be, for instance, "we expect that the masculinities in the "Qatargate" scandal are framed less in terms of gender than the femininities" or "we expect that we will find sensational vocabulary used for the description of Ms. Kaili." Such research hypotheses are naturally interpretively useful and methodologically interesting and are to form part of an extended study involving a deeper qualitative analysis. In selecting research questions over hypotheses, we aim to explore the complexity of our topic more comprehensively, while we plan to expand the research in the methodological framework of research hypothesis in the future.

Taking all the aforementioned into consideration, this study is based on the following research questions, that were developed from the theoretical background, by giving attention to various dimensions of the gender factor.

R.Q.1. What are the predominant elements in the framing of Ms. Kaili?

R.Q.2. When does Ms. Kaili receive a more negative evaluation?

R.Q.3. Which variables constitute the negative evaluation of Ms. Kaili in general and her specific negative evaluation regarding the "Qatargate" scandal?

Methodology and research protocol

The research method employed was quantitative content analysis, a technique that involves quantifying characteristics found in texts to answer the formulated research questions (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Krippendorff, 2018). Through statistical processing of data, associations are derived, allowing for the examination of theoretical assumptions, answering research questions, and even generating new theories (Hayashi, 1950). Quantitative research maintains a stable and inflexible structure, with minimal alterations once initiated, enabling the connection of multiple characteristics across many cases to reveal general trends (Kyriazi, 2001:47, Riffe et al., 2019).

Categorization serves as the core process in content analysis, transforming text into categories that express a specific coding system. This categorization process crystallizes the content into measurable variables for drawing conclusions. A prerequisite for quantitative content analysis is the existence of a codebook that allows for valid measurement (Krippendorff, 2018, Samaras et al., 2015:59-60).

The unit of analysis employed is the reference of MEP Eva Kaili in a news item about the "Qatargate" scandal. In order to quantify the institutional representations of femininities in an international scandal a codebook was developed. Most of its variables were dichotomous, measuring existence or absence. They were divided into those pertaining to the characteristics of the articles and those related to the framings of Eva Kaili in terms of role attributions, in terms of gender stereotypes and in terms of evaluation. The variables relating to the identification of mentions, article characteristics and valence are adapted from studies of national images in the press (Samaras et al., 2017). The variable of the importance of a mention is grounded in the idea that quantity of mentions is an indicator for the importance of a mention at the level of the article. This notion is the translation of the concept of "visibility" that is a measure of the importance of a mention in national images (Samaras et al., 2016) into the individual level of analysis of specific politicians. Finally, the categories relating to framings of politicians and gender are based on the operationalization of the works of Devitt (2002), Peng, et al. (2019), D'Heer, et al. (2022) which has been already presented in the theoretical part of this study.

As regards the procedure of the analysis a corpus of articles from the Francophone newspapers "Le Monde", "Le Figaro", "La Libération" and "Le Soir", mentioning MEP Eva Kaili and the scandal was constructed. French was chosen as a working language as the scandal occurred in a French speaking country and by making this choice the potential alteration of meaning occurring when reporting in different languages could be avoided. Flemish speaking newspapers were not a

part of the corpus as the coders are not fluent in this language. The Belgian “Le Soir” was chosen for its role as the newspaper that first reported on the scandal as it unfolded. The other three French newspapers were selected based on their high circulation coupled with their divergent political positions, with “Le Monde” being classified as a “centre-left”, “Le Figaro” as “centre-right” and “La Liberation as “left wing”. The timeframe of the corpus was from December 2022, the month when the scandal became public knowledge, to February 2023, from which point the “Qatargate” scandal was no longer a topic of the newspapers. From an initial total of 412 articles related to the “Qatargate” scandal only 250 were found to mention MEP Eva Kaili. The present study conducted a census consisting of all of them. The registration unit was the mention of MEP Eva Kaili and the context unit the sentence or paragraph (in the case there were not more than one mention per paragraph) in which she was mentioned.

Before expanding on the findings of the present study it is necessary to address the reliability of the coding process. In the process of conducting this study the researchers opted to create a codebook from scratch, but not run a pre-test. This decision was based on the argument that the coders had worked together on the same material in previous projects and as such they had developed a common understanding of it. What is more since they were only two in the few cases when one was not certain of which code to assign, they could always discuss it and in this way train each other. Nevertheless, concerns arose within the research team regarding the reliability of the findings, as Riffe et al. (2019) underline that intercoder reliability should be the result of statistical testing. To that end a post-analysis intercoder reliability test was conducted. In this, most variables performed very well, with a Krippendorff’s alpha well over .60. However, some variables pertaining to gender representations such as “sensationalism” and “gender” as well as others regarding evaluation performed poorly (Table 5, see data availability statement). This could be attributed to insufficient variation in the sample that was used for the test as well as the fact that quite some time had passed since the initial coding process and the coders were no longer as familiar with the content. This creates doubts about the reproducibility of the findings but not their validity as the coders had worked on the same corpus before albeit with a different objective and had worked on constructing the codebook together leading to their familiarisation with each of the constructs that were included in it.

Findings via numbers

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether and how MEP Eva Kaili’s characteristics as a “44-year-old woman and former TV presenter” are presented to enhance the attractiveness of the issue of “Qatargate”. The findings indicate a selected rhetorical narrative by Francophone Press concerning the portrayal of gender stereotypes upon the image of MEP Eva Kaili in an issue of extended international interest. This section discusses these findings in detail, exploring the role

of gender, its associations with MEP Eva Kaili's characteristics, and how it played a key role in the narration of the scandal.

To begin with, in a total of 412 articles concerning the "Qatargate" scandal, it was found that 250 of them contained a reference to Ms. Kaili (see Table 1).

Table 1.

Mentions of "Qatargate" and "Eva Kaili"

Newspapers	Articles about "Qatargate"	Articles about "Qatargate" that mention MEP Eva Kaili
"Le Soir"	260	142
"La Libération"	33	27
"Le Monde"	61	39
"Le Figaro"	58	42
TOTAL	412	250

Note: Percentages have been rounded up to discrete numbers.

Starting the analysis with the general first picture offered by the quantitative content analysis, 61% of the articles that have a reference to "Qatargate" in all 4 newspapers, have a reference to Ms. Kaili. This is a finding that can be interpreted in terms of personalization of the news, since the main protagonists are expected to have a specific reference to the news. Therefore, this is a relatively expected finding, essentially it is a confirmation of the implicit working hypothesis that permeates this study, namely that there are references to Ms. Kaili where there is a reference to "Qatargate". In particular, "Le Soir" contributes 63% to the total number of articles on "Qatargate", and 55% of those articles refer to Ms. Kaili. This is a finding that can be interpreted in terms of localism : "Le Soir" is the only Belgian newspaper and the scandal is taking place in Belgium. The other newspapers ("La Libération", "Le Monde", "Le Figaro") contain references to Ms. Kaili to the extent of the general average (see Table 2).

Table 2.		
<i>Frequencies of Mentions of "Qatargate" and "Eva Kaili"</i>		
Newspapers	Articles about "Qatar gate"	Articles about "Qatar gate" that mention MEP Eva Kaili in each of the newspapers
"Le Soir"	63%	55%
"La Libération"	8%	82%
"Le Monde"	15%	64%
"Le Figaro"	14%	72%
TOTAL	100%	61%

Note: The percentages from "Articles about 'Qatargate' that mention MEP Eva Kaili in each of the newspapers are derived from the comparison of the total number of articles for each of the newspapers and the number of articles mentioning Eva Kaili (see Table 1.). As regards the total of the same category it is the product of the division of the total number of articles about "Qatargate" in all the newspapers by the total number of articles about "Qatargate" that mention Eva Kaili.

Moving on, and approaching R.Q.1., it is noted that the institutional role and nationality of Ms. Kaili are the dominant frames through which Ms. Kaili is presented in the Francophone Press. Her institutional role in the EU is mentioned by 91%, while her national identity is mentioned by 66% (see Table 3).

Table 3.

Framings of Eva Kaili

Type of frame	Frequencies	
	n	%
Institutional	227	91
National	166	66
Spousal	115	46
Partisan	87	35
Filial	50	20
Gender	33	13
TV Presenter	30	12
Sensational	26	10
Femme fatale	10	4
Maternal	8	3

Note: N=250, total number of "Qatargate" articles mentioning Eva Kaili. Frequencies have been ordered by their prominence.

Therefore, the answer to R.Q.1. is that the predominant frame of Ms. Kaili, is not her gender. At a first level, and without studying the other associations, it would be said that the EU parliamentarian is presented within a frame that focuses on her institutional and ethnic identity.

This observation, however, applies when Ms. Kaili is presented without an evaluative sign, i.e. without receiving any evaluation from the journalist or from the sources of the news, within the text. This observation leads us to the second research question, which stems from the general question: when is Ms. Kaili evaluated negatively?

Approaching R.Q.2., regarding when Ms. Kaili's presentation receives a negative evaluation, it is observed that when Ms. Kaili is not mentioned as a former TV presenter, there is no evaluation of her broader course, at 97%. However, 17 out of 30 times when there is a reference to her former career, there tends to be a negative evaluation of her broader career (57%) (Table 4, see data availability statement). This leads to the conclusion that the reference to an earlier career, stereotypically "lower level" and "feminine" - for an EU institutional representative - is positively associated with a negative evaluation of femininities (see Table 4).

Table 4.

<i>Cross tabulation: Mention of Eva Kaili as a TV Presenter* General Evaluation of Eva Kaili's career</i>						
Mention of Eva Kaili as a TV presenter		General Evaluation of Eva Kaili's career				
		Doesn't Exist	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Total
Doesn't exist	n	213	6	1	0	220
	%	96.8	2.7	0.5	0	100
Exists	n	7	17	1	5	30
	%	23.3	56.7	3.3	16.7	100
Total	n	220	23	3	5	250
	%	88	9.2	0.8	2	100

Note: Percentages have been rounded up to the second decimal.

By delving more into R.Q.2 and answering R.Q.3. regarding which variables constitute the negative evaluation of Ms. Kaili in general and her specific negative evaluation regarding the "Qatargate" scandal, it is noted that, although there is a negative evaluation of Ms. Kaili for her general course of action, her specific negative evaluation for the scandal has a significant moderate positive association only to her nationality, Chi-squared(1, N=250)=32.1, $p<.001$, $\Phi=.36$, and her

institutional role in the EU, Chi-squared(1, N=250)=22.67, $p<.001$, $\Phi=.30$. In other words, it can be extrapolated that Francophone newspapers present a narrative in which Ms. Kaili is negatively evaluated overall with a specific feature to be her status as a former TV presenter, while - on the other hand - she is negatively evaluated for the scandal as a Greek European socialist. Therefore, the negative burden for this particular scandal is shifted more to her Greek and institutional status:

“Suspected of being involved in a vast corruption scheme involving current and former members of parliament (...) the Vice-President (S&D) of the European Parliament - there are a total of 14 Vice-Presidents in the European Parliament - Eva Kaili, of Greek nationality, was arrested on Friday at her home in Brussels.” (Le Soir, 11/12/2022)

while the negative burden for her existence as a whole relates to her "light" professional choices of the past. Several other possible associations were explored however they either beyond the scope of the present study or lacked significance.

Discussion and reflection

The findings of the research provide valuable insights into the representation of MEP Eva Kaili in the context of the "Qatargate" scandal, particularly focusing on the role of her gender, institutional identity, and previous career as a TV presenter. The study reveals a nuanced narrative constructed by Francophone Press, where various frames intersect to shape perceptions of MEP Eva Kaili within the scandal.

Firstly, the analysis highlights the prominence of Kaili's presence in the media coverage related to "Qatargate." With 61% of articles mentioning her out of the total coverage, it's evident that she becomes a central figure in the narrative surrounding the scandal. This personalization of the news underscores the significance of individual characters in shaping public discourse, particularly in cases of political controversy.

Moreover, the study identifies dominant frames through which Kaili is presented, with her institutional role in the EU and her Greek nationality being the most frequently mentioned. This institutional and ethnic identity framing suggests that her portrayal often revolves around her professional and national affiliations rather than her gender or previous career. However, it's crucial to note that gender does play a role, albeit less prominent, with Kaili being mentioned as a former TV presenter in some instances.

The intersectionality of gender and professional background becomes apparent when examining the evaluation of Kaili's career trajectory. The research indicates an association between references to her former career as a TV presenter and negative evaluations of her overall professional journey. This association suggests that her past occupation, stereotypically linked with femininity and

perceived as "lower level" for an EU institutional representative, influences how her broader career is evaluated.

Furthermore, the study delves into the specific negative evaluations of Kaili in the context of the "Qatargate" scandal. Interestingly, while negative assessments of her general actions are associated with her past as a TV presenter, her negative evaluation in relation to the scandal is more strongly linked to her nationality and institutional role in the EU. This distinction suggests a strategic narrative by Francophone newspapers, where different aspects of Kaili's identity are emphasized depending on the context, perhaps to sensationalize or contextualize the scandal.

The link between the negative assessment of Eva Kaili around the scandal and the reference to her nationality is an interesting element given the country of origin of this MEP. Eva Kaili, as an MEP, comes from Greece, the EU member state that was in Europe's spotlight in the 2010's due to its numerous scandals, leading to the country's financial crisis in 2009 that threatened the Eurozone and EU. This time, once again, a representative of this country in the European Parliament - the only EU institution whose members are elected by each member-state concerned - in this case, by Greek citizens - is involved in a major EU scandal, challenging the Parliament's political stature. As a result, the integrity of the European Union have been compromised once again by an official actor from Greece. Therefore, the element of Greekness that is highlighted in the image of Kaili in the specific reference to the Qatargate scandal is not only not a coincidental connection, but constitutes a reminder on behalf of the French Press to the reading public about the causal relationship between the scandal, the MEP and the country of origin of this particular MEP.

Overall, the research sheds light on the complex interplay of gender, nationality, and professional background in shaping media representations of political figures like MEP Eva Kaili. It underscores the importance of examining multiple dimensions of identity when analyzing media narratives and their impact on public perceptions of individuals involved in high-profile controversies.

Additionally, it captures in general the role of media in the way they presented and highlighted facts to make the content of this particular scandal more attractive. Highlighting Kaili as a woman, emphasizing her beauty through photographs, presenting her journey from television to the European Parliament, and underlining her role as a link between the male politicians involved in the scandal in question framed a narrative rather than a news coverage so that the content of the scandal would become more attractive and therefore readable by the public.

Data availability statement

All supplementary materials of this study (including the appendix with the tables, the codebook, the dataset and the syntax) are anonymized and available at: DOI 10.17605/OSF.IO/KY57M
Disclaimer: some of the labels of the variables are in Greek.

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