

## EU member states' humanitarian assistance and issue salience in public discourse: preliminary findings for the 2000 to 2008 period

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WORKING PAPER

**KFG**  
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# EU MEMBER STATES' HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND ISSUE SALIENCE IN PUBLIC DISCOURSE

Preliminary Findings for the 2000 to 2008 Period

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Matteo Garavoglia

No. 29 | August 2011



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# EU MEMBER STATES' HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND ISSUE SALIENCE IN PUBLIC DISCOURSE

## PRELIMINARY FINDINGS FOR THE 2000 TO 2008 PERIOD

**Matteo Garavoglia**

### **Abstract**

The establishment of the European External Action Service (EEAS) that took place with the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty lays the basis for a potentially more coherent and better-structured approach of the European Union to the issue of the provision of humanitarian aid. Within such a context, this paper investigates the relationship between the provision of emergency financial assistance and the extent of the presence of the issue of humanitarian aid in public discourse in seven EU member states. The empirical findings highlight a strong correlation between increases in issue salience and increases in the provision of humanitarian assistance as well as a significant concomitant variation in the issue cycles of the investigated EU member states.

### **The Author**



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## Contents

<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>2. Contextualization, Theoretical Background and Methodological Framework</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>3. Dependent Variable</b>	<b>8</b>
3.1 <i>Total Disbursements for All Investigated Catastrophes per Donor Country</i>	8
3.2 <i>Total Disbursements for All Emergencies Combined as % of GDP per Donor Country</i>	9
3.3 <i>Total Disbursements throughout the Period of Analysis</i>	10
3.4 <i>Disbursements per Donor Country over the Period of Analysis</i>	13
<b>4. Independent Variable</b>	<b>16</b>
4.1 <i>Total Number of Articles on All Natural Disasters Combined per Donor Country</i>	16
4.2 <i>Total Number of Articles over the Period of Analysis</i>	18
4.3 <i>Combined Daily Number of Articles per Donor Country</i>	20
4.4 <i>Total Disbursements against Total Number of Articles - All Countries Combined</i>	22
<b>5. Conclusions</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Literature</b>	<b>27</b>

## 1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to present the preliminary results that emerge from a broader study on the interplay between eventual increases in issue salience on the topic of humanitarian aid in the national public discourse of seven EU member states and the quantity of humanitarian aid provided by these EU member states to disaster-stricken countries. The investigated case studies for this research are the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands and Denmark. These countries are selected in that they cover a wide spectrum of EU member states in terms of their economic, political, historical and institutional nature. Indeed, the selected case studies can be grouped into three categories: EU member states that tend to invest significantly in the provision of humanitarian aid (the Netherlands and Denmark), member states that tend to record average performances (the United Kingdom, France and Germany) and member states that tend overall to invest relatively little in the provision of humanitarian aid (Spain and Italy). Aside from displaying different performances in terms of policy-making, the selected case studies display a high degree of variation also for what concerns different income levels, religious backgrounds, demographics, institutional architectures and colonial backgrounds.

For data collection, a variety of sources are used. Data for the dependent variable (provision of emergency financial assistance) are obtained through the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs' (UN OCHA) Financial Tracking System (FTS). Data for issue salience (the extent to which the issue of humanitarian aid is present in key center-left and center-right newspapers used as proxies to gauge national public discourse) are generated through the use of Lexis Nexis computer-based software. Other potential independent variables are investigated through the analysis of secondary literature and through the use of questionnaires sent to the relevant national authorities. Finally, the study makes use of the International Emergency Events Database (EM-DAT) of the University of Louvain for the collection of data on alternative explanations on the natural disasters themselves.

The first preliminary empirical results of this paper are presented through a four-step approach. Firstly, the paper provides a brief introduction to the context, theoretical background and methodological framework within which it is embedded. Secondly, empirical evidence for the dependent variable concerning the timing and amount of emergency financial assistance is explored. Thirdly, the paper analyzes the empirical evidence for the independent variable of issue salience on the topic of humanitarian aid in national public discourses as represented by the daily number of articles reporting on a selected sudden natural disaster. Finally, the paper offers some very preliminary conclusions that can be drawn by looking at the interplay between the dependent and the independent variables and it highlights the numerous issues that the paper invites to further investigate. While this paper aims to provide a first introduction to some empirical results and the questions that these results invite to further explore, it is important to bear in mind that a significant number of other results can be observed and that these have been investigated at much greater lengths as part of an ongoing and much broader research project that cannot possibly be explored in its entirety in this paper.

## 2. Contextualization, Theoretical Background and Methodological Framework

The research question constituting the general hypothesis that is addressed in this paper is the following: Does greater commitment of a national government to the issue of humanitarian aid correlate to greater positive salience of the above mentioned issue in national public discourse? When looking at issue salience and the news cycle, an increasing amount of evidence seems to suggest that European newspapers display remarkably similar issue cycles and that issue salience in European newspapers seems to follow very similar patterns across member states of the European Union. In the field of foreign affairs, this common pattern has been observed by Trezn in relation to the debate on the "Future of Europe" that was sparked by Joschka Fischer's speech at Humboldt University in Berlin in May 2000 (Trenz 2007), by Kantner and Rendfort on the subject of military and humanitarian intervention (Kantner/Rendfort 2007) and by Van de Steeg and Risse when dealing with the "Haider debate" (Van de Steeg 2006; Van de Steeg/Risse 2007). In his book on the European public spheres, identity and democracy in Europe, Risse again summarizes these findings highlighting the remarkable concomitant variations in the issue cycles of European quality newspapers when dealing with foreign policy issues (Risse 2010). This paper aims therefore and among other questions, to seek further evidence of a concomitant variation in issue salience between European newspapers addressing foreign policy-related issues. It does so with a specific focus on humanitarian aid: one policy area where the European Union sees itself as key agenda setter and a leading political force.

Addressing further theoretical questions, this paper provides some preliminary empirical findings on the extent to which issue salience can enable mass media to influence policy-making on the issue of humanitarian aid. In this respect, this paper is an extrapolation of a much broader research project aiming to test Walgrave and Van Aelst's tentative theory on the mass media's political agenda setting power whereby an increased attention on behalf of mass media to a selected issue translates, under certain conditions, in greater output on behalf of a national government (Walgrave/Van Aelst 2006). Walgrave and Van Aelst's tentative theory proposes a model of analysis that takes into account media input, the political context and political adoption. Media input refers to the kind of issue covered (obtrusive or unobtrusive), the media outlets involved (newspapers, radio, TV or the internet) and the type of coverage offered (positive or negative news). The political context can change in election or "routine" times according to a variety of factors: the institutional rules affecting the legislative process; the internal functioning of government activity on the specific policy area under investigation; depending on who is reported upon by the media (executives or legislative bodies) and the personalization of politics (whereby the government has to show leadership in the form of the prime minister/president).

Political adoption by policy makers of the media's agenda setting power can result in no reaction, slow symbolic reaction, fast symbolic reaction, slow substantial reaction or fast substantial reaction. Looking at media input, the most favorable conditions under which the media might succeed into becoming effective agenda setters are those where the issue is of an unobtrusive type, the involved media outlet is the national broadsheet and the coverage type is "sudden negative news". In relation to the political context, mass media seem more likely to manage to set the political agenda in routine (i.e. non-election) time, when traditional institutional rules of political bargaining do not apply, when the internal functioning of the executive allows for fast substantial reactions, independently of the political configuration and when "personalized politics" push the head of the executive in question to display some sort of resolute leadership

(Walgrave/Van Aelst 2006). Having said that, this paper does not provide a full testing of the theory but rather limits itself to present some preliminary findings that might support their theory and that are investigated in much greater detail in a broader research project currently being finalized.

The results presented in this paper are obtained through a two-step approach. Firstly, the dependent variable is analyzed so as to ascertain the exact day when a specific government provides the disbursement of financial aid in response to a specific sudden natural disaster. Secondly, the independent variable is determined by looking at issue salience in selected national newspapers. Within this context, the dependent variable (DV) of this paper is the disbursement of emergency financial assistance in response to sudden natural disasters. Data for this is provided by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs' Financial Tracking System through an extensive database which includes disbursements provided by the selected national governments for the entire period of analysis, the name of the recipient country and the exact date when a financial contribution was disbursed. The independent variable (IV) is issue salience in public discourse and the data is gathered through the use of Lexis Nexis database. In order to determine the salience of public discourse on the issue of humanitarian aid, a prominent center-left and a prominent center-right quality newspaper for each country is analyzed in the 21 days following each natural disaster in the January 1st 2000 to December 31st 2008 period. This is done so as to encompass both the more liberal and more conservative political affiliations of the broadest possible political spectrum of citizenry and to observe the media's reaction immediately following a natural disaster. The total number of articles published each day on each one of the selected natural disasters under investigation is then recorded.

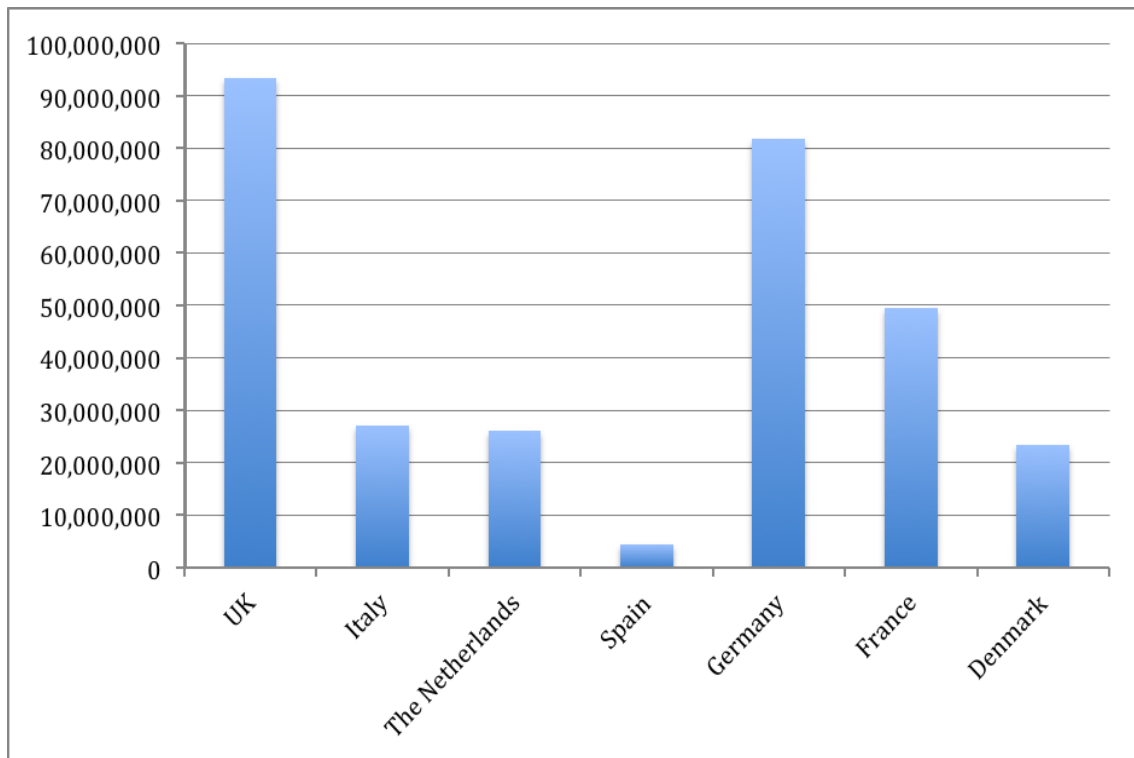
Last but not least, the alternative explanation that should ideally determine a government's provision of emergency humanitarian assistance is represented by the magnitude of each sudden natural disaster under investigation. Sudden natural disasters that according to the International Emergency Events Database of the University of Louvain have recorded over 1000 fatalities, over 1,000,000 affected people and over US\$ 1 billion in estimated damage are therefore selected. The investigated sudden natural disasters are the Gujarat earthquake of the 26th of January 2001, the Bangladeshi floods commencing on the 24th of June 2004, the Southeast Asian tsunami of the 26th of December 2004, the Indian floods of the 24th of July 2005, hurricane Stan on Central America on the 1st of October 2005, the Pakistan earthquake of the 8 October 2005, the Java earthquake of the 27th of May 2006, cyclone Sidr on Bangladesh on the 15th of November 2007, cyclone Nargis on Myanmar on the 2nd of May 2008 and the Sichuan (China) earthquake of the 12th May 2008. For each of the ten sudden natural disasters selected, the following 21 days are investigated in terms of the daily disbursements from donors under investigation (DV) and the daily number of relevant articles published in the two newspapers selected for each donor country (IV). The following pages explore, in turn, both the preliminary findings relating to the dependent variable and those concerned with the independent variable.



### 3. Dependent Variable

#### 3.1 Total Absolute Disbursements for All Investigated Catastrophes per Donor Country (US\$)

Graph 1: Total Disbursements for All Investigated Catastrophes per Donor Country (US\$)



Source: Elaborations from the Financial Tracking Service (FTS) of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA).

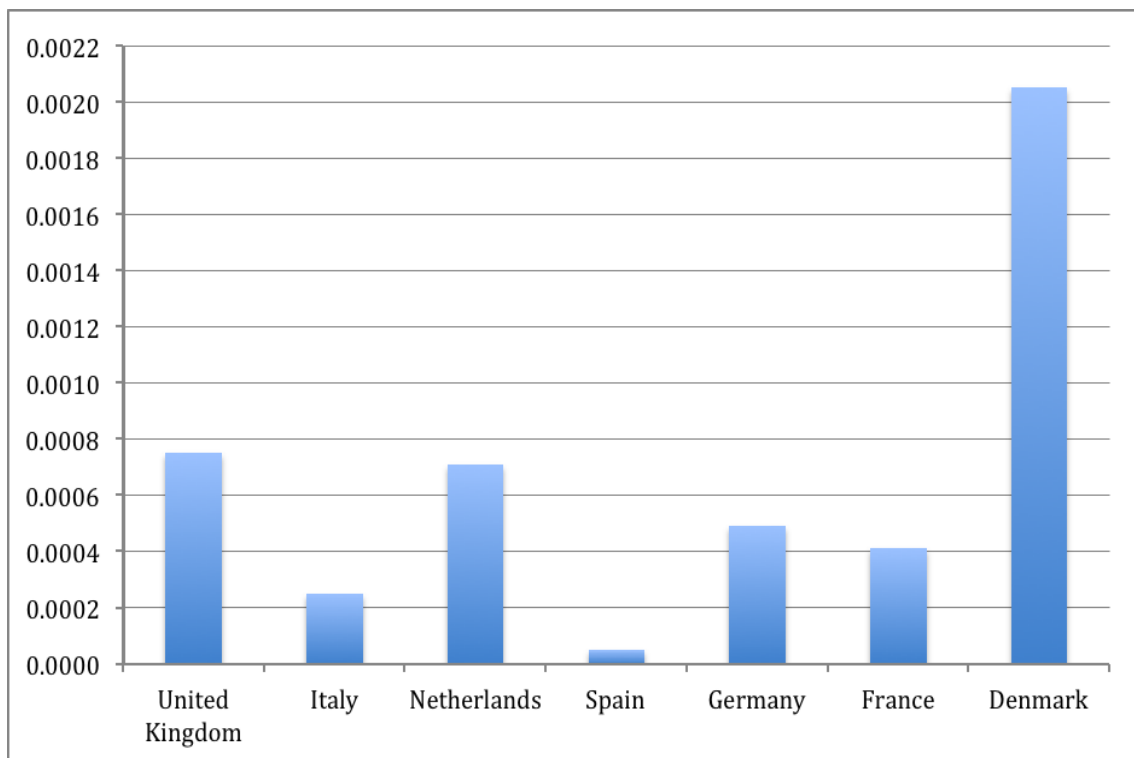
The graph illustrates the total amount of disbursements of emergency financial assistance provided by each donor country for the ten largest humanitarian disasters that took place within the January 1st 2000 to December 31st 2008 period of analysis.

Looking at the graph, the remarkable performance of the United Kingdom comes immediately apparent: despite an economy significantly smaller than that of Germany and comparable to that of France in terms of absolute GDP, the United Kingdom outperforms both of its continental colleagues with an expenditure of over US\$ 90 million. On the other hand, with an economy larger than that of the United Kingdom, Germany only manages to provide just above US\$ 80 million in emergency financial assistance. France, with an economy of comparable size to that of the United Kingdom but an expenditure of just below US\$ 50 million only musters barely more than half of the contribution provided by the United Kingdom. Given the fact that its economy is of a comparable size to those of both the United Kingdom and France, Italy performs particularly poorly with an expenditure of approximately US\$ 28 million: that is equivalent to roughly half the expenditure of France and to one third of the expenditure of the United Kingdom. With an expenditure hovering around US\$ 25 million both the Netherlands and Denmark post an impressive performance when

compared to their peers: while their economies are puny in comparison to those of France and Italy, both the Netherlands and Denmark contribute half of the expenditure of France and even match the expenditure of Italy. Finally, Spain performs particularly poorly: with an economic size in between Italy and the Netherlands, Spain provides only a fraction of the emergency financial assistance provided by its fellow European Union's member states (US\$ 5 million).

### 3.2 Total Disbursement for all Emergencies Combined as % of GDP per Donor Country

Graph 2: Total Disbursements for All Emergencies Combined as % of GDP per Donor Country



Source: Elaborations from the Financial Tracking Service (FTS) of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), as well as Eurostat 2010.

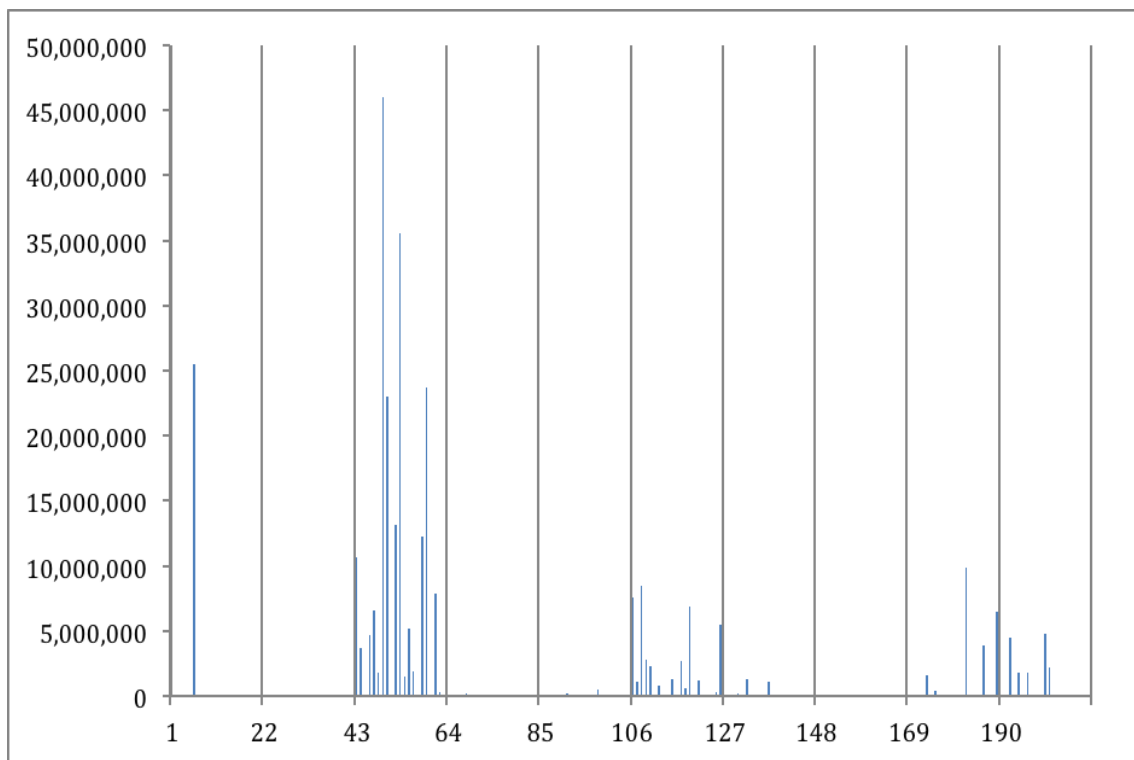
The graph above illustrates the total amount of emergency financial assistance provided by the selected donor countries for all ten humanitarian crises under investigation as a percentage of GDP.

The results are stunning: dedicating over 0.002 per cent of its GDP to emergency humanitarian assistance, Denmark outperforms by far all other EU member states under investigation. Providing more than two and a half times emergency financial assistance as a percentage of GDP than the second-best performing donor under investigation, Denmark is the undisputed "winner" in terms of generosity towards disaster-affected countries. In distant second and third positions respectively, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands manage to provide just around 0.0007 per cent of their GDPs to emergency financial assistance. The

performance of Germany and France is relatively similar and in both cases rather mediocre: the two countries provide approximately 0.0005 per cent and 0.0004 per cent of their GDP in emergency financial assistance. Italy scores particularly poorly by providing only just over 0.0002 per cent of its GDP in emergency financial assistance to disaster-affected countries. Finally, Spain scores bottom of the league with less than 0.0001 per cent of its GDP dedicated to the provision of emergency humanitarian assistance to the countries affected by the humanitarian crises under investigation. To sum up, the analysis of all disbursements as a percentage of GDP portrays a picture where Spain and Italy perform particularly poorly, Germany and France post a mediocre performance and where the United Kingdom and the Netherlands record significantly above average performances. With a stellar performance, Denmark is in a league of her own.

### 3.3 Total Disbursements Throughout the Period of Analysis (US\$) - All Donors Combined

Graph 3: Total Disbursements Throughout the Period of Analysis (US\$) - All Donors Combined



Source: Elaborations from the Financial Tracking Service (FTS) of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA).

The above graph illustrates the total amount of emergency financial assistance provided by all donor countries combined throughout the whole period of analysis. Each of the ten sections in which the graph has been divided contains the 21 days following the onset of each natural disaster under investigation and each number visible on the x-axis represents the first day (the onset) of a natural disaster.

The tsunami of December 2004 (onset on absolute day 43) is the natural disaster that received by far the greatest amount of emergency financial assistance among all natural disasters investigated in the sample. While the fact that the donors under investigation provided over US\$ 45,986,132 in emergency relief for the victims of the tsunami in one single day is in itself outstanding, what is even more exceptional is the total amount of emergency financial aid that was provided over the entire three weeks following the disaster itself. The seven donor countries under investigation provided US\$ 197,859,730 in emergency financial assistance as recorded through the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs' Financial Tracking System. The day of the tsunami itself saw disbursements for a total of US\$ 10,617,179 and, aside from the peak of US\$ 45,986,132 mentioned earlier, five other days saw total disbursements of over US\$ 10 million as well. Throughout the three weeks following the tsunami, only three days saw no financial disbursements to the benefit of the victims of the tsunami coming from the considered seven donor countries. Indeed, the victims of the tsunami received therefore not only substantial but also prolonged assistance from the seven EU member states under investigation.

A second catastrophe that stands out in terms of the quantity of emergency financial assistance received by the affected population in one single day is the Gujarat earthquake (India) of January, 26th January 2001 (onset on absolute day 1). The seven donor countries under investigation provided over US\$ 25 million to the victims of this calamity as recorded by OCHA's Financial Tracking System making it the third natural disaster to receive the most emergency financial assistance (after the December 2004 tsunami and the Pakistani October 2005 earthquake) within the nine-year period of analysis in this study. A word of caution is nevertheless in order at this point for what concerns the provision of humanitarian aid on the occasion of the Gujarat earthquake: while the data for the total amount of financial assistance provided is in as far as possible correct, not the same can be said for its timing. Research carried out on tabulates of the FTS of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has highlighted a situation whereby all donor countries under investigation that reported having provided emergency financial assistance to the victims of the January 2001 Gujarat earthquake, reported doing so on the 31st of January 2001 only. This should lead to use some caution when analyzing the data in that it seems unlikely that all donor countries should provide emergency financial assistance on exactly the same day for the same catastrophe. What is likely to have happened is that emergency financial disbursements might have taken place on a number of different days but have been reported on a set date as the result of administrative requirements on behalf of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. However, disregarding the potential exact timing of the financial assistance provided to the victims of the Gujarat earthquake, it is safe to claim that this was indeed the natural disaster that received the third largest amount of emergency financial assistance from the combined seven donor member states within the whole nine-year period of analysis.

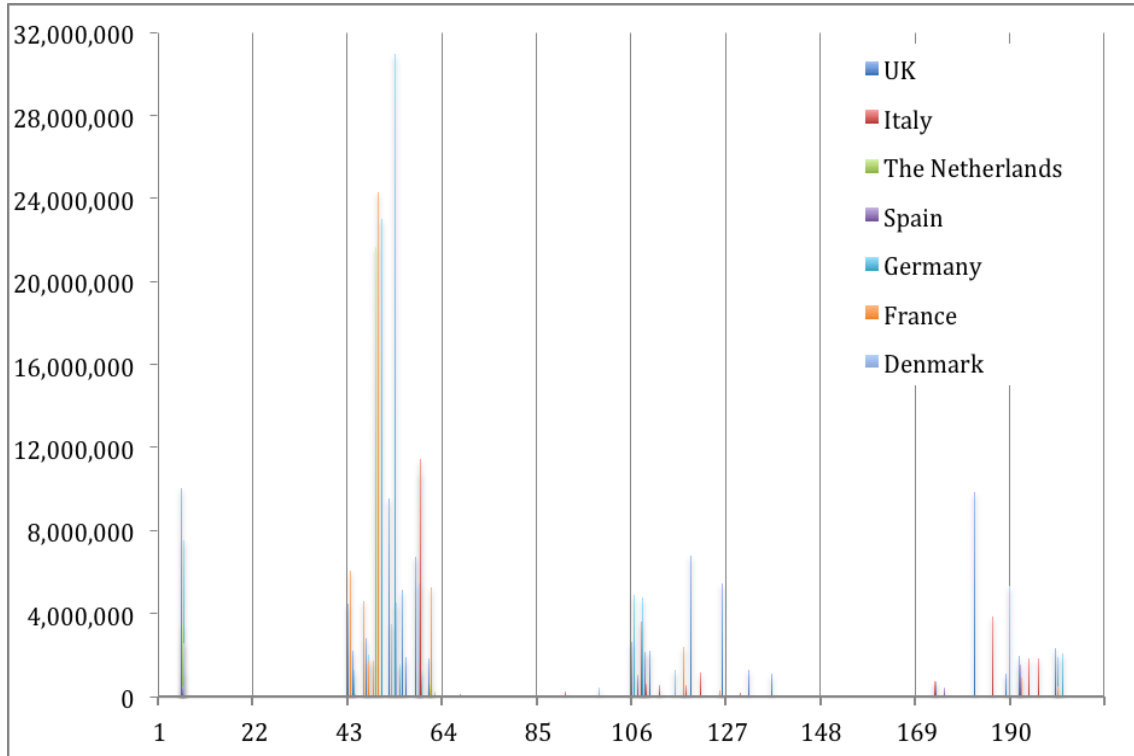
Aside from the tsunami in December 2004 and the Gujarat earthquake in January 2001, at least three other humanitarian catastrophes among those under investigation received substantial emergency financial assistance from the seven EU member states under scrutiny. The victims of the earthquake that shattered

Pakistani-controlled Kashmir on the 8th October 2005 (onset on absolute day 106) received emergency humanitarian assistance to the tune of US\$ 41,737,091 over the three weeks following the quake itself. Within these three weeks, four days clearly stand out as particularly significant in that over US\$ 5 million were donated in each of them. The provision of emergency financial assistance to Pakistan following the October 2005 Kashmir earthquake was both speedy and sustained over the whole three weeks following the disaster: this was the second humanitarian catastrophe (after the December 2004 tsunami) that received the most emergency financial assistance among all the natural disasters under investigation. The victims of cyclone Nargis (onset on absolute day 169) received US\$ 9,861,933 in emergency financial assistance in one single day and a total of US\$ 22,227,252 in emergency financial assistance over the three weeks following the landfall of the cyclone on Myanmar. This was the case despite the questionable handling of the emergency on behalf of the Burmese military junta that donor countries had to deal with. These constraints might nevertheless have significantly accounted for the relative slow response in the disbursement of emergency humanitarian assistance.

According to OCHA's Financial Tracking System, the seven donor countries under investigation provided emergency financial assistance to the tune of US\$ 15,084,589 to the victims of the Sichuan earthquake that shattered China on the 12th of May 2008 (onset on absolute day 190). The bulk of the assistance came over two specific days when the donor countries provided almost US\$ 5 million per day. Three other disasters received emergency financial assistance but on a much more limited scale. The earthquake that struck Java (Indonesia) on the 27th May 2006 (onset on absolute day 127) mobilized US\$ 2,621,672 in emergency humanitarian assistance from the investigated seven donor countries. The bulk of the assistance came in two specific days to the tune of US\$ 1 million per day. When hurricane Stan made its landfall on the Central American Atlantic coast on the 1st of October 2005 (onset on absolute day 85), the seven analyzed EU donor countries answered with the provision of US\$ 796,480 in emergency financial assistance, while the floods that affected the Mumbai region (India) starting from the 26th of July 2005 (onset on absolute day 64) triggered the disbursement of only US\$ 174,577 from the seven donor countries. Finally, on occasion of the Bangladeshi floods that started on the 20th June 2004 (onset on absolute day 22) or cyclone Sidr (Bangladesh) on the 15th of November 2007 (onset on absolute day 148), no EU member state emergency humanitarian assistance was reported through OCHA's FTS.

### 3.4 Disbursements per Donor Country over the Period of Analysis (US\$)

Graph 4: Disbursements per Donor Country over the Period of Analysis (US\$)



Source: The author and elaborations from the Financial Tracking Service (FTS) of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA).

The graph above illustrates the variation in the amount of disbursements provided by each donor country under investigation for the whole period of analysis. The graph has been divided in ten sections. Each section is made up by the 21 days following the onset of each one of the natural disasters under investigation while each number visible on the x-axis represents the day that the onset of a natural disaster was recorded.

By looking at the graph, the exceptional amount of emergency financial assistance provided by all donor countries on the occasion tsunami in December 2004 (onset on absolute day 43) immediately becomes apparent. More specifically, the role played by Germany in leading the commitment and disbursement of humanitarian assistance becomes clear. Indeed, on the occasion of the tsunami, Germany outdid all other donor countries and in two occasions provided donations to the tune of over US\$ 23 million and US\$ 31 million respectively. On this occasion, France also played a significant role in the provision of emergency financial assistance, both with a one-off donation of approximately US\$ 24 million and with a series of multiple donations between US\$ 2 million and US\$ 6 million throughout the three weeks following the tsunami itself. In line with the size of their economies, the United Kingdom and Italy also provided some very significant amounts of financial assistance.

While providing smaller donations throughout the three weeks following the tsunami itself, the United Kingdom provided especially significant assistance on three specific days to the tune of over US\$ 9 million, US\$ 5 million and again US\$ 9 million. On a more limited scale, Italy distinguished itself with a significant one-off donation to the tune of approximately US\$ 12 million well into the third week following the onset of the emergency. Again in line with the size of their economies, the Netherlands and Denmark were the smallest donors on the occasion of the tsunami. Denmark's performance should nevertheless be praised in that, although by far the smallest economy among all the investigated donors, it did nevertheless manage to outdo the Netherlands in terms of total amount of aid provided to the victims of the tsunami.

Last but not least, the almost complete absence of Spain among the donors (only US\$ 100,000 was donated) for the tsunami should be noticed. While this data is indeed surprising, it should be kept in mind that this study only takes into consideration disbursements recorded through OCHA's Financial Tracking System and that, therefore, donations in kind as the ones that came from the Spanish government (which actually mobilized the navy on the occasion of the tsunami in order to provide emergency relief assistance) are not recorded in the graph.

The data concerning the provision of emergency humanitarian assistance to the victims of the January 2001 Gujarat earthquake (onset on absolute day 1) is unreliable to say the very least. It is highly unlikely for the disbursements from all donor countries for this natural disaster to have taken place on the same day. Rather, the timing of the provision of aid as shown in the graph is likely to be distorted due to administrative and reporting requirements. This coincides with 31st of January 2001 and this is likely to be an arbitrary date set by either by OCHA through its Financial Tracking System or by the national governments themselves.

While the timing of the disbursements is unreliable, the quantity is not: on the occasion of the Gujarat earthquake, it was the British and German governments and, to a much more limited extent, the Dutch and the Danish ones that stood out in terms of amounts of emergency assistance provided. The British and the German governments provided approximately US\$ 10 million and US\$ 7.5 million in aid respectively while the Dutch and Danish governments provided approximately US\$ 3 million and 2.5 million respectively, leaving all other potential donor countries far behind in terms of financial commitments. Moving on to cyclone Nargis that made its landfall on the shores of Myanmar in May 2008 (onset on absolute day 169), it can be easily seen how the United Kingdom is the donor that stood out in terms of the amount of humanitarian aid provided with a disbursement of approximately US\$ 10 million. On this occasion, Denmark and Italy came a distant second and third with disbursements of over US\$ 5 million and approximately US\$ 4 million respectively. Interestingly and with the exception of two almost symbolic disbursements from Spain immediately after the landfall of the cyclone, all disbursements that took place in favor of the victims of cyclone Nargis are to be recorded at least two weeks into the emergency, perhaps highlighting the concern of a number of donors that the assistance provided would have been mismanaged or siphoned off to the private bank accounts of the ruling military junta.

Unlike in the case of cyclone Nargis, the disbursements that took place following the Sichuan earthquake (China) on the 12th of May 2008 (onset on absolute day 190) were more limited in terms of amount but more constant over time. Indeed all the donor countries under investigation bar the Netherlands and

Denmark provided emergency aid to the tune of between US\$ 500,000 and US\$ 2.5 million over the two weeks following the quake itself. It might be no coincidence that the two countries that overall score best in terms of the percentage of GDP dedicated to financial emergency assistance to disaster-affected countries did not contribute any financial assistance to the recipient country that is by far the wealthiest of all those included in the sample.

Two more natural disasters to have received substantial emergency assistance as recorded through the Financial Tracking System are the earthquake in Pakistani-administered Kashmir in October 2005 (onset on absolute day 106) and the Java earthquake of May 2006 (onset on absolute day 127). The victims of the October 2005 Kashmir earthquake received substantial assistance from both the German and the British government. The first provided two installments of approximately US\$ 5 million each while the latter provided two installments between US\$ 5.5 million and 6 million each.

On a much more limited scale, all other donor countries contributed emergency assistance throughout the three weeks following the quake itself, but always remained far from the quantities of assistance provided by Germany and the United Kingdom. The victims of the Java earthquake were to receive significantly less financial assistance than their Pakistani counterparts. The assistance provided was indeed to come primarily through two installments from the British government, each to the value of approximately US\$ 1 million and from a tiny disbursement of the Italian government. On a very negative note, it should be observed that hurricane Stan on the 1st of October 2005 (onset on absolute day 85) and the floods that affected western India from the 24th of July 2005 (onset on absolute day 64) saw the mobilization of little more than symbolic amounts of emergency financial assistance from a limited amount of donor countries. Last but certainly not least, the graph clearly illustrates how the victims of the floods that devastated Bangladesh in June 2004 (onset on absolute day 22) and those of cyclone Sidr in November 2007 (onset on absolute day 148) could count on no emergency financial assistance whatsoever from any of the seven EU member states under investigation. The international community effectively left the victims of these two last mentioned crises to themselves.

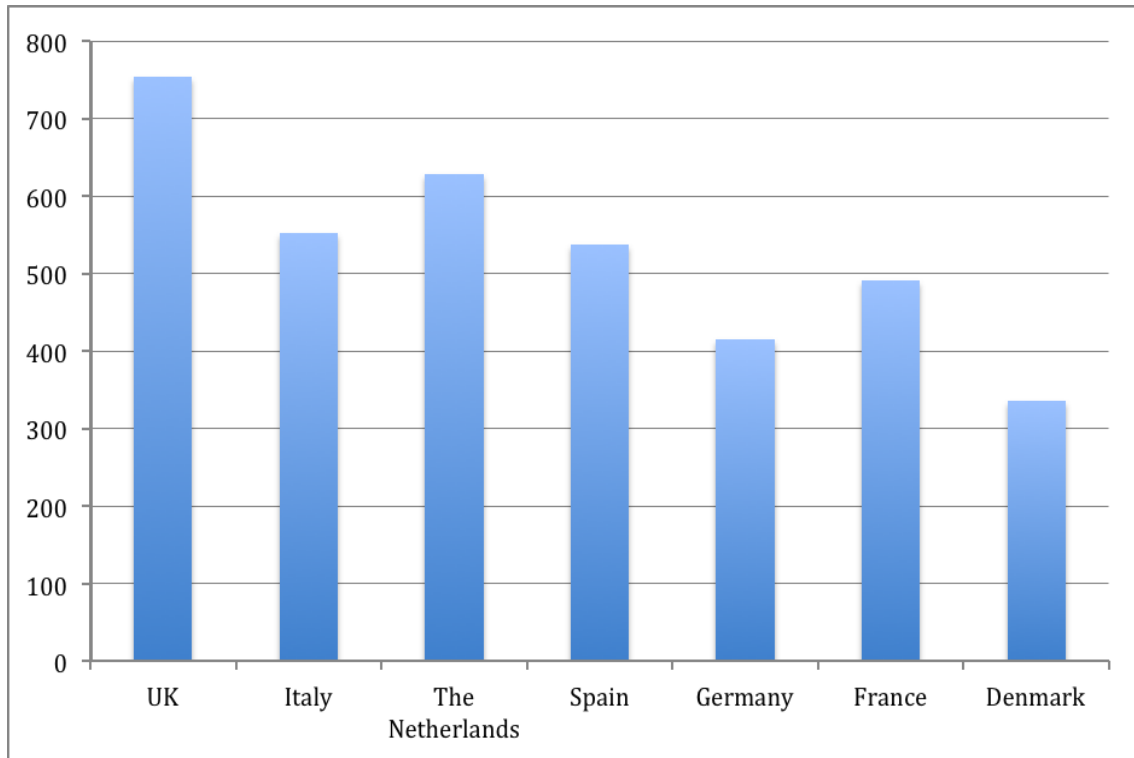
While the previous pages have provided empirical findings concerning the dependent variable constituted by the disbursement of emergency financial aid from European donors to those countries that have been affected by sudden natural disasters, the following pages highlight some of the key empirical findings related to the independent variable constituted by issue salience in key center-left and center-right national newspapers for the EU member states under investigation.



## 4. Independent Variable

### 4.1 Total Number of Articles on all Natural Disasters Combined per Donor Country

Graph 5: Total Number of Articles on All Natural Disasters Combined per Donor Country



Source: The author

The graph above illustrates the total number of articles published in selected center-left and center-right newspapers in each one of the donor states under investigation reporting on all the investigated humanitarian crises. While the ones provided above are simply the absolute numbers of articles published on the selected natural disasters in each investigated donor country throughout the period of analysis, the data is still significant in that it highlights the extent to which the issue of humanitarian assistance is present in different national public discourses.

With 754 articles published, the United Kingdom is the country where issue salience on the topic of humanitarian aid appears to be strongest among the seven European Union member states included in the study. On the other hand of the spectrum and with approximately 335 articles published in its leading center-left and center-right newspapers, Denmark is the country where, at first sight, humanitarian issues are least prominent in terms of issue salience in public discourse. All other donor countries under investigation find themselves somewhere in between the United Kingdom and Denmark in terms of the total number of articles published on the selected humanitarian emergencies.

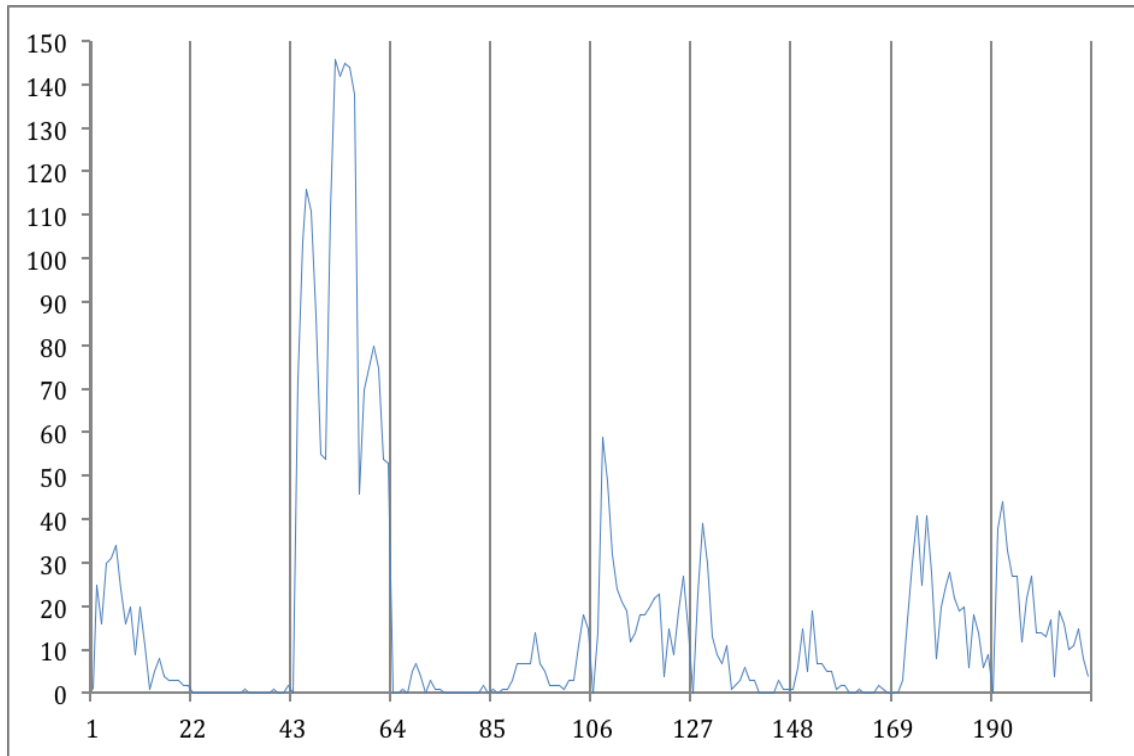
The Netherlands is the donor country with the second highest number of published articles with a total of 629. Two donor countries that do not perform particularly well when it comes to the provision of

emergency of humanitarian assistance to disaster-stricken countries, Italy and Spain, come in respectable third and fourth positions in terms of the total number of articles that their key center-left and center-right newspapers dedicate to the humanitarian emergencies included in the study. Indeed, Italy and Spain recorded respectively a total of 552 and 538 articles. Finally, France and Germany rank fifth and sixth respectively for what concerns the total number of published articles: the former with 491 and the latter with 415 articles.

Having ranked the seven investigated donor countries according to the total number of articles published on the analyzed natural disasters in the 1st of January 2000 to the 31st of December 2008 period, a word of caution is necessary when making claims following an analysis of their respective center-left and center-right newspapers. Firstly, some newspapers (such as is the case with the Guardian in the United Kingdom) might publish a “development and third world” section on a regular basis thus almost automatically highlighting and upgrading the exposure that issues related to humanitarian and development aid get in public discourse. Secondly, different countries might display different “newspaper cultures and traditions” whereby a newspaper might either have a larger total number of articles of shorter length or a more limited number of articles of greater length and depth. Finally, some daily newspapers might be published on Sundays while others are not, thus increasing the total number of potential articles of the former newspapers compared to the latter. All these factors highlight the fact that, although still significant, the results displayed in the graph should not be taken at face value.

#### 4.2 Total Number of Articles over the Period of Analysis - All Donors Combined

Graph 6: Total Number of Articles over the Period of Analysis - All Donors Combined



Source: The author

This graph above illustrates the total number of articles published in all 14 newspapers combined for all the seven European Union member states analyzed in the study. Each one of the ten sections in which the graph has been divided represents one natural disaster. Each natural disaster is monitored from the day of its onset for the following 21 days while each number visible on the x-axis refers to the onset of a selected natural disaster.

Sunday, the 26th of December 2004 registers a sudden and exceptional increase in the total number of articles published in the analyzed newspapers: this is the day that the tsunami struck Southeast Asia, killing just short of a quarter of a million people (absolute day 43). It is interesting to observe that the total number of articles skyrocketed on the very same day as the tsunami struck: this can be attributed to the fact that there are six time zones between the European Central Time (ECT) and the time zone of the areas struck by the tsunami themselves. Also, the tsunami struck in the early morning of the 26th of December local time: this was still the night of 25th in Europe and therefore newspapers had the chance to “get the story out” already on 26th December in Europe. Still, it took a few days for both the magnitude of the disaster to become apparent and for journalists from Europe to converge on the scene of the disaster: this would explain a second and even more exceptional increase in issue salience well into the second week following the onset of the tsunami when a peak of 146 articles per day was recorded. Interestingly, issue salience remained extremely high for an exceptionally long period of time as European newspapers covered and developed the stories related to the aftermath of the disaster. Finally, it is worth noticing that the

tsunami of 2004 registered an exceptional number of casualties among European tourists: a feature that ensured an extended and high degree of prominence for the natural disaster in European newspapers as these reported on the unfolding stories affecting both local and foreign survivors.

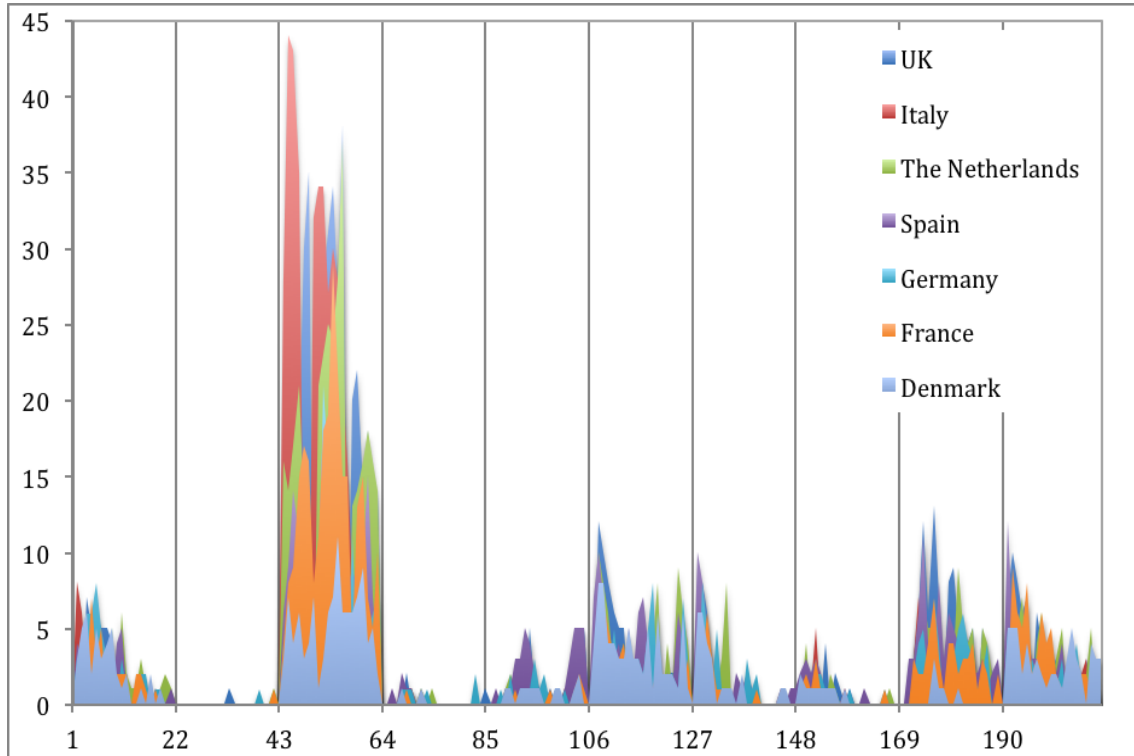
The earthquake that struck Pakistani-administered Kashmir of October 2005 (onset on absolute day 106) is the natural disaster that recorded the second-highest number of articles dedicated to a humanitarian catastrophe in a single day among those investigated: 60 articles were published in the selected newspapers on the day immediately following the quake. Issue salience for this humanitarian emergency remained sustained throughout the three weeks following the quake itself with a number of days recording a total of more than 20 articles and almost every day recording more than ten articles.

Three other humanitarian disasters within the study can be clustered into one specific group for what concerns dynamics in issue salience: the Gujarat earthquake in January (onset on absolute day 1), cyclone Nargis on Myanmar in May 2008 (onset on absolute day 169) and the Sichuan earthquake (China) in May 2008 (onset on absolute day 190). All these three natural disasters displayed a typical pattern in terms of issue salience that saw a dramatic increase in the total number of articles published within the three days immediately following the catastrophe itself, a sharp drop in the number of articles within one week and then a slower, steady and sustained decrease in the total number of articles throughout the second and the third weeks following the onset of the catastrophe. Still in terms of issue salience, the pattern registered for the Java earthquake (Indonesia) of May 2006 (onset on absolute day 126) is somewhat similar to the three catastrophes mentioned above but with one marked difference: the peak in the number of articles covering the earthquake recorded within the first week following the quake itself (39 in a single day) is followed by a much steeper decline in the total number of published articles. Indeed, the second and the third week following the onset of the earthquake immediately record a very limited number of articles and even days with no articles at all thus highlighting a state of affairs whereby a high degree of issue salience was not sustained over a prolonged period of time.

Last but not least, the remaining four humanitarian emergencies under investigation can be clustered together in light of the fact that they all received very little to almost no news coverage. Within this cluster, a first subset of countries is represented by those affected by hurricane Stan starting on the 1st of October 2005 (onset on absolute day 85) and by the disaster that struck Bangladesh when the country was ravaged by cyclone Sidr's landfall on November 15th, 2007 (onset on absolute day 148). These two natural disasters saw a very limited but still significant amount of issue salience (with peaks of 18 and 19 articles per day respectively). On the one hand, hurricane Stan recorded a peculiar increase in the number of articles immediately after landfall, a lull between the second and the third week following the onset of the emergency and finally a sudden increase on the number of articles reporting on it on the third week after the onset of the emergency. Cyclone Sidr, on the other hand, followed a typical issue salience cycle as explained previously in the case of the Gujarat earthquake, cyclone Nargis and the Sichuan earthquake, but to a much more limited extent. The second subset of natural disasters to have received very little reporting in national newspapers is made up by the floods that ravaged Bangladesh in June 2004 (onset on absolute day 22) and by the floods that affected the Mumbai region (India) in July 2005 (onset on absolute day 64). Both these two humanitarian emergencies were virtually ignored by the investigated newspapers. Indeed, no more than seven articles per day were ever recorded for these two catastrophes that went almost unnoticed in all the analyzed donor countries.

#### 4.3 Combined Daily Number of Articles per Donor Country

Graph 7: Combined Daily Number of Articles per Donor Country



Source: The author

The graph above illustrates the combined daily number of articles published by the two newspapers analyzed for each of the seven donor countries under investigation reporting on all the selected humanitarian crises. The graph has been divided in ten sections: each number visible on the x-axis highlights the onset of one of the ten natural disasters under investigation and each section the 20 days following the onset of the catastrophe itself.

A number of patterns can be observed by looking at the graph. To begin with, two interesting patterns can be noted for what concerns increases in issue salience on the topic of humanitarian aid among both the best and the worst performing countries in terms of humanitarian aid provision. Italy is a country that generally scores poorly in terms of humanitarian assistance provided as well as in terms of development aid assistance. Denmark, on the other hand, is a country that performs extremely well in terms of humanitarian aid performance as well as in the provision of long-term development assistance. The graph illustrates interesting dynamics for countries that are at odds in terms of the quality and quantity (as measured as a percentage of GDP) of both humanitarian and development assistance provided. Throughout the period of analysis, issue salience on the selected natural disasters seems to be remarkably low in Italian newspapers and, indeed, throughout a number of crises Italian newspapers publish either a very limited number of articles or none at all. Following the onset of the December 2004 tsunami (onset on absolute day 43), however, issue salience skyrocketed in Italian newspapers and these went as far as publishing peaks of up to 34 and 44 articles per day, making Italy the country that most reported on the December 2004 tsunami

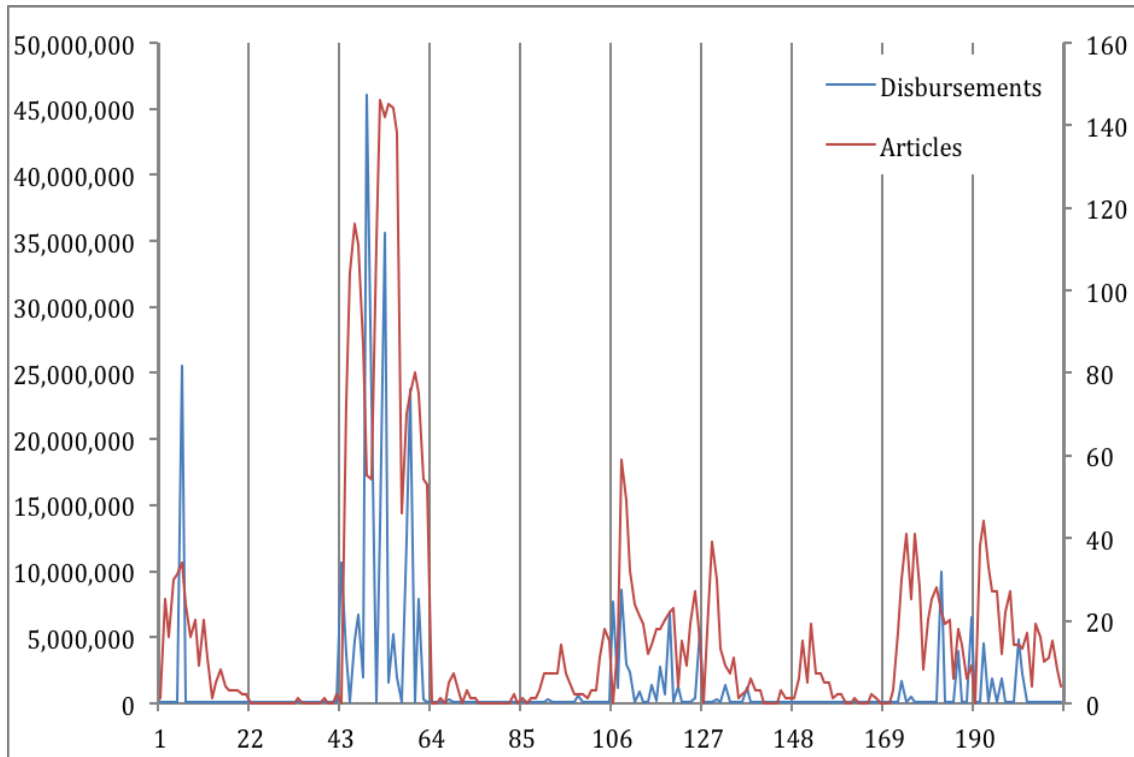
among all donor countries under investigation. Throughout the period of analysis, issue salience on the selected natural disasters seems to be remarkably steady and constant in Danish newspapers: throughout almost every investigated crisis, Danish newspapers publish a substantial although not exceptional number of articles. Following the onset of the December 2004 tsunami, however, Danish newspapers published a significant number of articles on the catastrophe (with peaks of 11 per day) but not even a comparable number to the ones published in Italian newspapers. Indeed, throughout the period of analysis, the number of articles published in Danish newspapers remained always extremely steady with a variation of only between zero and eleven articles per day. These data suggest that the best and the worst performing countries in terms of humanitarian aid provision within the sample of analysis follow completely different trajectories in terms of issue salience: the former displaying very limited degrees of variation in terms of issue salience throughout time, while the latter displaying extremely high degrees of variation over time.

A second pattern that can be observed is the relatively similar timing that all donor countries display in terms of the day when articles are published. Aside from those outlier cases when the natural disaster under investigation is either over-reported upon (the tsunami of December 2004) or under-reported upon (the Bangladeshi floods commencing on the 24th of June 2004 and Indian floods commencing on the 24th of July 2005), newspapers across countries seem to behave in a very similar way in terms of issue salience. For the overwhelming majority of natural disasters analyzed, national newspapers publish the greatest number of articles in the three days immediately following a catastrophe. The peak of the first three days are then usually followed by a sudden and sharp decrease in the total number of articles published which is in turn followed by a steady but slower decrease in the total number of articles published in the following two to three weeks. This pattern can be clearly seen for the Gujarat earthquake (onset on absolute day 1), the Java earthquake (onset on absolute day 127) and the Sichuan earthquake (onset on absolute day 190).

Finally, a pattern can be observed on political and diplomatic issues that intersect with natural disasters: the selected newspapers of all donor countries under investigation react in similar ways in terms of the amount of reporting carried out on the political aspects of humanitarian catastrophes. Indeed, this pattern is quite clear both in the case of the earthquake that affected Pakistani-controlled Kashmir (onset on absolute day 106) and cyclone Nargis (onset on absolute day 169). In both occasions and following the "standard" peak in the total number of articles immediately after the onset of the catastrophe and the subsequent sharp decrease in issue salience, the number of articles increases to report on the diplomatic struggles and political challenges involving both donor and recipient countries.

#### 4.4 Total Disbursements (US\$) against Total Number of Articles - All Countries Combined

Graph 8: Total Disbursements (US\$) against Total Number of Articles



Source: The author and elaborations from the Financial Tracking Service (FTS) of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA).

The graph above illustrates the relationship between the total number of articles published by all newspapers under investigation and the total amount of disbursements by all donor countries under investigation for all the selected humanitarian crises within the period of analysis. The left y-axis displays disbursements for the period of analysis while the right y-axis displays the number of articles published throughout the whole period of analysis. The numbers visible on the x-axis correspond to the day of the onset of each one of the ten natural calamities analyzed while each one of the ten sections in which the graph has been divided into is made up by the 20 days following the onset of the catastrophe itself.

What is striking about the graph is that peaks in issue coverage usually pre-date peaks in actual disbursements. This finding would seem to imply the presence of a causal mechanism confirming the general hypothesis whereby an increase in issue salience leads to an increase in a donors' provision of emergency financial assistance. However, a more detailed investigation of the graph's dynamics is necessary in order to explore whether causality is taking place. When observing the dynamics for the tsunami in December 2004 (onset on absolute day 43) one can clearly see that an exceptional increase in the amount of articles published on this natural disaster (issue salience) clearly precedes an unprecedented increase in the amount of emergency financial assistance disbursed by the donor countries. While a significant surge in disbursements can be observed on the day of the tsunami itself with total disbursements for almost US\$ 11 million

it is in the first week following the tsunami itself that the amount of published articles skyrockets to 115 per day. Indeed, it is after this exceptional peak and with the beginning of the second week following the tsunami that donor countries put hands to their wallets to an unprecedented scale. On the second week following the tsunami, the investigated EU member states managed to provide emergency financial assistance up to the tune of US\$ 46 million and almost US\$ 36 million per day thus far exceeding the amount of disbursements recorded for any other natural catastrophe. During the second week following the tsunami, the total number of articles published in the investigated newspapers reaches and maintains for a few days unprecedented peaks of almost 150 per day. The third week following the tsunami saw both a decrease in the total number of published articles and in the total amount of emergency financial assistance provided. Nevertheless, with a peak of 80 articles per day and a peak of almost US\$ 24 million in donations, the values remained exceptionally and substantially higher than those recorded at any time for any other natural disaster. Throughout the three weeks following the tsunami, increases in issue salience seem always to precede increases in the total amount of emergency financial assistance provided by the donor countries.

Among those investigated, the humanitarian crisis that recorded the second largest amount of donations is the Gujarat earthquake of January 2001 (onset on absolute day 1): the seven EU donor countries under analysis provided over US\$ 25 million for the victims of the Indian quake. Unfortunately and as it has been mentioned above, the data for what concerns the exact timing of the disbursements of financial assistance is unreliable. What can be observed, however, is a rather typical pattern in terms of issue salience, with an increase in the total number of articles published in the days immediately following the earthquake itself (with a peak of 35 articles per day) and then a gradual but steady decline in terms of issue salience over the three weeks following the catastrophe.

The data is both more reliable and interesting for what concerns two catastrophes that took place in May 2008: the landfall of cyclone Nargis on the shores of Myanmar in May 2008 (onset on absolute day 169) and the Sichuan earthquake that devastated parts of central China in May 2008 (onset on absolute day 190). In both instances, a significant increase in the total number of published articles was followed by a substantial increase in the amount of emergency assistance provided. Cyclone Nargis saw twice a peak of 42 articles per day reporting on the catastrophe, while the Sichuan earthquake recorded a peak of 44 articles per day reporting on the disaster. In terms of financial disbursements, the victims of cyclone Nargis received up to US\$ 10 million in emergency humanitarian assistance in one single day while the victims of the Sichuan earthquake received up to slightly more than US\$ 4 million per day. Both natural catastrophes saw increases in issue salience preceding increases in the provision of humanitarian assistance and a typical decrease in both the number of articles published and the amount of emergency assistance provided over the three weeks following the onset of the disasters. In these respects, both cyclone Nargis and the Sichuan earthquake were "typical crises".

Last but not least, an extra word should be spent on the dynamics that followed the landfall of cyclone Nargis on Myanmar. As the graph clearly illustrates, there was a significant time lag between an increase in issue salience and an increase in the amount of emergency assistance provided. There was also a significant drop in the number of articles published on the catastrophe in the second week following the cyclone's landfall and then a sudden new increase in terms of issues salience. Both phenomena can be attributed to the peculiar political situation in Myanmar whereby a military junta rules the country and where donor



countries waited a number of days before allowing for the provision of emergency assistance in order to observe whether the military rulers would have effectively used the aid provided for the affected population or not. Within this context, therefore, the media shifted the focus of their attention (after the drop in issue salience) away from the catastrophe itself and towards the political controversies surrounding the diplomatic conflict between the military junta and the international community.

Two more natural disasters that saw significant reporting in terms of issue salience and humanitarian assistance provided are the earthquake that struck Pakistani-administered Kashmir in October 2005 (onset on absolute day 106) and the Java earthquake (Indonesia) of May 2006 (onset on absolute day 126). While both catastrophes were followed by a typical increase in the number of articles published immediately after the disasters (with peaks of 60 and 39 articles per day each) and a slow and steady decrease in the number of articles reporting on the catastrophes in the three weeks following the disasters, no clear increases in the amount of humanitarian assistance provided could be recorded as result of these increases in issue salience. Indeed, on both occasions, humanitarian aid seemed to have been provided (or not) independently of increases in the number of articles published with donations taking place immediately following the disasters themselves or many days after the catastrophes or not at all. No clear pattern can be discerned in these two occasions.

Finally, two patterns can be seen when observing the remaining four natural disasters under investigation: one of increases in issue salience without increases in disbursements and one of both no increases in issue salience and no significant disbursements either. The havoc caused by hurricane Stan on Central America on in October 2005 (onset on absolute day 85) and the devastation brought about by cyclone Sidr on Bangladesh in November 2007 (onset on absolute day 148) are fitting examples of the first pattern. In both cases, noticeable increases in the total number of articles published by the investigated newspapers on each of the crises (with peaks of 13 and 19 articles per day respectively) was not followed by any substantial increase in the amounts of humanitarian aid provided. On the other hand, examples of the second pattern can be seen in the cases of the floods that affected Bangladesh starting in June 2004 (onset on absolute day 22) and the floods that affected western India starting in July 2005 (onset on absolute day 64). In both these instances, the amount of issue salience dedicated to the catastrophes was minimal (with the total number of articles published by all investigated newspapers never exceeding a peak of 6 per day) and the amount of emergency financial assistance being provided (as recorded through OCHA's Financial Tracking System) being nil.

## 5. Conclusions

The aim of this paper was to provide an overview of the preliminary empirical findings of a study on the relationship between increases in issue salience in public discourse on the issue of humanitarian aid and the quantity of emergency financial assistance provided by EU member states. The selected case studies were the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands and Denmark. These countries were chosen to include a wide spectrum of EU member states in terms of the quantity and quality of humanitarian aid provided as well as to ensure great variation in the religious, economic, political and historical background of the states under investigation.

Data sources that were used are the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs' Financial Tracking System for the dependent variable, Lexis Nexis computer-based database for the independent variable and the International Emergency Events Database of the University of Louvain for the alternative explanations and the data on the disasters themselves.

The preliminary empirical findings were presented through a three steps approach. Firstly, an overview of the contextualization, the theoretical background and the methodological framework of the paper were provided. Secondly, an exploration of the results pertaining to the dependent variable of humanitarian aid provision was carried out. Finally, an analysis of the independent variable of issue salience in national public discourses was presented.

Summing up the first results presented in this paper, a number of observations can be extrapolated from the empirical evidence gathered so far. Firstly, overall there seems to be a positive concomitant correlation between an increase in issue salience (IV) and an increase in the provision of emergency financial assistance (DV) following a sudden natural disaster (CNN effect). This observation is particularly significant given the fact that, for those natural disasters that receive very limited or no news coverage, no disbursement of humanitarian aid seems to be forthcoming. Indeed, on a temporal dimension, increases in disbursements seem to frequently follow increases in the total number of articles published to report on the sudden natural disaster for which an increase in disbursement is later recorded. This phenomenon can be observed for both the combined results including all EU member states under investigation (Graph 8) and for EU member states taken individually (not shown in this paper).

Secondly, an increase in issue salience in national newspapers (IV) seems to have a stronger impact on the provision of emergency financial assistance (DV) in those member states that overall perform poorly in terms of the provision of humanitarian aid. This seems to be the case when examining the performance (both in terms of issue salience and government's disbursement) for very different countries such as Italy and Denmark whereby the former provided significant humanitarian assistance only in catastrophes that attracted the attention of the media while the latter displays stable amounts of disbursements across different crises independently of peaks in the total number of articles reporting on a specific sudden natural disaster.

Thirdly, while on the one hand the "swings" in the total number of published articles for different sudden natural catastrophes seem to be more significant in countries that tend to overall perform poorly in the

provision of humanitarian aid, on the other hand the variation in the total number of articles published on each of the selected natural disasters under investigation seems to be much more limited in donor countries that provide the greatest amounts of humanitarian aid as percentage of their GDP. This pattern can be observed in Graph 6 and Graph 9 whereby Italy and Spain stand for the first set of countries and Denmark and the Netherlands for the second set of countries.

Fourthly and for what concerns individual countries, both a puzzle and a confirmation of the general hypothesis can be observed. On the one hand, Denmark's performance presents a significant empirical puzzle. While Denmark is by far the best performing country in terms of the provision of emergency humanitarian assistance as a percentage of GDP, the country is also the one with the most limited amount of published articles on the investigated sudden natural disasters among all the seven donor countries taken into consideration. Denmark is in many respects an outlier in terms of empirical findings and the reasons for the country's very specific data are probably to be searched in the very reasons contributing to its impressive performance in terms of emergency humanitarian aid provision.

On the other hand, the United Kingdom seems to be the country that at first sight best confirms the general hypothesis that an increase in issue salience should lead to an increase in a government's disbursement of humanitarian aid. The United Kingdom is indeed the best performing country in terms of the provision of emergency assistance in absolute terms (beating Germany despite having a significantly smaller absolute GDP) and it is also the country with the highest total number of articles published on the selected sudden natural disasters.

Finally and perhaps most interestingly, a coordination of issue cycles could be noticed. Indeed, European newspapers seem to report with remarkably similar timings and degrees of intensities on the investigated sudden natural disasters. This evidence seems to confirm the findings of previous research that concentrated on "hard" military interventions and CFSP issues (Kantner/Rendfort 2007) and highlight that also in the "soft" foreign policy realm of humanitarian aid, there appears to be a synchronization of issue cycles across the investigated EU member states.

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