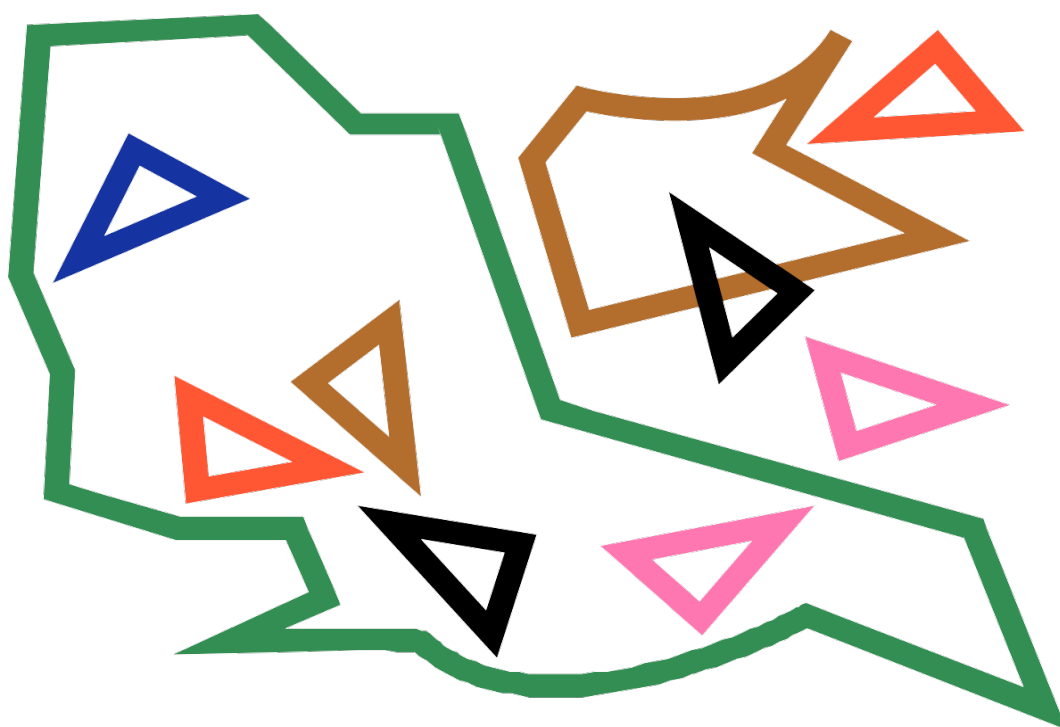


Policy Brief # 2

The role of minority media in shaping narratives on borders and Europe

B-Shapes - Borders Shaping Perceptions of European Societies



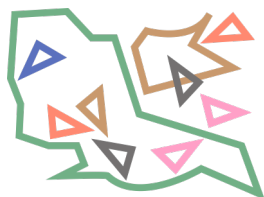
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Executive Summary

This policy brief examines how minority media cover border-related issues in four European borderlands populated by autochthonous national minorities. In these borderlands, cross-border interactions are a significant aspect of daily life for many residents, especially for those belonging to a national minority (Czechia-Poland, Denmark-Germany, Italy-Austria, Hungary-Slovakia). We focus on two re-bordering events: the migration crisis of 2015/16 and the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020. By analyzing over 1,700 minority media newspaper articles, we show how media narratives frame perceptions of borders and the European Union in these minority communities. Our study reveals a gap between local concerns and the broader European context, with limited inclusion of diverse voices in minority media. This highlights the complex nature of border narratives in minority regions and their impact on European integration. The findings call for more inclusive and diverse media representation and better integration of local and European perspectives to support European integration and address the unique challenges minority communities face in border areas. Local concerns often dominate media reporting, but linking these with broader European narratives is crucial. Through policies that support improved diversity in media representation, a stronger role for the EU in border and cross-border policies, and the promotion of European heritage and values, we can build a more resilient, inclusive, and democratic European society that respects and supports its minority communities in border regions.



Context

In recent years, Europe has seen a renewed emphasis on political borders, especially during the so-called migration crisis in 2015/16 and the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. During this period, political, symbolic, and cultural boundaries became more tangible and more present in public discourse, affecting the movement of people and goods and the broader process of European integration. For national minorities, cross-border connections are vital to their daily lives and social fabric-. Re-bordering events can, therefore, be especially challenging for them and are subject to intensive and often highly politicized debate. Minority media play a key role in these debates and contribute to shaping minorities' perceptions of borders and Europe through the framing and narration of re-bordering events. They serve as vital platforms for often marginalized minority voices and local perspectives. Therefore, it is important to recognize and support the role of minority media in fostering a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of borders and European integration.

Overview of the recognised national minorities and the analysed newspapers

Minority	Settlement area and size ^[1]	Newspaper	
German minority in Denmark	North Schleswig Estimated 12,000-15,000	Der Nordschleswiger	Language: German Daily paper (six days a week) until 2021 Since 2021 online medium with a bi-weekly printed version
Danish minority in Germany	South Schleswig Estimated 50,000	Flensburg Avis	Language: Danish Published in print six days a week
German-speaking minority in Italy	Autonomous Province of Bolzano/Bozen (South Tyrol) 314,604 according to 2011 census	Dolomiten	Language: German Published in print six days a week
Polish minority in Czechia	Predominantly in Zaolzie region (Těšínské Slezsko) Estimated 20,000-40,000	Głos	Language: Polish Published in print twice a week and online medium
Hungarian minority in Slovakia	Predominantly in southern Slovakia; in the census of 2021, 422,065 declared Hungarian ethnicity and 462,165 Hungarian as native language	Új Szó	Language: Hungarian Print newspaper (6x/week) and online news portal
		Felvidék.ma	Language: Hungarian Online news portal

^[1] Our study focuses on these recognised national minorities. Numbers are based on either available estimations or census data.



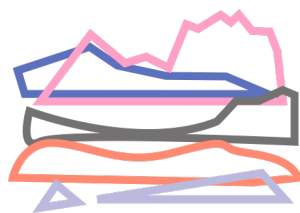
Evidence, Analysis, and Results

We analyzed over 1,700 border-related articles from six minority newspapers in Czechia, Denmark, Germany, Italy, and Slovakia, focusing on the periods of increased migration in 2015-2016 and the border closures enacted in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. This analysis uncovered several key findings about the media narratives surrounding borders and Europe.

First, we found a range of narratives about borders, from seeing them as bridges connecting people to viewing them as fences separating them. Borders were often described as special places with unique identities and significant emotional and social value for minorities. However, a clear gap existed between local concerns and the broader European context. Media coverage focused mainly on local issues, with little discussion of European concerns or the EU's role in border policies. This contributed to a narrative in which the EU is viewed as a distant entity, primarily seen as a policymaking and funding body, with little emphasis on Europe as a shared space with common heritage, values, and beliefs. Another important finding was that border policies were mostly attributed to individual countries rather than the European Union. Kin-states were often highlighted in the news, being portrayed as more responsible for border policies than the EU or the country where minorities live. For many minorities, cross-border connections are experienced as transnational more than genuinely European, adding to the disconnect between local experiences and European narratives.

Additionally, it is a matter of concern that representation in the media landscape was quite narrow and gender-biased, mostly featuring the voices of male politicians. Perspectives from civil society, women, young people, and migrants were largely missing, reflecting a narrow media narrative focused on elites. This lack of diverse voices contributes to an incomplete portrayal of border-related issues and a loss of opportunity for building understanding across Member States of the roles that borders and border regions can play in an enhanced EU integration and cohesion process.

Finally, re-bordering was predominantly framed in terms of the free movement of goods and commuters, suggesting a market-centered perspective (but also an indication of the relevance of re-bordering to emerging cross-border workforces and labour markets), and from a perspective of security, strong external borders, and national policy which largely ignored the substate crossborder dimension. Only to a much smaller degree, the media presented narratives about the social and cultural dimensions of re-bordering.



Policy Recommendations to Media Organizations and Media Networks

Diversify Voices in Reporting: Include perspectives from civil society, women, young people, and migrants to provide a more comprehensive and diverse narrative on border-related issues.

- Actively seek diverse interview partners and perspectives
- Reflect diversity in the composition of the newspaper staff and boards
- Create spaces for reflective discussions on male gender bias in journalism
- Create or contribute to databases of experts from under-represented contexts (e.g. women, civil society organisations, migrants, local inhabitants, and persons with disabilities)
- Cooperate and participate in journalism training on male gender bias
- Cooperate with journalism training providers on diversity and inclusion issues, including male gender bias.
- Cooperate with journalism training providers to enhance knowledge about EU integration and European cohesion issues.

Emphasize Human Stories: Balance what is a tendency to focus on institutional and policy reporting with attention to the reporting of human stories that emphasize the social and emotional significance of borders for minority communities, fostering a more personal connection to the European project.

- Follow the journeys/stories of individuals who cross borders for safety, economic opportunity, or family reunification, featuring local residents and their interactions with the border.
- Feature the human stories of marginalized people

Highlight the EU's Role in the local contexts: Increase coverage of the European Union's role and activities in border regions, such as cross-border initiatives, cultural exchanges, and policies that enhance the mobility and socio-economic opportunities for minorities and border region residents generally.

- Establish a dedicated "Europe" section / feature
- Integrate local concerns with broader European contexts by highlighting how local border issues relate to the larger European integration process and the shared heritage, values, and beliefs of the EU
- Create greater awareness of the link between the human story and the EU policy or intervention that is a factor in the human story

By implementing these recommendations, minority media can play a crucial role in fostering a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of borders and European integration, ultimately supporting the process of European integration and addressing the unique challenges faced by minority communities in border regions.

Project Information:

- Project Beneficiaries: University of Southern Denmark (SDU), Denmark; Brunel University of London, United Kingdom; European Academy Bozen (Eurac Research), Italy; Oulu University, Finland; Eötvös Loránd University of Budapest, Hungary; Technical University of Liberec, Czechia; University of Wrocław, Poland; Université de Strasbourg, France; the National Museum of History, Bulgaria; the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR), Germany; the Foundation Network of European Remembrance and Solidarity, Poland; Kreatus, Poland; Lungomare Art Collective, Italy; Halmstad University, Sweden
- Duration: April 2023 – March 2026 (36 months)

Website: <https://www.sdu.dk/en/forskning/forskningsenheder/samf/b-shapes>

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/groups/13019005/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/people/B-Shapes/100092507586694/>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/bshapes2023/>

September 2024



A project funded by the European Union's Horizon Europe research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 101095186; and by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) under the UK government's Horizon Europe funding guarantee under grant number 10065228.