

# **The European Union's Approach to Multilingualism in its own Communications Policy**

**European Day of Languages,  
CULT Committee presentation, 27.9.21**

**Carlos Mendez, EPRC Delft  
Michele Gazzola, Ulster University**

# Structure of the Presentation

- 1. Study objectives**
- 2. Methodology**
- 3. Preliminary findings**
- 4. Key issues and next steps**

# Objectives

**Overall objective:** *To assess the current state of play of the EU's approach to multilingualism in its own communications policy and to propose avenues for improvement*

## Specific objectives

- To undertake a **comprehensive mapping** analysis of the use of EU languages across institutional websites and twitter
- To assess the implications for **legal compliance, language regimes and practices.**
- To provide a **multilingual needs typology** – to characterise the degrees of inequality arising from divergence in multilingualism
- To derive **policy lessons and recommendations** for EU policymakers.

# Methodology

- Literature review
- Develop a typology of ‘multilingual needs’
- Big data analysis of EU websites and Twitter
- Analysis of survey data

# Data collection is ongoing

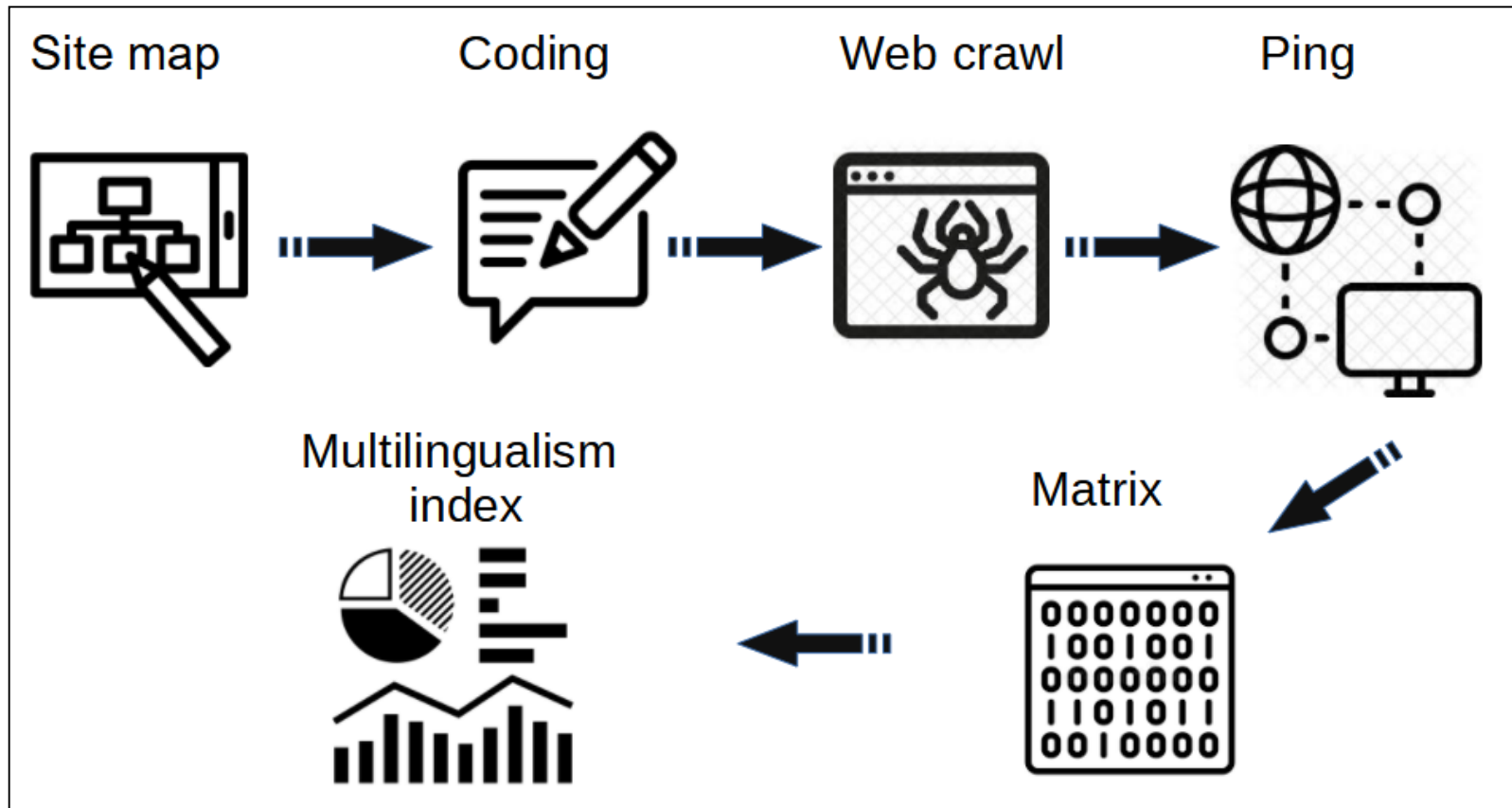
## Websites

- EU Institutions, advisory bodies, agencies
- 500k urls from 3 of the main institutional websites
  - ✓ European Commission: 270k
  - ✓ European Parliament: 170k
  - ✓ Council of the European Union: 130k

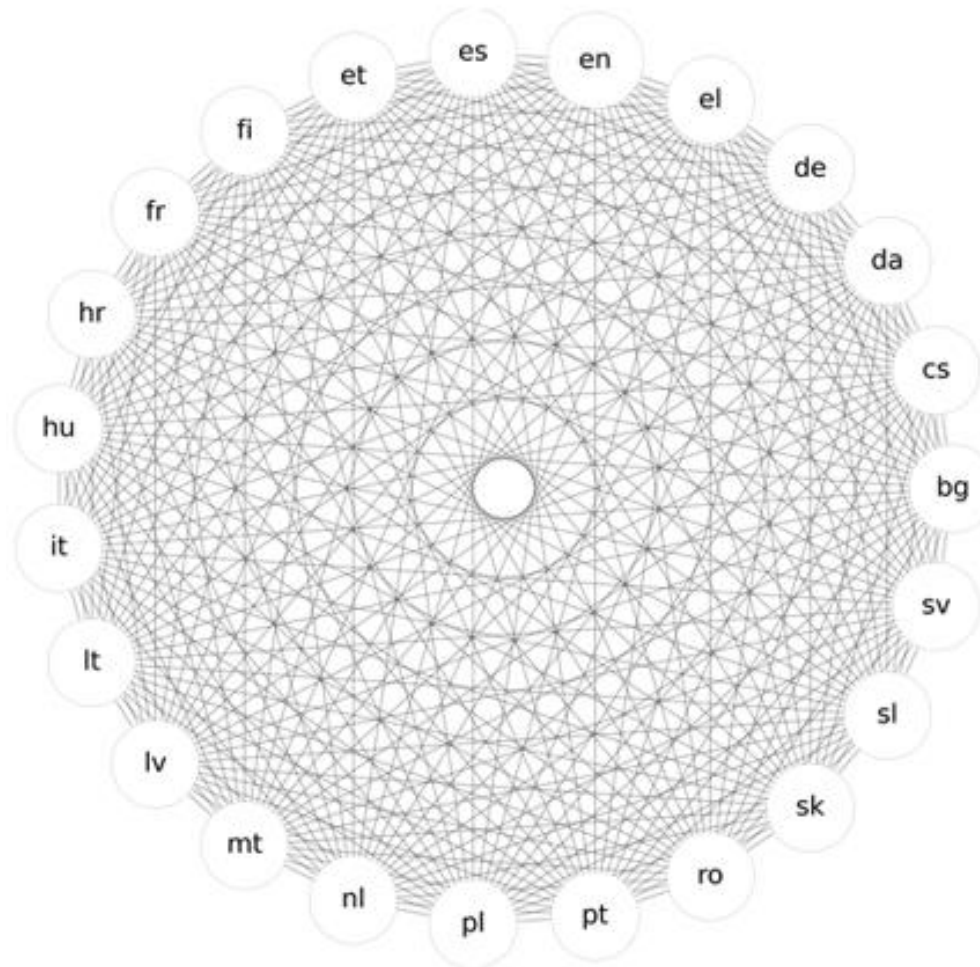
## Twitter

- 3,200 tweets per account (corporate and individual)
- 1.1 million MEP tweets collected to date
- 80k tweets from 5 institutional accounts to date:
  - ✓ European Parliament (including the language accounts)
  - ✓ Council of the European Union
  - ✓ European Central Bank
  - ✓ European Committee of the Regions
  - ✓ European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training

# Websites of EU institutions, agencies and bodies



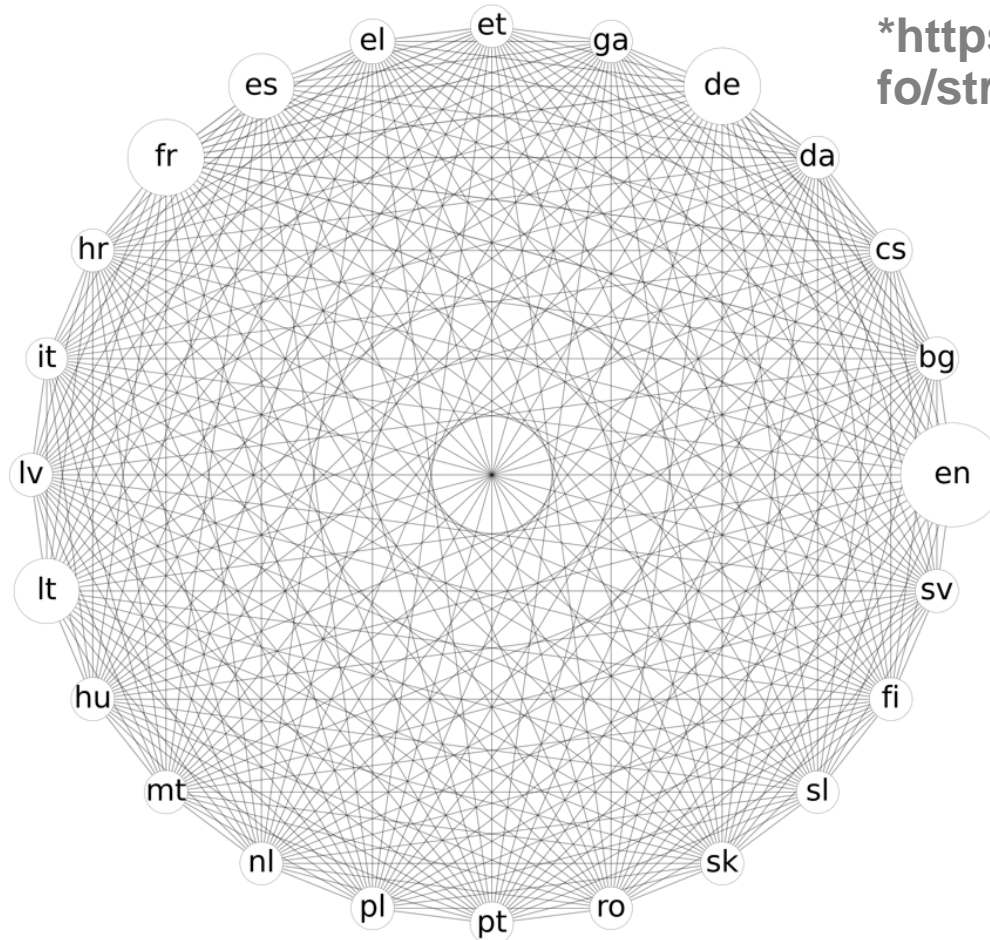
# Example of a symmetric website: the European Commission



|

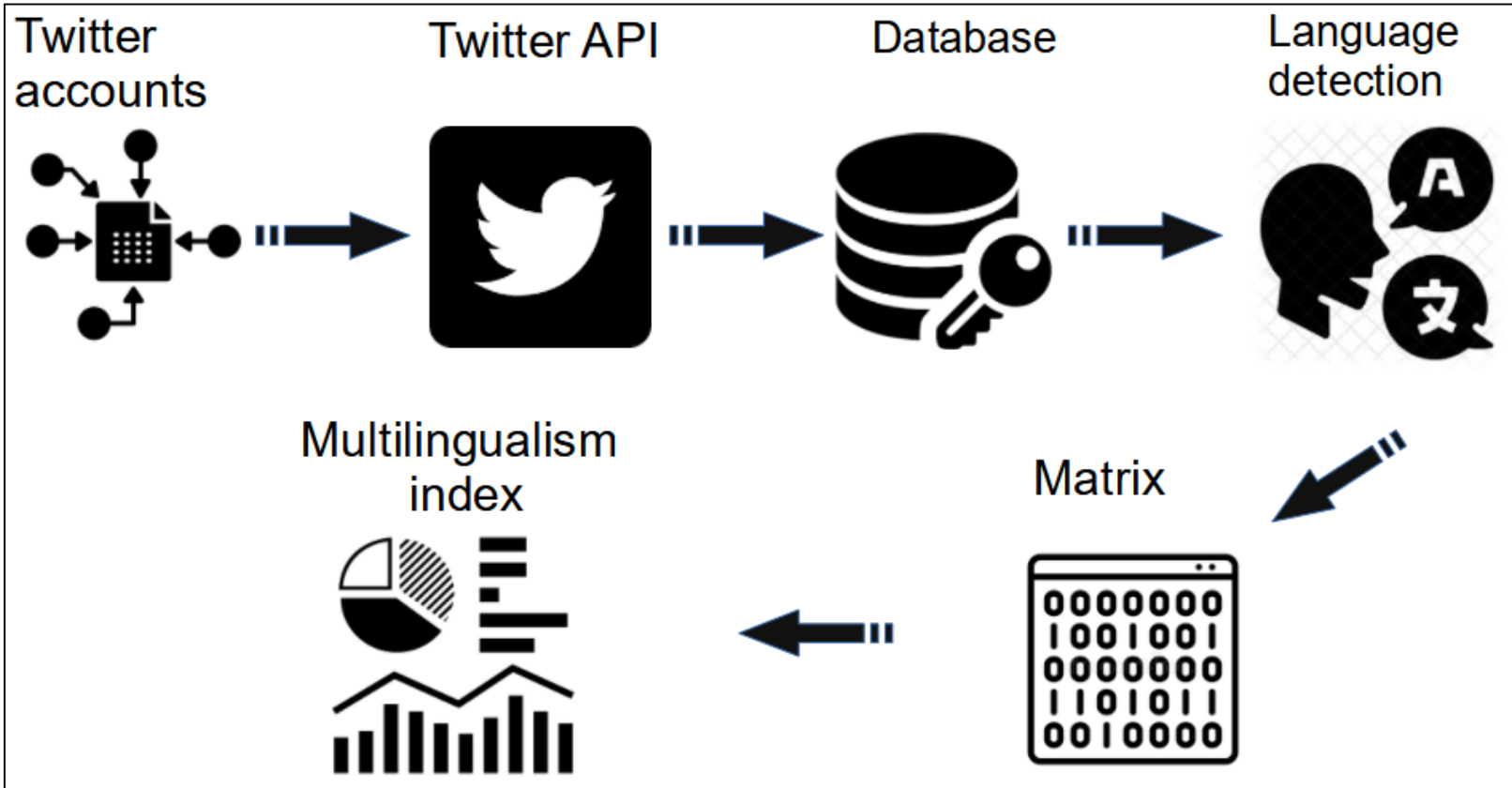
# Example of an asymmetric website section\*: European Commission section on strategy

\*[https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy_en)

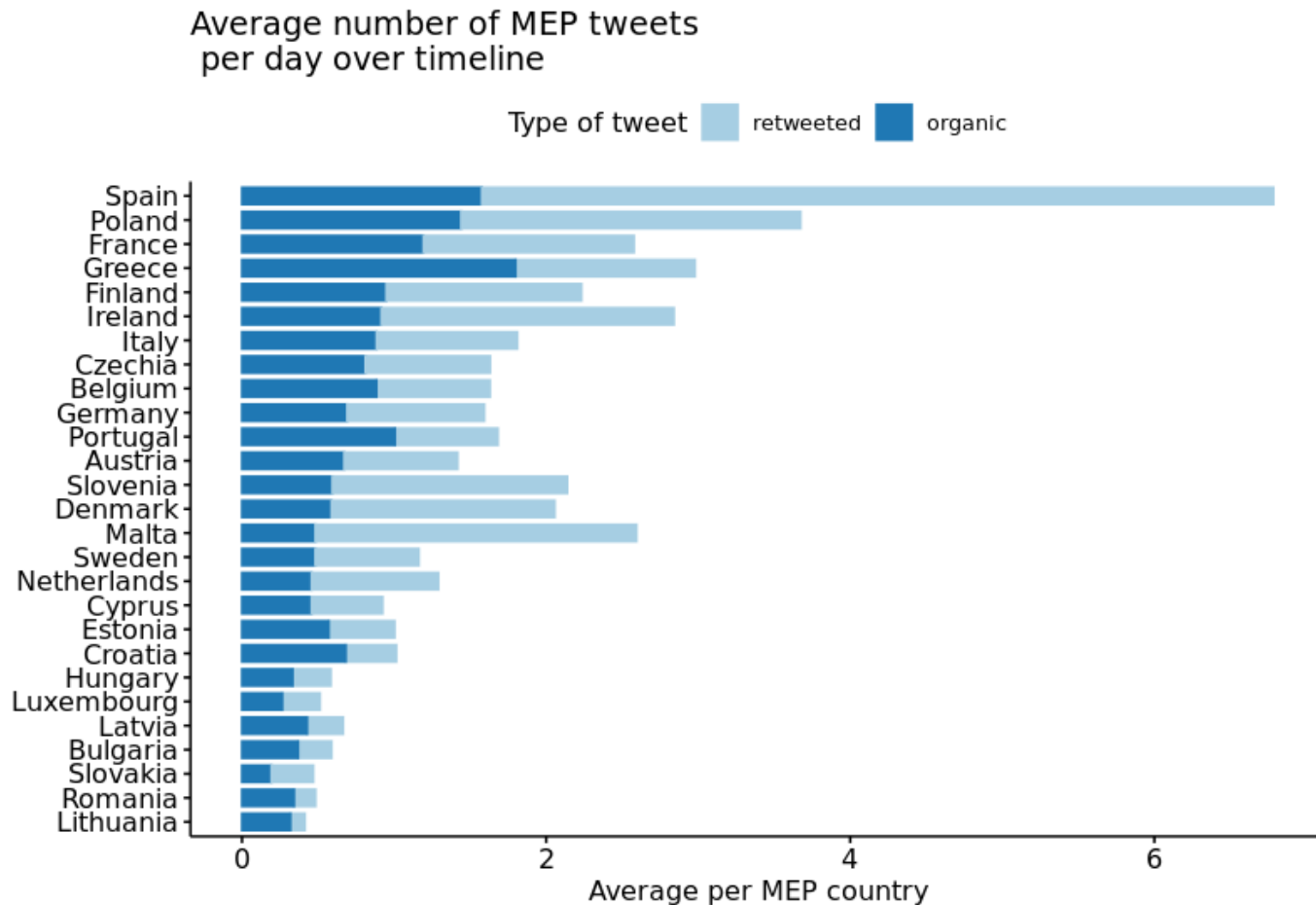




# Social Media – Twitter

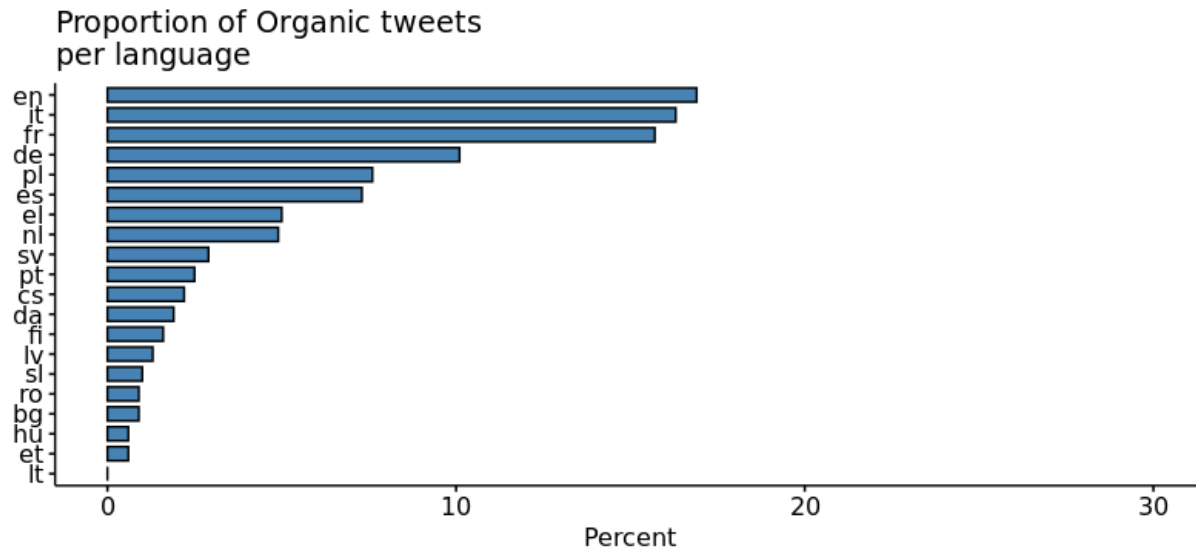
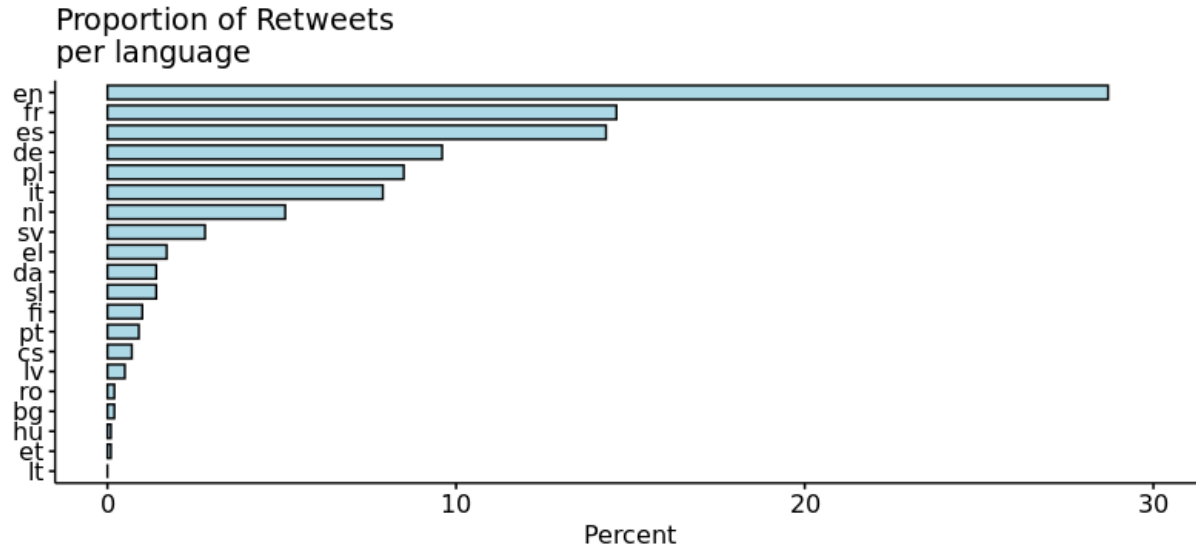


# Frequency: MEP tweets grouped by Country

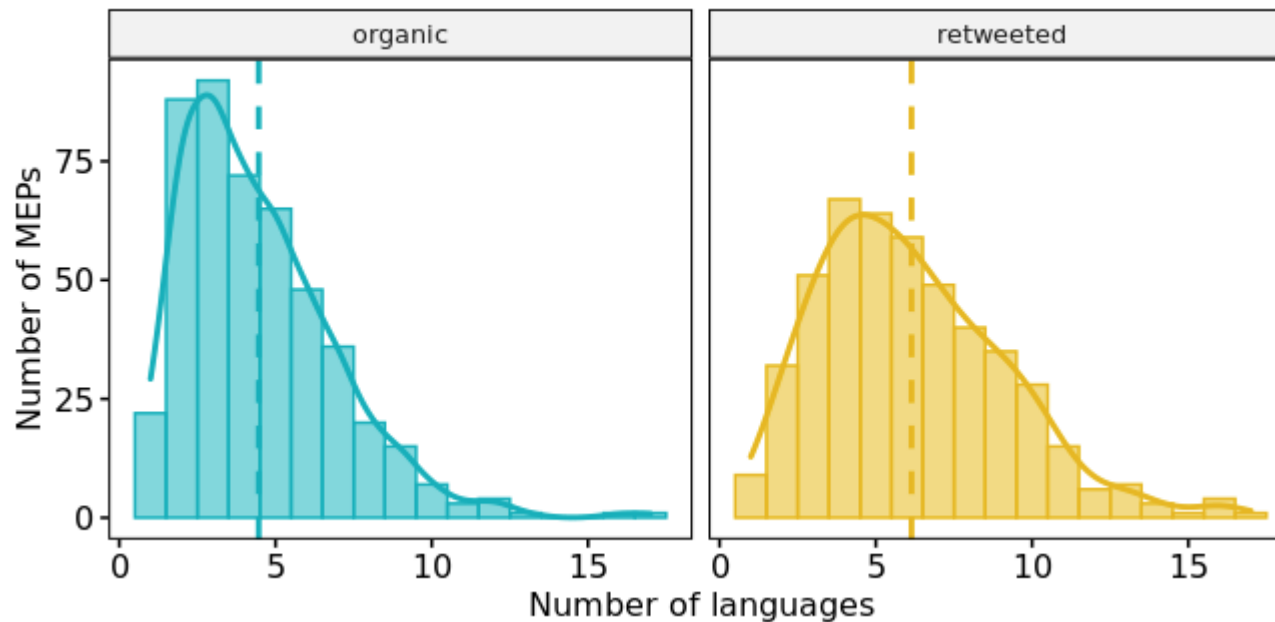


Note: 'organic' tweets is the term used by Twitter for original tweets

# Language: MEP tweets (tweets grouped by type)

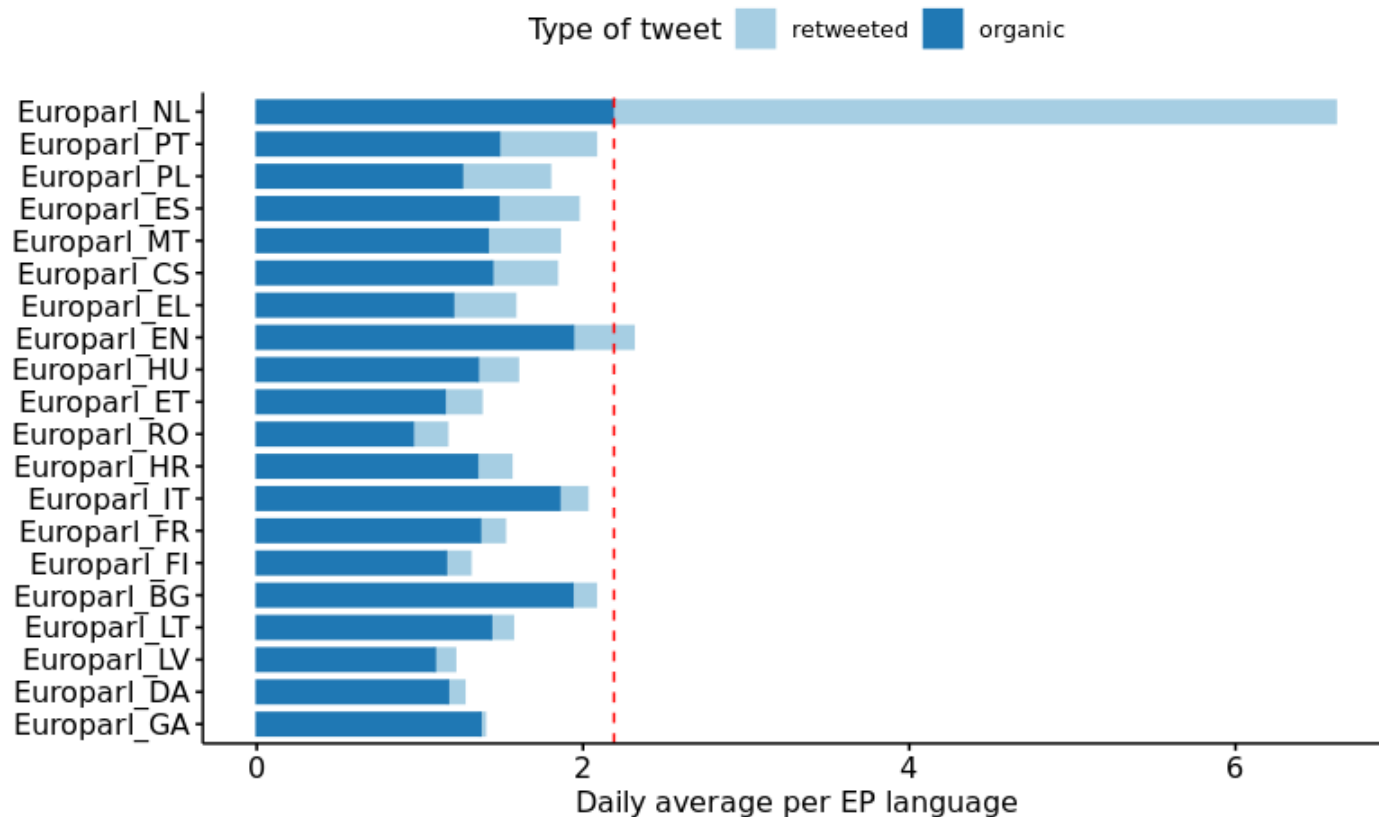


# Number of languages tweeted by MEPs (median is 4 for tweets, 6 for retweets)

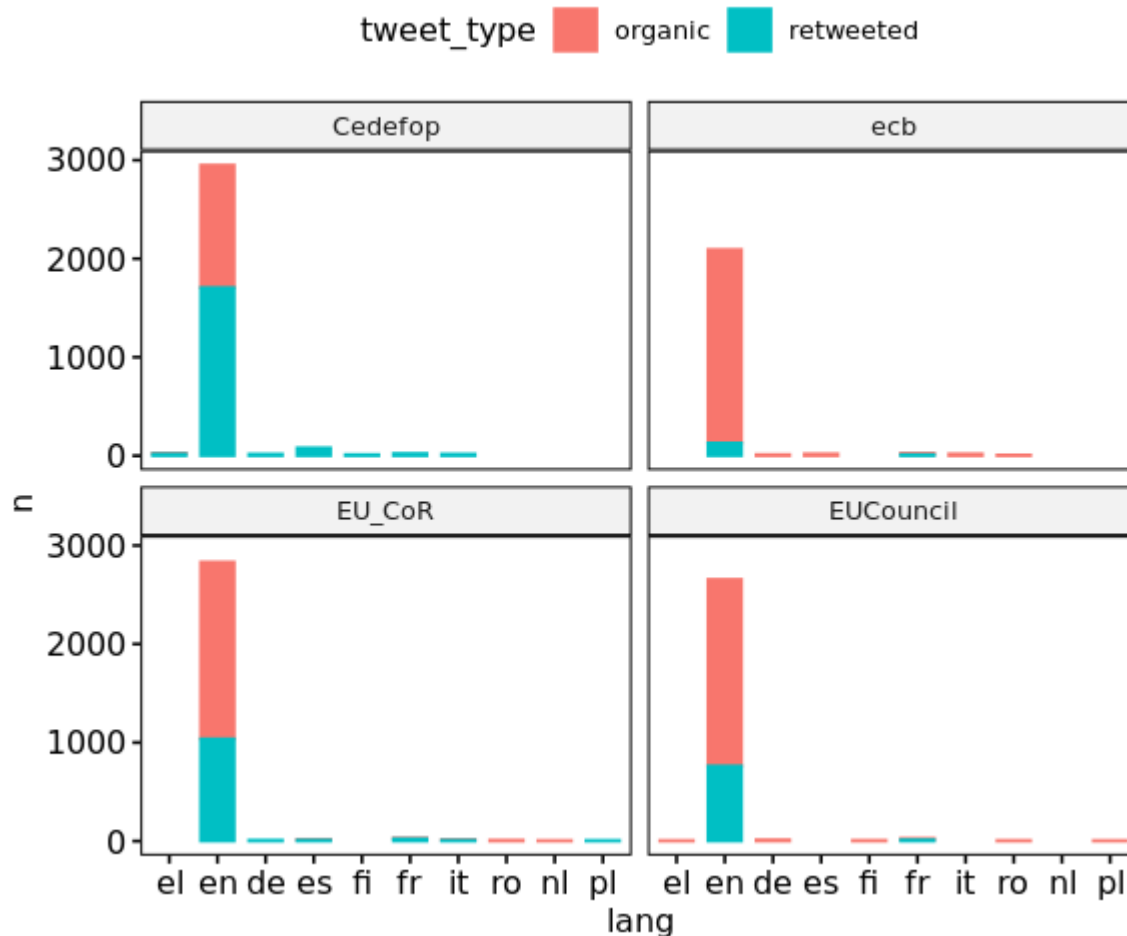


# Frequency: EP tweets (by language accounts)

Average number of tweets  
per day over timeline



# Language: tweets by other EU institutions, bodies and agencies



Key

- Cedefop** = European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
- ecb** = European Central Bank
- EU\_CoR** = European Committee of the Regions
- EUCouncil** = Council of the European Union

## Key issues and next steps

- **Deepen, widen and validate website/twitter analysis**
- **Review existing studies on EU multilingual practices**
- **Analysis of citizens language skills to assess exclusion from digital communications**

## Key issues and next steps

- **EU online communications that are not legally binding can still impact citizen's rights and obligations**
- **These could fall within the scope of current multilingualism obligations**



## Key issues and next steps

- **Legal analysis will clarify the formal and substantive boundaries of EU rules on multilingual communication**
- **Will lead to a typology of documents organized according to the need for translation in order to minimize inequalities**



**Final study in February 2022**