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Paul Statham

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Making Europe news

How journalists view their role and media performance

■ **Paul Statham**

University of Bristol, UK

ABSTRACT

This article addresses ‘media performance’ and European governance. It examines how newspaper journalists view different aspects of their practices and roles in this process. First, the study provides a general picture of how journalism has responded to the transformation of politics resulting from advancing European integration. Second, it examines whether, based on journalists’ assessments, this has involved a transformation of the practices and norms of journalism. The sample consists of 110 interviews with journalists from newspapers in Britain, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and Switzerland, plus four transnationals. We find a limited but emergent ‘Europeanization’ of journalism, carried by transnational newspapers serving specialist audiences and to a limited extent by European correspondents on the national press. Regarding ‘performance’, we consider that journalists would be able to adapt and ‘Europeanize’ to a greater extent if politicians improved their own communication efforts and made European governance more relevant to citizens.

KEY WORDS ■ Europe ■ journalism ■ media performance ■ political communications

Introduction

Media performance is often held responsible for the European Union’s perceived ‘democratic deficit’, and its lack of visibility, resonance and legitimacy in the ‘hearts and minds’ of citizens. Politicians are never slow to blame the media when their EU integrationist aims founder, whereas EU elites see better communication through national media as the best way to improve their legitimacy.¹ Thus the EU’s institutional ‘democratic deficit’ is linked to, or partly caused by, a ‘communication deficit’. From a normative viewpoint, adequate political communications are essential in response to the multi-leveilling and the spread of governance beyond national borders that have resulted from advancing European integration, not least to ensure

effective links between political institutions and citizens. This is the thrust of the growing Habermas-inspired (2005) 'European public sphere' research (e.g. Koopmans, 2007; Peters et al., 2005; Statham, 2007a; Trenz, 2007). Following Schlesinger (1999: 276–7), the emergence of a 'European sphere of publics' requires the dissemination of a European news agenda that becomes part of the everyday news-consuming habits of European audiences, to an extent that publics come to understand citizenship and belonging as at least in part transcending the nation-state. Clearly, any possible moves towards such a situation would depend on the media's performance in producing adequate flows of political information about European governance in the public sphere.

This article addresses media performance and European governance by examining how newspaper journalists view different aspects of their practices and roles in this process. Journalists are defined as those who take decisions directly affecting news contents (Donsbach and Patterson, 2004). This definition covers editors and reporters who participate in daily decisions that influence information gathering and selection processes, as well as actually writing the 'news'. Journalists work within news organizations that operate within constraints and opportunities shaped by commercial and institutional factors, including ownership, market share, and a nationally specific relationship between the media and political systems (Hallin and Mancini, 2004). Thus news organizations usually have a clear relationship to institutional politics, identifying to a greater or lesser extent with left or right political parties, and addressing readerships with identifiable political leanings (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995). Such factors attribute newspapers with a specific 'organizational culture' that finds expression in its 'editorial line', a set of values with which most journalists consciously identify. Taking such contextual factors largely as given, we focus on news organizations as environments which provide specific constraints and incentives for journalists to operate, professionally. The first aim is to provide a general picture of how journalism has responded to the transformation of politics resulting from advancing European integration. The second is to examine whether, based on journalists' assessments, this has involved a transformation of the role of political journalism, and, if so, in what ways.

Many opinions about the press vis-à-vis Europe are advanced in a relative absence of systematic empirical evidence. Semetko et al.'s 2001 review provides a damning assessment:

We know of no studies to date that have looked specifically at the role and impact of European integration on domestic news coverage ... We know little about political communication and news organizations from a comparative perspective and even less about how news differs cross-nationally in terms of the reporting of domestic and European political affairs. (p. 121)

More recently, there has been an increase in research on journalism and Europe (e.g. Baisnée, 2002; Firmstone, 2007; Gliessner and de Vreese, 2005; Huber, 2007; Statham, 2007b). However, understandably given resource limitations, these have often been small 'n' case studies located in one or two countries, and focused on one type of journalism, which places limits on the possibility to generalize from their findings. Alternatively, the few attempts at large-scale coverage (e.g. Raeymaeckers et al., 2007) provide descriptive information about the numbers, geographical scope and infrastructure of journalism, but tell us relatively little about journalists' understandings that inform their practices. Overall, despite recent advances, there is little in the way of 'joined up' sociological approaches, addressing different aspects of journalism systematically and inclusively of cross-national experiences.

The absence of cross-national approaches in political communications (Donsbach and Patterson, 2004), plus the associated methodological 'ethnocentricism' of raising national experiences to a general level, is well documented (Hallin and Mancini, 2004). For understanding journalists' responses to the multi-levering and trans-nationalization of governance, and any potential emergence of a 'European journalism', the need to draw from a broad sample of national experiences is especially pressing.

This study aims to provide a broad overview of journalists' responses to the emergence of European governance by a systematic study of their evaluations and experiences of the factors which shape their news-making decisions. Obviously, it is not possible to address all aspects. The inquiry is structured around investigating journalists' perception of the following factors. The factors 'external' to news production are the 'supply' of information produced by political actors' agenda-setting activities, and the EU's quality of information provision. The 'internal' factors cover journalists' reporting practices, and their own agenda-setting targets and campaigns. Finally, we consider journalists' views on 'media performance'. Together these build up a general picture of the emergent field of 'European journalism' and its relationship to politics. The study draws on a sample of 110 interviews with journalists selected from national and regional newspapers in Britain, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and Switzerland, plus four transnational ones. In assessing 'European journalism', this allows for highlighting notable cross-national, cross-journalist, or cross-newspaper variations, as well as differences between the transnational and (sub)national press.

Before presenting the detailed study, we provide detail on the research design. Our concluding discussion returns to assessing media performance and the prospects for a 'European journalism'.

Research design

Given that journalists belong to a social group sharing a common orientation and ethos that affects how they see their profession (Tumber and Prentoulis, 2005), their views are a potentially rich data source. Analysing how journalists 'see their world' provides factual information on their practices, but also allows insight into the understandings, norms and values which shape their actions.

Between 2003 and 2004 we interviewed 110 journalists. Each interview took at least an hour and was undertaken in the journalist's own language. To render this large amount of information manageable, we used an interview schedule that contains 'closed' survey-like questions but also requires interviewees to elaborate openly on their answers. The questions refer to different aspects of the political communication process: infrastructure; readership's demand; source strategies; reporting practices; commentating; political role; and advocacy (Statham et al., 2003). All responses, 'closed' and 'open', were coded into an SPSS database. This allowed qualitative comments to be used in the analysis in a way that was linked to 'closed' responses to specific questions. Thus, interpretation is based on linked quantitative and qualitative responses. It should be noted that many more questions were asked than those presented here and such information influenced our interpretation.

It was important to have interviews with journalists from a range of countries and of different types, a design which allows for cross-national and cross-journalist comparisons. We selected established democracies in Western Europe: Britain, the Netherlands, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, and non-EU Switzerland. It was not logistically feasible to cover all newspapers for seven countries and the transnational level. We selected four newspapers per country which together were seen as 'best fit' functional equivalents for 'representing' their national daily newspaper landscape. This selection is shown in Table 1.

The research design selected four journalist types (editor/lead writer, EU correspondent, journalist covering agriculture, journalist covering immigration) from four types of newspaper per country (left-broadsheet, right-broadsheet, tabloid or popular, regional). The selection of journalists thus varies across different professional roles, distinguishing between reporters and commentators, and between EU specialists and 'normal' news beats. Finding cross-national functional equivalents for newspapers is not straightforward and some alterations to the design were required to account for national specificities.² Our final selection was taken in consultation with national experts. For further details on choices, see Statham (2006).

Table 1 Selected newspapers by country

	UK	F	D	CH	ESP	I	NL
Left broadsheet	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Le Monde</i>	<i>Süddeutsche Zeitung</i>		<i>El País</i>	<i>La Repubblica</i>	<i>De Volkskrant</i>
Right broadsheet	<i>The Times</i>	<i>Le Figaro</i>	<i>Frankfurter Allgemeine</i>	<i>NZZ (D) & Le Temps (F)</i>	<i>Abc</i>	<i>Il Corriere della Sera</i>	<i>Algemeen Dagblad</i>
Popular/Tabloid	<i>The Mirror</i>		<i>Die Bild</i>	<i>Blick (D) & Le Matin (F)</i>	<i>El Mundo</i>		<i>De Telegraaf</i>
Regional paper	<i>The Scotsman</i>	<i>Ouest-France</i>	<i>Leipziger Volkszeitung</i>		<i>La Vanguardia</i>	<i>La Nazione (N) & Il Mattino (S)</i>	<i>Leeuwarder Courant</i>
Other		<i>L'Humanité</i>					

Note: (D) = German language; (F) = French language; (N) = North regional; (S) = South regional.

For transnationals, we added four English language newspapers targeted at elite or business readerships: *Financial Times (Europe)*, *International Herald Tribune (Europe)*, *Wall Street Journal Europe*, and the *European Voice*, which is a weekly with limited circulation, but with a Brussels elite readership. Here we interviewed only editors/leader writers and EU correspondents. The interview schedule for the transnational press was modified where necessary.

Our recruitment was effective, achieving 110 interviews from a possible 120. The shortfall is due to some correspondents covering more than one role, or some roles not existing on some newspapers. Not all questions were relevant for all journalist types, which accounts for the varying 'n' in presented tables.

Factors shaping journalism over Europe

Here we begin by looking at how journalists receive information flows from the political system. These are 'external' to news production but may influence journalists' evaluations and decisions regarding European news. A first factor we examine is political actors' attempts to influence journalists through their communication strategies, and, second, we give special attention to journalists' perceptions of the information 'quality' supplied by EU institutions. We then examine two factors 'internal' to news production for European politics: first, by assessing journalists' experiences of news reporting; and, second, by examining 'who' they attempt to influence through opinion-leading in commentaries and by campaigns. Given the important normative questions over what constitutes an adequate provision of political information for European governance, finally, we inquire into journalists' evaluations of their role and 'media performance'.

1 Political actors' 'source-strategies'

The media system depends on 'inputs' of information from the political system. This is supplied by political actors from institutions, social and economic interest groups, NGOs, and social movements, who make demands in relation to events. In the 'mediatized politics' era (Mazzoleni and Schulz, 1999), journalists are confronted by a barrage of competing claims, from which only a small number appear in print due to a limited carrying capacity. Thus the political discourse carried by the media is a competitive field where collective actors engage in acts of 'strategic political communication' (Kriesi, 2004) to gain influence. Political actors' mobilization attempts constitute their

'agenda-building' or 'agenda-setting' activities (Everett and Dearing, 1988; Hilgartner and Bosk, 1988). Often these are purposeful and strategic attempts to 'symbolically package', 'frame' (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989), and target information at journalists. Such efforts and their reception are discussed in journalism studies as 'source strategies' (Schlesinger and Tumber, 1994).

Hence a factor that may influence how journalists evaluate European politics concerns the amount and type of information that political actors target at them. The supply of available information resources will depend on which political actors make claims, and how they frame them. For example, if actors representing national political institutions make more efforts than European ones, then their specific 'nation-focussed' agendas are likely to shape the resource-pool facing journalists. If European institutions make fewer publicity efforts for their political aims than other actors, these will be less visible to journalists, and less likely to reach copy. It also needs noting that actors have 'vested interests'. For example, in cases of unpopular legislation, national politicians may have their interests served by promoting a view of European governance that depicts them as relatively powerless in the face of supranational EU decisions. It is therefore important to know 'who' are the most frequent 'source strategists'.

To build up a picture of who makes most effort to supply information, we asked journalists to describe the frequency with which they were contacted by a list of political actors, varied by actor-type (institutional/civil society) and political level (non-EU above nation-state, European, national, regional). We asked:

Some public actors and organizations take 'active' initiatives to get their message across by supplying news stories, for example, through organizing press statements, publicity stunts or other campaign activities. How often do the following types of organization target you with such publicity activities? (never = 0, from time to time = 0.33, regularly = 0.67, always/very often = 1)

Table 2 shows the list and ranks actors according to the frequency which journalists from national and regional newspapers considered them as 'source strategists'. We found strong cross-national similarities and few differences between newspaper types. Hence the further columns in Table 2 show differences perceived by EU correspondents and 'normal' journalists on policy beats, which were more evident.³

The striking finding is the predominance of national source strategists. Four national actors are ranked in the top five. National governments are the only actors who regularly (0.66) target journalists whereas national interest groups (0.61), political parties (0.57) and campaign and protest groups (0.44) come second, third and fifth. This underlines the importance of

Table 2 Journalists' perceptions of the frequency of political actors' 'source strategies' (national and regional newspapers, by journalist type)

	Rank	All*	EU correspondents/ journalists covering EU affairs	Correspondents/ journalists on specific policy fields
National government	1	0.66	0.64	0.67
National interest groups (e.g. Trade Unions, employers' associations)	2	0.61	0.44	0.72
Political parties (national)	3	0.57	0.44	0.65
European Union institutions/Commission	4	0.46	0.76	0.28
National campaign and protest groups	5	0.44	0.23	0.57
Regional/local government	6	0.40	0.35	0.44
Regional or local interest groups (e.g. Trade Unions, employers' associations)	7	0.40	0.21	0.50
Scientific experts/policy think tanks working in this field	8	0.37	0.36	0.38
Supranational or transnational institutions (WTO, World Bank, UNHCR etc.)	9	0.31	0.37	0.27
Regional or local campaign and protest groups	10	0.30	0.21	0.35
European interest groups (e.g. Trade Unions, employers' associations)	11	0.28	0.44	0.19
International or transnational campaign and protest groups	12	0.23	0.26	0.21
International or transnational interest groups (e.g. Trade unions, employers' associations)	13	0.22	0.24	0.22
European campaign and protest groups	14	0.21	0.29	0.17
All		0.39		
N		73	26	47

Note: * Figures aggregated mean score range from 0 to 1. Scale: never = 0, from time to time = 0.33, regularly = 0.67, always/very often = 1.

agenda-building attempts by national actors compared to regional, European and (non-European) supranational, transnational and international ones in shaping the information available to journalists. Overall we see a hierarchy of national actors, followed by regional and only then European and supra-national ones.

It is well established that powerful institutional actors have easier and more routine access to journalists than civil society actors and social movements (Schlesinger and Tumber, 1994). One would generally expect to find a hierarchy of source strategists that reflected this actor-type difference, with institutional actors prominent. Within political levels our findings confirm this. However, what is interesting is that Table 2 shows how little, comparatively, European and other actors above the nation-state try to make themselves heard to journalists on national and regional papers. The European Union institutions (0.46) are the only actors above the nation-state who make noteworthy communication efforts. However, even this makes the EU a source strategist only on a par with national campaign and protest groups (0.44), regional and local governments (0.40) and interest groups (0.40). By contrast, European interest groups (0.28) and protest groups (0.21) make very few efforts indeed.

As a political actor, 'Europe' seems to make relatively little effort to penetrate the information resource-pool of journalists and, to the limited extent that it does, 'institutional' not 'civil society' voices are the ones heard. On this evidence, the impact of source strategies would be to present journalists with sources of political information that prioritize the interpretative frameworks of national political actors overall, and regarding those from Europe institutional perspectives.

However, variations across journalist-type for national/regional papers, and considering the transnational press, adds nuance to this picture. First we see that European institutions target EU correspondents considerably more often (0.76) than they do 'normal' journalists (0.28). This shows that the EU directs its communications at the topical specialists. By contrast, national governments target EU correspondents (0.64) and normal journalists (0.67) at similar levels. Overall, it seems the EU makes little effort to compete with national political actors to influence normal beat journalists, but competes with them for the attention of EU correspondents.

Our enquiries with journalists from the transnational press reveal interesting differences.⁴ These journalists receive significantly more information mobilized by European institutions, political parties, interest groups, and even campaign and protest groups, than from national and regional actors, including governments. Especially prominent as source strategists are the two

main party groups from the European Parliament, the centre-right European People's Party–European Democrats (PPE-ED) and centre-left Party of European Socialists (PES). This gives an indication of some nascent European-level party competition mobilized for mediation through the transnational press. Such perceived differences between the transnational and (sub)national press lends support to the idea of a 'restricted' public space (Schlesinger, 1999) for Europeanized political communication. Channels of information flows from the EU-level political system are strongly directed at transnational newspapers, and to a limited extent at specialist European correspondents for national and regional newspapers.

2 The EU's performance as a source

It is also important to examine the quality of the EU institutions' information provision, not least because their communication strategies have been identified as a factor limiting the effectiveness of their media visibility (Meyer, 1999; Tumber, 1995), though some recent efforts have been made to improve this (Raeymaeckers et al., 2007).

To examine the EU's quality as a source, we asked journalists to assess the information-provision and political-communicative qualities of the information provided by the EU institutions' communications, judged by their suitability for news. By information-provision qualities we refer to the objective information contents of their communications, such as providing 'material which is usable news copy', 'material that is accurate', or 'specialist knowledge/expertise'. By political-communicative qualities, we mean the political contents of the EU's communications, such as 'having a clear political line', 'being transparent', and 'being open to discussion'. We asked journalists to compare these six aspects of the EU's communication with that of national actors, and about perceived differences in 'overall professional standards'. Thus for the seven identified variable aspects of communication, we asked: 'In comparison to the national political actors that you deal with, please rate whether the following aspects of European institutions' communication are better, no different, or worse.' Table 3 ranks the journalists' perceptions of the EU's communication, judged by these aspects, and shows the score, weighted by country.⁵ After giving 'closed' responses (+1 'better', 0 'no different', -1 'worse'), journalists elaborated openly on the EU's communicative performance.

The ranking of journalists' perceptions clearly shows that the EU's information-provision is seen as better than its political-communicative performance. The three information-provision aspects providing specialist knowledge (0.12), accurate material (0.05), and material which is usable news copy (-0.05), were rated higher than its three political-communicative

Table 3 Journalists' evaluations of European institutions' communication, compared to national political actors (national and regional newspapers)

	Rank	All*
Providing specialist knowledge/expertise	1	0.12
Providing material that is accurate	2	0.05
Providing material which is usable news copy	3	-0.05
Overall professional standards	4	-0.17
Being open to discussion	5	-0.18
Being transparent	6	-0.23
Having a clear political line	7	-0.37
All		-0.12
N		54

Note: * Figures aggregated mean score range from -1 to +1. Scale: better = +1, no different = 0, worse = -1.

ones, openness to discussion (-0.18), transparency (-0.23), and having a clear political line (-0.37). Turning to the comparison with national actors' communication, generally, journalists consider the EU's overall professional standards for communicating (-0.12) to be slightly worse than national actors.

Journalists' comments clarify *how* they view the EU's communication. Regarding information-provision, many journalists highlighted limitations due to the EU's technocratic style, the complexity due to the number of countries and issues involved, and the remoteness of EU institutions and their press offices. A typical remark was:

[It is] worse because there is a huddle of competences in Brussels, where different nations follow their different interests. Additionally the way of life in Brussels is not very conducive: It seems many have lunch between 11 a.m. and 4 p.m. and then go home. (Bonn Correspondent, *Die Bild*).

Some criticized the suitability of information received:

The most stupid are the service of spokesmen and Eurostat that fax 30 pages of numbers as if we have time to figure it out. (EU Correspondent, *Ouest France*)

They (European institutions) say 'take the whole thing and look for the focus', the national ones say 'take 2 sheets, it's our focus, and if you like I'll then give you the whole thing'. (Editor, *El Mundo*)

However, the EU received praise from others for its 'objective' information. Some appreciated the expertise of the information and that it is less likely to be delivered with political spin:

They try to give a lot of info and they try less than national governments to dodge issues by using 'stiff talk' (langue de bois). (Socio-Economic Editor, *L'Humanité*)

Less spinning here. (Brussels Correspondent, *The Times*)

Journalists overwhelmingly consider the political-communicative aspects of the EU's communication to be problematic. Typically, one journalist remarks: '(T)here is less openness, less transparency and I cannot see a clear political line' (Editor, *Leipziger Volkszeitung*). However, this overall negative view holds more for the Commission than the European Parliament, where the existence of political cleavages and party politicians helps journalists to report political messages: 'The people (means MEPs) who are motivated and understand how to sell politics, who are operating through the Parliament are very good. The (EU) institutions are bad' (Brussels Correspondent, *Mirror*).

Interestingly, the opinions of journalists from transnational newspapers regarding EU communication did not differ from their colleagues. Overall, they considered this to be worse than national governments, with the exception of the *International Herald Tribune's* Brussels correspondent who compared it to the 'equally bad' US government. Transnational journalists also hold strong reservations over the EU's political-communicative performance. For example, one (*Wall Street Journal Europe*) criticized the Commission's media savvy:

The main thing is that the Commission tends to ... hire experts, who are very good at their subjects, but have zero idea how the press works, and which strings to pull to get a good quote or a good spin on a story in a newspaper.

Overall, this shows that the EU's media performance will not be improved simply by increasing the quantity of information flows and their supply-lines, but that journalists of all types hold concerns about the suitability of its political contents for making news copy.

3 News reporting

Most existing studies on European journalism emphasize factors within news production that are barriers to effective coverage for European governance (Baisnée, 2002; Huber, 2007; Meyer, 1999; Morgan, 1995; Raeymaeckers et al., 2007). These include: resource limitations for news gathering and research; journalists' poor linkages to EU institutions; the obscure nature of European politics and its lack of 'news values'; editors' low prioritization of European stories; journalists' poor language skills and knowledge deficits; their overuse of 'nationalized' interpretative frameworks; and news organizations following their proprietor's alleged political line over Europe.

Obviously, the resources a news organization commits to support European journalism are important. For example, there may be considerations which limit information-gathering possibilities, such as the costs of keeping a correspondent in Brussels, or funding investigations and research, both of

which will influence a journalist's knowledge-base for European politics. Alternatively, journalists' difficulties in reporting on Europe could be due to the weakness of their linkages to European political institutions, which would affect their access to official documents, experts, or 'quotable' public figures and politicians. In addition, the status of European news within a news organization, and its editorial line, will impact on its ability to compete for space in the newspaper.

Galtung and Ruge's classic research (1965) demonstrated that for journalists, 'newsworthiness' is based on a complex set of criteria where an event's characteristics – prominence, human interest, conflict, 'the unusual', timeliness, cultural proximity (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996) – influence its chances of being reported. Journalists may experience difficulties in finding adequate 'news values' within European politics. Europe may be difficult to fit within existing news values and formats, as a complex, technical issue, as an event with a remote or transnational scope, or because it lacks charismatic spokespersons or clear political cues. For example, journalists' news values may demand exciting conflicts between personalities, whereas Europe may deliver technocratic debates between faceless bureaucrats. Finally, journalists may face pressures from their news organizations, either the management or editors, to follow a specific political line on Europe, which would influence their selection and writing decisions. For example, Anderson and Weymouth (1999) claim that Rupert Murdoch's British newspapers promote Euroscepticism to serve their proprietor's interests.

A general finding is that there is relatively little evidence of organizational efforts to transform news production processes and journalist practices specifically to enhance European coverage. Newspapers have responded to the challenge of reporting European affairs in an ad hoc way. They try to incorporate Europe as a topic into pre-existing news gathering and reporting practices. New posts for European correspondents tend to occur as a branch of foreign affairs. Changes within the organization to cover Europe are usually at the initiative of a few key individuals and not a response to perceived institutional concern. Overall, the limited innovations have been responsive and evolutionary rather than pro-active and transformative of journalists' practices.

Obviously, it is not possible to examine all aspects of news reporting, so we aimed to gain an overall understanding of journalists' experiences and what they see as the important barriers to European reporting. We constructed a list of possible concerns relating to their resources, journalistic practices, Europe's news values, and organizational pressures from the newspaper (both political and work-related). Specifically we asked: 'News reporting is a pressurized and sometimes difficult task. Please mention whether any

of the following is a concern/consideration/difficulty for you when reporting a story relating to Europe.' Respondents answered yes or no (Yes = 1 No = 0) to the 'concerns' listed in the first column of Table 4, and then elaborated openly. Table 4 shows the journalists' ranking for these perceived problems relative to one another (weighted by country), and cross-national variations.

In general, we found that the experiences of journalists from different countries, working on different newspapers, and between different types of journalists did not vary significantly. This suggests that there is a common experience for 'European' reporting that largely transcends differences pertaining from national media cultures, within journalism, and across newspapers.

From the list of possible concerns, a key finding is that the most prominent are difficulties that journalists experience in communicating European stories within limited space requirements and using existing news values. The availability of news space (0.84) and the necessity to capture audience attention (0.68) were ranked by far the highest. Journalists' open comments added substance to this picture. They see problems arising from the complex

Table 4 Journalists' concerns, considerations and difficulties when reporting on European affairs (national and regional newspapers, by country)

	Rank	All*	UK	F	D	CH	ESP	I	NL
Availability of news space	1	0.84	0.92	0.77	0.86	0.50	0.93	0.92	0.89
Necessity to capture audience attention	2	0.68	0.92	0.54	0.79	0.70	0.57	0.58	0.63
Access to important public figures	3	0.55	0.62	0.46	0.69	0.70	0.71	0.23	0.38
Availability of resources for research/investigation	4	0.50	0.46	0.62	0.79	0.60	0.57	0.08	0.33
Pressure of deadlines	5	0.47	0.62	0.46	0.57	0.20	0.67	0.46	0.11
Lack of expert knowledge on topic	6	0.40	0.38	0.54	0.31	0.50	0.14	0.38	0.76
Access to official documents	7	0.39	0.54	0.46	0.37	0.30	0.57	0.15	0.25
Lack of clear cues and positions from politicians	8	0.37	0.31	0.36	0.46	0.50	0.36	0.08	0.75
Own lack of understanding of topic	9	0.35	0.38	0.23	0.29	0.30	0.29	0.46	0.57
Pressure from senior editors/journalists	10	0.23	0.15	0.23	0.37	0.30	0.29	0.08	0.22
Pressure from management/organisational pressure	11	0.14	0.0	0.46	0.08	0.0	0.21	0.15	0.0
All		0.44							
N		87	13	13	14	10	15	13	9

Note: * Figures aggregated mean score range from 0 to 1. Scale: No = 0, Yes = 1.

nature of European politics and the obscure information sources available in Brussels, which lack the news values that would increase their communicability to readerships. News space limitations are not just a general concern, but a specific intrinsic problem for European news, as one interviewee identified:

The main problem regarding stories of the EU is the complexity of the EU issues. A journalist has to explain much more. This results in problems of space. (Agricultural/Brussels Correspondent, *FAZ*).

Most underlined this view:

When writing stories about Europe it is even more difficult and complicated to break down the issue into an understandable form. (Chief Editor, *Blick*)

It's difficult to get anything in about the Common Agricultural Policy. CAP is mainly figures, if you could make it into personalities or have an element of conflict then that would help. All the newsdesk are interested in is 'are they having a fight or not'? (Rural Affairs Editor, *Scotsman*)

In general it is difficult to get an item on Europe in the paper, as it is regarded as boring, and there is too little debate about it. (European Correspondent, *Leeuwarder Courant*)

The space is not sufficient for EU issues. Because of that we don't deal on a daily basis with EU issues. It is necessary to be able to explain things well to the reader. Extreme synthesis cannot be made on very technical and complex things. (EU correspondent, *Nazione*)

Within this common viewpoint, there is some cross-newspaper variation. Journalists from popular (1.00), tabloid (0.90), and regional (1.00) newspapers find limited news space even more problematic than those on broadsheets (centre-left 0.80; centre-right 0.67). Also tabloid journalists (0.80 compared to 0.67 for all) find it hardest to capture the audience's attention for Europe. On this *Bild's* Political Editor elaborates: 'It is difficult to access the relevant actors and it is difficult to convert European issues into the language of *BILD*. There are no photos of Europe because the actors are unknown.'

The other clear-cut finding from Table 4 comes from the especially low ranking of pressures from the management and the organization (0.14), and pressure from senior editors and journalists (0.23), as concerns. Journalists do not seem to experience overt institutional pressures, either regarding their work performance or to pursue a specific political line when covering Europe. Their comments illustrate concerns with the practice of European journalism not their organizational environment.

Regarding investigative resources (0.50) and access to expert knowledge (0.40), official documents (0.39) and public figures (0.55), findings were mixed, with some journalists experiencing problems, and others not. Problems

regarding investigative resources tended to depend on a newspaper's resource allocation to European affairs; for example, 'we cannot do investigations, we do not have not enough resources to have someone working for a week on an issue' (Socio-Economic News Editor, *L'Humanité*). Whereas problems with access tended to refer to difficulties with the EU institutions' approach to political communication: 'Access: I can't cover the Justice and Home Affairs council of the EU because it is closed to the media. I can't even get hold of the papers until several months after they've been discussed' (Home Affairs Editor, *Guardian*).

Interestingly, journalists on transnational newspapers broadly shared these views. They also identified important concerns with making EU stories interesting to readers and a lack of space for EU news. The complexity and incommunicability of EU politics is a concern for those writing for transnational elite publics too: 'I think it's the language and understanding issue. Europe is constructed in such a way that ... is too complex for the average European. It doesn't resemble anything on the national level, and the decision-making is opaque' (*International Herald Tribune*).

Overall, it seems that the primary concern for all types of journalist is how to fit European governance into news formats, given that it has to compete for news space. European politics appears to be inherently unsuited for 'making news' and the information received is difficult to make relevant to readers. Conversely, journalists seem to face little unwanted pressure of an interfering or political type from their news organizations.

4 Media agenda-setting and political campaigns

Journalists may also take up a pro-active engagement as 'political actors' (Page, 1996). Operating within their newspaper's editorial line, they have opportunities for taking up 'advocate' (Janowitz, 1975) or 'partisan' stances (Donsbach and Patterson, 2004). This is an example of the media's own 'agenda-setting' efforts (McCombs and Shaw, 1972). As political commentators, journalists attempt to promote opinion-formation processes among their readerships, and thereby exert influence (Eilders et al., 2004). Much depends on who is the target constituency of their political demands, which may be directed at elites, specific interest or target publics, or at general audiences.

Hypothetically, Europe presents an opportunity for journalists to behave as political actors, given that as an issue it tends to cross-cut conventional party lines, and, as an emergent field beyond the nation-state, power relationships between the media and political systems are less entrenched than they are nationally. Newspapers could even institutionalize their political role by running European campaigns or including Europe as a key part of their

editorial line. To address the media as political actors, first we examine where European institutions fit among the perceived targets of journalists' political commentaries, and, second, whether they run European campaigns.

To address who journalists target, we focussed on their commentating practices, and asked them to describe the frequency with which they attempted to influence a list of political actors, varied by actor-type (institutional/civil society) and level (non-EU above nation-state, European, national, regional): 'When you are writing an article that gives you the scope to express an opinion on behalf of the newspaper, and comment on political events, how often do you try to get your message across to the following actors?' (Scale: never = 0, from time to time = 0.33, regularly = 0.67, always/very often = 1). Table 5 shows an overall ranking and score for the frequency with which journalists

Table 5 Journalists' own 'agenda-setting' targets (national and regional newspapers)

	Rank	All*
Publics	1	0.47
Your readership	1	0.76
National public opinion	2	0.57
Informed political opinion – 'the chattering classes'	3	0.56
Scientific experts/policy think tanks working in this field	4	0.25
Journalists from other newspapers	5	0.20
Governments and political parties	2	0.38
National government	1	0.53
Political parties (national)	2	0.43
Regional/local government	3	0.41
European Union institutions/Commission	4	0.30
Supranational or transnational institutions (WTO, World Bank, UNHCR etc.)	5	0.23
Interest groups	3	0.28
National interest groups (e.g. trade unions, employers' associations)	1	0.42
Regional or local interest groups (e.g. trade unions, employers' associations)	2	0.30
European interest groups (e.g. trade unions, employers' associations)	3	0.22
International and transnational interest groups (e.g. trade unions, employers' associations)	4	0.17
Campaign and protest groups	4	0.21
National campaign and protest groups	1	0.28
Regional and local campaign and protest groups	2	0.23
European campaign and protest groups	3	0.18
International or transnational campaign and protest groups	4	0.15
<i>N</i>		86

Note: * Figures aggregated mean score range from 0, to 1. Scale: never = 0, from time to time = 0.33, regularly = 0.67, always/very often = 1.

from the national and regional press try to influence specific actors through commentating.⁶

Generally, media agenda-setting seems to be more oriented to public constituency building than influencing political elites. Journalists target their political information at public constituencies (0.47) more than actors from institutional politics (0.38) and interest (0.28) and campaign groups (0.21). Their own readerships (0.76) are the only constant target, followed by national public opinion (0.57), and informed public opinion – ‘the chattering classes’ – (0.56). After this, political actors begin to register, but really only national ones: governments (0.53), political parties (0.43), and interest groups (0.42). It is striking that journalists on the national and regional press attempt to influence EU institutions only ‘from time to time’ (0.30), to the same limited extent as regional and local interest groups (0.30), and even less than regional governments (0.41). It is worth noting that even the newspapers’ specialists on Europe, the EU correspondents, attempt to address national governments (0.42) and political parties (0.42) more than EU institutions (0.35). In sum, we find little evidence for journalists trying to influence European institutional politics through their writing, which is much more targeted at public readerships, and to a lesser extent national institutional politics.

Turning to the transnational press,⁷ journalists also direct most efforts at their own readership (1.00) and shaping ‘the chattering classes’ of informed opinion among transnational (0.87) and national (0.87) elites. In addition, they attempt to influence the Commission (0.80), Council of Ministers (0.80), and European Council (0.80), and the national governments of Britain (0.73), France (0.73), Germany (0.73) and Italy (0.73). Although the European Parliament (0.67) and its main parties PPE-ED (0.47), PES (0.47), are prominent source strategists, journalists target them less than other EU institutions. This is indicative of where power lies at the supranational level. Overall, the transnational press agenda-setting is more prominent than the national and regional press and it channels its efforts at national and transnational elite publics, as well as the powerful EU institutions and national government actors. This supports the view of transnational journalism as an emerging actor within European politics at the supranational level.

Regarding the nature of journalists’ political advocacy when commentating over Europe, we refer to a detailed study (Statham, 2007b). Our main finding was that, to the extent that they take on any advocacy role over Europe, journalists see themselves as adopting an educational approach for raising political awareness, more than a political partisan or ideological campaigning role.

This interpretation is further supported by our finding very few examples of newspaper campaigns over Europe. The few cases tended to be

one-off issue-specific efforts and not the adoption of a consistent ideological line within a newspaper's editorial line. For example, *Bild* and *Il Mattino* ran campaigns against 'price hikes' following the introduction of the euro. Exceptions are the Swiss tabloid *Blick* which is a pro-European campaigner, and the British *Sun*, which actually refused at an editorial level to participate in this study because of the centrality of Euroscepticism to its current editorial line.

Transnational journalists also emphasized the educational awareness-building and informative, rather than political, campaigning aspects of their advocacy. In contrast to national papers, their campaigns are directed at supra- and transnational European political issues rather than their national consequences. Thus the *Wall Street Journal* (Europe) ran a 'Scrap the CAP' campaign against EU agricultural policy in 2000, whereas the *European Voice* has run a consistent campaign since 2001 for 'transparency in the EU', for example by naming and shaming MEPs who failed to declare their interests on the European Parliament's website. Once more this is indicative of steps towards acting like a 'representative voice' on behalf of a (transnational elite) European public.

5 Media's role and performance

Much research has emphasized the importance of the interdependent relationships between media and political systems within nation-states, for example (Mazzoleni and Schulz, 1999) and Hallin and Mancini (2004) on 'political parallelism'. This raises the question of what can be expected from a media system in response to advancing European integration and the resultant transformation of institutional politics and power beyond the nation-state. Questions of media performance are inherently linked to discussions about the possible remedies for the European Union's perceived 'democratic deficit' (Statham, 2007b). It is therefore pertinent to see how journalists view their possible role with regard to addressing the European Union's perceived democratic shortcomings. We asked: 'Much is made of the "democratic deficit" of the EU, what role do you see the press having in reducing this deficit by informing and educating the public?' Journalists' open comments unpack *how* they see their role.

Some criticize the media's performance:

[The] media can do it a lot but the problem is how they do it. They are a little behind, they don't give much importance to the EU and they are not clear about EU. (Co-director, *Repubblica*)

However, most comments indicate that journalists perceive the democratic deficit to be a problem within institutional politics, i.e. the political system

and not the media system. They think the media should expose such perceived deficits, but are clear that this is an informative not a political role. Journalists tend not to see the democratic deficit as their responsibility, nor do they adopt pioneering normative stances:

The media are no substitute for Parliamentary control. (EU Political Journalist, *FAZ*)

To discuss, explain, verify, (journalists) can help people to understand the importance of the EU. Nevertheless, EU decision-making lacks transparency. EU Commissioners are perceived as not politically responsible because they are not elected. (Co-director, *Repubblica*)

[On perceived role re: democratic deficit] We're a commercial organization so it's not our job. I do believe there is a democratic deficit, and it's an interesting topic and we try and cover it. (Associate Editor, *Scotsman*)

There's generally a low understanding of the functioning of EU institutions, only the newspapers can fill this gap. (Correspondent, *El Pais*)

Overall, the 'democratic deficit' is seen as an important topic but not as a justification for transforming existing journalistic practices and norms, nor as an opportunity for adopting an enhanced political role.

Interestingly, journalists on the transnational press shared this understanding. They viewed their primary role to be information provision and located the responsibility for the democratic deficit in the EU institutions' poor efforts at bridging the 'gap' to their citizens. A *European Voice* correspondent recounted:

Number one, we have to explain how the EU works in clear and simple terms. Second, we have to try and make up for the fact that EU institutions, generally speaking, aren't exactly models of transparency, by trying to put as much information that the people in important positions want to keep secret, in the public domain.

Generally, it seems that journalists evaluate their role by standards of professional performance. This is how they view their potential contribution to improving Europeanized political communication flows, whereas they see the responsibility for the current democratic deficit to be beyond the scope of their actions, and firmly located within the political system, and specifically the European institutions.

Discussion: a 'European journalism'?

In the light of concerns over media performance, what are the emergent patterns and future prospects for a 'European journalism'?

Overall we found strong cross-national similarities in journalists' views. Although national media cultures are distinct, deriving from specific relationships between media and political systems (Hallin and Mancini, 2004), it seems that journalism over Europe is emerging as a common transnational experience and practice. Indeed the differences between journalists on transnational papers and those on (sub)national ones were greater than cross-national variations. The transnational press has adopted a specialist and advanced role for mediating European news. Transnational journalists receive greater flows of information from EU political institutions, and make more efforts to influence EU actors when commentating than their national colleagues, who remain mostly locked within circuits of information flows with national political actors. For the national and regional press, responsibility for EU information flows is effectively outsourced to European correspondents, who manage the limited opportunities for providing European news. In this sense, European correspondents are pioneers at the national level, whose journalism creates a possible space for the emergence of Europeanized viewpoints, within a context of strong competition from traditional nationalized ones. The transnational press has a similar function, providing a space for emergent Europeanized viewpoints by operating in a market gap between national media systems. It is starting to fulfill an emergent role for mediating between European institutions and transnational elite publics. Such findings support the idea of a restricted Europeanization of the public sphere (Schlesinger, 1999), catering for small transnational political and economic elites, mediated by transnational newspapers and, to a much more limited extent, by European correspondents on the national press. Any future potential for a European journalism is likely to start out from these locations. However, there is a very long way to go before there can be talk of a mass-mediated news agenda that would fulfill Schlesinger's requirements for a 'European sphere of publics'.

It is overly simplistic to place the responsibility for the unlikelihood of a mass-mediated European public sphere on media performance. Our study has shown that current communication deficits are due partly to external constraints, over which journalists have virtually no influence: the limited and national-focused sources of information they receive; the feeble efforts of EU institutions to communicate to their citizens as general audiences through the national press; and the low communicative qualities of EU politics, which is high on technical information, but extraordinarily lacking in the substance, such as personality conflicts, which citizens recognize as 'politics'. Within such constraints, it is somewhat expedient for politicians to point the finger at the media over Europe's 'communication deficit'. There is nothing to suggest that journalists – even operating with in existing norms and practices – would be

unable to adapt if politicians made European governance more salient in the hearts and minds of its citizens.

Our findings indicate that the media tend to follow the political system over Europe; they represent much more than lead political debate, and this is how the journalists perceive their role. Even on the democratic deficit, journalists viewed this as a potential story, but showed little inclination for using it to justify extending their own role as a political actor. From our assessment, there is relatively little to criticize in journalists' performance, other than, sometimes, a lack of innovation and imagination in how they ply their trade. In a market and political context which provides few organizational incentives for producing news that generates Europeanized viewpoints, it is unrealistic to expect journalists to take this step as some individual transformative leap of consciousness. Nor, from a normative viewpoint, would it be especially desirable for them to do so. Politicians should take the lead in making European governance relevant to people. This would be a necessary precondition for journalism to follow suit and 'Europeanize'.

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Notes

- 1 This is a finding of EurPolCom's 'Constitution' project (ESRC RES-000-23-0886), see Michailidou (2007).
- 2 Specific media systems, their newsprint landscapes and press cultures, are products of and derived from specific types of liberal democracies, and reflect their important political cleavages (Hallin and Mancini, 2004). Subsequently, newspaper selection needed to take account of additional variations in specific countries to accurately represent key political cleavages, e.g. the regional North/South divide in Italy, and language communities in Switzerland.
- 3 Only journalists were asked this question who were potentially recipients of 'source strategies', a number of editors were not, thus $N=73$. Note also that using anova tests for variance on each variable, there were significant differences (<0.05) for eight of the 14 variables for 'journalist type', compared to only 4 for country and 2 for newspaper type.

- 4 The actor list for transnational journalists was modified to allow for specification between different types of EU-level actors, and governments of different countries.
- 5 Here $N=54$ because we asked only journalists who indicated they had experience of EU communications.
- 6 Only journalists who make decisions about or write commentaries responded, hence $N=86$.
- 7 The actor list for transnational journalists was modified to allow for specification between different types of EU-level actors, and governments of different countries.

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Biographical note

Paul Statham is Professor of Political Sociology and Director of EurPolCom, the International Research Network for European Political Communications (www.eurpolcom.eu), at the Department of Sociology, University of Bristol, UK.
 Address: Department of Sociology, University of Bristol, UK.
 [email: paul.statham@blueyonder.co.uk]