

European Journal of Communication

<http://ejc.sagepub.com>

Journalists as Commentatorson European Politics: Educators, Partisans or Ideologues?

Paul Statham

European Journal of Communication 2007; 22; 461

DOI: 10.1177/0267323107083063

The online version of this article can be found at:
<http://ejc.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/22/4/461>

Published by:

 SAGE Publications

<http://www.sagepublications.com>

Additional services and information for *European Journal of Communication* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://ejc.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://ejc.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

Citations (this article cites 6 articles hosted on the
SAGE Journals Online and HighWire Press platforms):
<http://ejc.sagepub.com/cgi/content/refs/22/4/461>

Journalists as Commentators on European Politics

Educators, Partisans or Ideologues?

■ *Paul Statham*

ABSTRACT

■ Questions of media performance seem to be inherently linked to any proposed solutions to Europe's perceived 'democratic deficit'. This article addresses a specific part of this story: the attempts by journalists from the national press to commentate politically on European affairs, and their self-perceptions about the opportunities and constraints facing them. The article's main enquiry is whether commentating on Europe is different from commentating on national affairs. A model was constructed to assess types of political advocacy. The empirical study is based on interviews with a sample of journalists with four different roles, and from four different types of newspaper, from seven European countries. The main finding is that to the extent that they take on an advocacy role at all with regard to Europe, journalists see themselves as adopting an educational mode of raising public awareness, more than a political 'partisan' or 'ideological campaign' mode. Such findings are then discussed in relation to the broader issue of media performance over Europe. ■

Key Words advocacy, commentary, democratic deficit, Europe, journalism

Introduction: Europe's 'democratic deficit' and media performance

The European Union (EU) inadvertently brought the debate about its own alleged 'democratic deficit' to the forefront of public attention when the

Paul Statham is Professor of Political Sociology, Department of Sociology, Centre for European Political Communications (EurPolCom), Bristol Institute for Public Affairs, University of Bristol, 3 Priory Road, Bristol BS8 1TX, UK. [email: paul.statham@bristol.ac.uk]

European Journal of Communication Copyright © 2007 SAGE Publications (Los Angeles, London, New Delhi and Singapore) www.sagepublications.com, Vol 22(4): 461–477. [10.1177/0267323107083063]

French and Dutch people voted against ratifying the EU's attempt to produce a Constitution in 2005. Previously, steps towards European integration had been largely out of the public eye, driven by elites 'building Europe in the absence of Europeans', as Jean Monnet put it. The EU constitution sounded like a step towards state-like and federalist pretensions, even if it was largely a treaty, but its rejection by the populations of two founding countries sent shock waves through Brussels. In response, the Commission mobilized a European Communication White Paper 2006, which belatedly discovered the need to bring the mass media on side to advance the EU integration process, though it is debatable to what extent the document expresses an understanding of how the media works (Trenz et al., 2007). Even before the Constitution debacle, the media's role and performance in covering European politics was commonly criticized as contributing to the EU's perceived 'democratic deficit': its lack of visibility, resonance and legitimacy in the 'hearts and minds' of citizens. In addition, the media are often held responsible for the resilience of nationally focused public communications (Gerhards, 1992), or are criticized for not living up to the normative ideals of the public sphere (Slaatta, 2006).

Questions of media performance seem to be inherently linked to any proposed solutions to Europe's 'democratic deficit'. Adequate political communication is essential in response to the supra- and transnationalizing and multi-levering of governance that has resulted from advancing European integration, not least to ensure effective links between political institutions and citizens and confer 'legitimacy' (Habermas, 2005). This general position is shared by authors addressing the possible emergence of a 'European public sphere' (e.g. Koopmans and Statham, 2002; Trenz, 2005; van de Steeg, 2002). From this perspective, mass-mediated communication carries a political discourse, where the arguments of political actors and decision-makers are made publicly visible to citizens, and thereby open to processes of deliberation that may provoke consensus-building and support, or, alternatively, opposition and challenges. A key focus is on 'media performance' as a supply-line of political communication. In this article, we address a specific but important part of this story: the attempts by journalists from the national press to commentate politically on European affairs, and the opportunities and constraints facing them. We focus on national media, specifically the press in this instance, as the location for the Europeanization of political communication processes, given the limited emergence and elitist orientation of transnational media (Schlesinger, 1999).

Commentating is a crucial consideration for 'media performance' because it constitutes journalists' most direct form of political intervention

into the mass-mediated public discourse. Previously, more attention was given to the reporting function of the media, its 'carrying capacity' and 'representation' of political discourse, and whether there are emergent channels of 'Europeanized' communication, between different nation-states, and between specific nation-states and the EU supranational level (e.g. Peters et al., 2005; Statham, 2007). Here we examine the press as a 'political actor'. Specifically, when commentating, how do journalists see their role and 'act' in response to their perceived opportunities and constraints for entering the mass-mediated public debate by mobilizing opinions over Europe? Do they see themselves as 'educators' raising public awareness, or as 'partisans' pushing specific European viewpoints? Are they able to write 'independently' from influence of proprietors or political parties?

First, we set the scene by discussing commentating and identifying four possible types of advocacy. Then we outline the research design, method and data sample of 102 interviews across seven countries. After the analysis, we return to some of the themes of media performance.

Journalists as commentators: a model for types of advocacy

Journalists are people who take decisions directly affecting news content (Donsbach and Patterson, 2004). This definition covers editors and reporters, who participate in daily decisions influencing gathering and selection processes, as well as interpreting information and actually writing the articles and commentaries that appear as 'news'.

The study of editorials and commentaries has become recognized as an important field of enquiry for communications (Eilders et al., 2004, Firmstone, 2007). When reporting news, journalists represent the political discourse, which requires placing events and opinions within a context that is likely to privilege specific actors and opinions, over others. Such effects are referred to in the literature on 'second-level agenda-setting' and the media's selection 'bias' and 'framing' of political events (see, for example, Shoemaker and Reese, 1996). However, when they commentate on events, journalists intervene more directly into public debates, and have greater opportunities for focusing attention on interpretations of issues and thereby a greater potential for influencing the way that the public understands and forms opinions on such issues. The visibility of editorials in the public domain allows journalists a special status as an 'actor' in the mediated public debate. Subsequently, their mobilized opinions and arguments may potentially contribute to public deliberation and opinion-formation processes. Such efforts are discussed in literature on the media's political influence, including its role as a 'political actor' (Page, 1996), 'advocacy' (Donsbach and Patterson, 2004),

and 'media framing' (Iyengar, 1993). These are journalists' attempts to influence deliberation and opinion formation processes among readerships, as well as influence political institutions and actors, and are a focus of this article. We take the writing and publication of editorials and commentaries as a case for studying journalists' political 'advocacy' efforts over Europe.¹

Of course, editorial writing is not without institutional constraints. At the macro level, news organizations 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 system (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995; Hallin and Mancini, 2004). Also, news organizations themselves usually have a clear relationship to institutional politics, identifying to a greater or lesser extent with left or right political parties, and their publications address specific readerships: for example, broadsheets address an educated elite readership. Such factors attribute a newspaper with a specific 'organizational culture', a collective identity that finds expression in its 'editorial line', and delimits its relationship to institutional politics and its readership. Seen as an internalized set of values, this 'organizational culture' shapes journalists' decisions regarding their writing. Most journalists consciously identify with their newspaper's 'editorial line'. Since a decision to write an article that moves beyond or changes the established 'line' has organizational consequences, these are usually taken at editorial meetings in the news organization.

Since the 'advocacy' concept has been used somewhat indeterminately (Donsbach and Patterson, 2004), it is worth unpacking and specifying. This study examines 'advocacy' by looking at *how journalists 'act' in response to their perceived opportunities and constraints for entering the mass-mediated public debate over Europe through their own commentary articles*. There are factors 'external' and 'internal' to journalism at play.

In addition to the rather obvious point of possible resource or information-gathering limitations due to the remoteness of Brussels, there may be other 'external' factors shaping editorial writing. Institutional pressures from within the news organization, or political parties closely associated to it, may influence commentating. For example, some authors (e.g. Anderson and Weymouth, 1999) claim that the Murdoch newspapers in Britain write about European affairs and promote Eurosceptic positions as a direct result of their proprietor's stance. Another example would be the difficulty for the French newspaper *L'Humanité* to commentate on Europe in a way that was at odds with the French Communist Party to which it is closely affiliated. Such factors influence the *independence* of the news organization and journalists to be 'advocates'. Another external factor could be the complexity and emergent nature of European politics. For example, the perceived

		Attributing intentional ideological bias over Europe (pro-European/Eurosceptic)	
		<i>partisan dimension</i>	
		-	+
Raising Awareness <i>informative-educative dimension</i>	+	'educational'	'ideological campaign'
	-	'business as usual'	'biased'

Figure 1 Different types of advocacy

lack of public salience of European politics, which is the 'stuff' of experts and technocrats, or its complexity, or relative lack of party political cues, may all create disincentives for editorial writing on European affairs.

Turning to 'internal' factors, we identify two dimensions of journalists' motivations and practices. First, journalists' efforts may be 'informative-educative', attempting to raise public awareness and knowledge about a perceived problem. Second, they may be 'partisan', advancing a specific ideological stance over European affairs (pro-European vs Eurosceptic) as a public constituency-building effort. However, these dimensions are not mutually exclusive: 'informative-educative' promotes an issue by *raising awareness*; whereas the 'partisan' *intentionally attributes it with an ideological 'bias' over Europe*. By combining the two dimensions we arrive at four possibilities, which are represented in Figure 1.

First, there may be little advocacy of either type and Europe may be simply 'business as usual' (bottom-left), brought under the editorial microscope solely when the salience of events dictates, and then commented upon according to the usual norms of the 'editorial line'. Second, in the 'educational' mode (top-left), journalists' advocacy over Europe may be motivated to raise public awareness and understanding for an important and complex issue, but without actively aiming to promote an ideological position on the pro-European/Eurosceptic axis. For example, it is possible to engage in advocacy by unpacking and informing about the complex institutional workings of multi-level European governance, without promoting a partisan ideological view on the European project. The third situation reverses this, in 'biased' mode (bottom-right), advocacy may constitute journalists routinely mobilizing Eurosceptic or pro-European views through commentary with scant effort being made to unpack and inform the public about the complexities of European politics. Finally, journalists' advocacy efforts may run an 'ideological campaign' over Europe (top-right), assertively raising issues and opening them up for public evaluation in a way that also promotes a clear stance for a position on the Eurosceptic/pro-European continuum. For example, a commentary

may initiate a discussion that elaborates on a proposed set of regulations for EU farming subsidies as a basis for promoting the Eurosceptic stance that national farmers would be better served by the country withdrawing from the EU. In this case, farming would be a campaign issue specifically taken up by the newspaper to criticize the EU.

In order to examine the nature of journalists' advocacy through commenting over Europe, we conducted interviews with journalists in the UK, France, Germany, Spain, the Netherlands, Italy and Switzerland. Before turning to the analysis, we elaborate on the data collection and method.

Data collection, sample and interview method

We consider journalists' perceptions of factors contributing to decisions about writing commentaries to be an important source of information. However, this case is also located in a broader study of Europeanization and political journalism (Statham, 2006; Statham, forthcoming).

For the topic of Europe, it was important to have interviews with journalists from a range of countries and of different types. This design allows for cross-national and cross-journalist comparisons. The research was part of the large seven-country EuroPub.com collaboration (europub.wz-berlin.de/). It was not logistically feasible to cover all newspapers. We selected four newspapers per country that 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-leaning broadsheet, right-leaning broadsheet, tabloid or popular, and 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 and further details on these choices appear elsewhere (Statham, 2006; Statham, forthcoming).

Recruitment efforts for interviewees were effective, achieving 102 interviews from a possible 112. Journalists from the selected newspapers were interviewed in their own language in 2003/4 using a structured questionnaire schedule that took approximately one hour and allowed for closed responses followed by open elaborations (full questionnaire

Table 1 Selected newspapers

	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 (FAZ)</i>	NZZ (D) & <i>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>					

(D) = german language; (F) = French language; (N) = North regional; (S) = South regional.

downloadable at Europub.com website). Not all questions were relevant for all journalist types; for example, with regard to our specific enquiry here, not all journalists interviewed were engaged in writing commentaries.³ Responses to questions were coded into a database, linking numeric and string variables. This strategy allowed us to retrieve linked quantitative and qualitative (open answers) information, selected by country, newspaper or journalist type for analysis.

Interview findings

This study takes two related inroads. First, by looking at whether there are differences in the way that journalists commentate on European compared to national affairs, it builds up a picture of the extent to which Europe is 'business as usual' for journalists, or alternatively, if they consider there are specific factors that shape their advocacy over Europe. Second, by examining journalists' self-perceptions of writing commentaries and editorials, we gain some insight into the extent and type of political advocacy role that journalists adopt, or not, over European issues, and whether this takes an 'educational', 'biased' or 'ideological campaign' mode.

To address perceived differences when commentating on European as compared to national affairs, we constructed a set of possible differences. Some differences were 'internal' to journalists' writing, such as whether 'national interest' becomes more prominent as an issue, whether the educative role relative to the readership is enhanced due to limited public knowledge over the topic, whether independence to express a political stance increases and whether more effort is made to influence political elites. Others were 'external', such as, whether newspapers are more likely to follow an established party political line, or that of the proprietor, or that of national public opinion.

The specific closed question was: 'When commentating on political affairs relating to Europe, such as the Convention on the Future of Europe, is the newspaper's role in any way different than when giving an opinion on national affairs, with respect to the following statements? Answer: Yes or No [interviewer then reads out left-hand column of Table 2].'⁴ An answer 'Yes' was coded with a score 3, and 'No' a score 0. The first two columns in Table 2 show the rankings and overall aggregate scores for journalists' perceived differences, on a scale from 0 for the lowest, to 3 for the highest difference, and weighted by country.

After this closed question, interviewees were asked to elaborate in an open way about what they considered to be the most important difference so that we could also analyse their comments. The four right-hand columns

Table 2. Journalists' perceived differences when commentating on European compared to national affairs (by journalist type)

	<i>All</i>	<i>Editors/ leader writers</i>	<i>EU correspondents/ journalists covering EU affairs</i>	<i>National newspaper journalists, specific policy fields</i>	<i>Regional newspaper journalists, specific policy fields</i>	
	<i>0 = No</i>					
	<i>3 = Yes</i>					
	<i>Rank</i>					
Newspaper is more likely to defend what it sees as the national interest	1	1.7	1.4	2.0	1.8	1.8
Newspaper has more of a duty to improve public knowledge	2	1.6	1.3	2.1	1.2	2.1
Newspaper is more likely to express its own position, independently from other actors	3	1.4	1.2	1.7	1.5	0.8
Newspaper is more likely to try to influence the positions of political elites	4	1.3	1.3	1.6	1.5	0.5
Newspaper is more likely to follow the perceived position of the proprietor	5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5
Newspaper is more likely to follow the line of the political party with which it is most closely associated	6	0.4	0.1	0.6	0.6	0.5
Newspaper is more likely to follow the line indicated by national public opinion polls	7	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.5
All		1.0	0.9	1.3	1.1	0.9
N		87	26	21	27	13

Aggregated average scores on a scale from 0 = No, to 3 = Yes.

in Table 2 show differences by subcategories of journalist type. These are shown because differences between journalist types were more striking than national and newspaper type variations. Overall, we found relatively few cross-national differences between journalists in our study and so have relatively little to say in that respect. This does not, however, contradict the body of research that emphasizes the importance of different national media systems and cultures (e.g. Hallin and Mancini, 2004). The similarities that we found could be simply a phenomenon that is specific to European coverage, namely, that the responses of national media to the emergent challenge of Europeanized politics have so far evolved in a similar way.

Turning to Table 2, a first observation is that we have a clear negative finding with regard to differences that are 'external' to journalists' writing practices. The political stance of proprietors (rank 5, 0.5), political parties associated with the newspaper (rank 6, 0.4) and general public opinion (rank 7, 0.3) are not more of a consideration when commentating on Europe. From this we deduce that the way that journalists comment over European affairs is not an outcome of extra pressures placed on them to follow their proprietors', political allies' or the general public's position over Europe. We also see that journalists are more likely to take up an independent stance from other actors (rank 3, 1.4) and to try and influence political elites (rank 4, 1.3) than they are to be influenced by proprietors (rank 5, 0.5), political parties (rank 6, 0.4) or the public (rank 7, 0.3). This indicates that when commentating, journalists' own perceived flow of opinion-leading is from themselves to external political actors, i.e. from the media system to the political system. In other words, journalists see themselves as being sufficiently 'independent' to be active and engage in advocacy over Europe.

Regarding newspaper type variations, it is worth noting that this holds especially for journalists writing for popular (express own position 2.1, mean 1.4; influence political elites 2.1, mean 1.3) and tabloid newspapers (express own position 2.3, mean 1.3; influence political elites 1.7, mean 1.3) than for broadsheets and regionals. However, this is more likely to be an outcome of the generally more assertive commentating style of popular and tabloid newspapers than a factor specific to commentating on Europe. One of the very few cross-national variation concerns Britain, however, where journalists are more inclined to follow the proprietor's position over Europe than elsewhere (1.0 compared to 0.5 mean). This 'exception' comes from the *Times*' journalists, which as a member of the Murdoch group appears to have a clear editorial line over Europe that is enforced within the organization, to a greater extent than other newspapers.⁵ Overall, though, journalists seem to be as 'independent' to write their political commentaries over Europe as they are over national affairs.

Turning to the perceived limited differences between commentating on European and national affairs apparent from Table 2, they are 'internal' to writing practices for political commentary. These give us an indication of the type of advocacy by journalists over Europe. First, journalists mention their likelihood for promoting opinions that defend 'national interest' (rank 1, 1.7), which may be taken as evidence for the persistence of journalists' national interpretative frameworks over Europe. This was backed up by the journalists' comments, as an Italian journalist put it: 'On EU politics there is the tendency to bring to the European level Italian reasons for wishing that a common Italian position is brought in' (Mario Orfeo, director, *Il Mattino*). Interestingly, this shows a case of a journalist pushing consciously for a national (Italian) version of Europe, but without expressing a specific consistent ideological stance (Euro-sceptic/pro-European) on European affairs. Namely, national viewpoints supersede ones defined over Europe. Second, another limited difference is that journalists emphasize that they have an informative and educational role and duty to improve public knowledge (rank 2, 1.6), which is stressed more than attempting to influence political elites (rank 4, 1.3). Overall, this points in the direction of *informative-educative* advocacy raising awareness over Europe, more than *partisan* advocacy and ideologically based activism.

Turning to the cross-journalist variations shown in Table 2, we see that all four highest perceived differences are more distinctly expressed by EU correspondents than either editors/leader writers or national and regional journalists (defend national interest 2.0, mean 1.7; improve public knowledge 2.1, mean 1.6; express own position 1.7, mean 1.4; influence political elites 1.6, mean 1.3). With the duty for improving public knowledge ranked highest (2.1). This indicates that European correspondents appear to be a distinct group among journalists with a specific set of norms. It seems that they take on a specialist role as pioneers commentating on Europe but once more this advocacy role is perceived as informative-educative to raise public awareness.

This interpretation about an informative-educative emphasis is strongly supported by journalists' detailed open comments on the greatest difference when commentating over Europe. Here journalists emphasize difficulties that are specific to communicating about Europe as a topic, much more than any perceived difficulties in attributing it a specific ideological bias. By far the overwhelming difference that journalists mention is the need to explain and express more clearly, and in more detail, because of the lack of public and readership knowledge about European compared to national affairs: 'There's an attempt to explain things better when the EU level is spoken of, it's a task of giving more clarity, knowing that the reader

isn't as familiarized with the EU's functioning compared to national politics' (Andrés Ortega, editor, *El País*). 'On European issues [we] have to be a lot more informative since more explanations are needed for the reader to understand the opinion piece' (Pedro Cuartango, *El Mundo*). 'The public does not know much about the subject so the paper has the duty to inform' (Rimmer Mulder, editor, *Leeuwarder Courant*). 'The newspaper sees itself as pro-European, internationalist, it feels it has [a] duty to inform and explain because of levels of ignorance of the subject and the failings of government over the EU' (Ian Black, European editor, *The Guardian*). These examples, selected from many, underline that journalists see the key difference when commenting on European affairs to be the need to inform and educate their readerships. It emphasizes the *informative-educative* much more than the *partisan* dimension of advocacy.

However, an important difference is that journalists consider that they have a greater scope to comment more openly over European politics, because political cleavages are not as clearly established in the political system and public imagination as they are for national politics: '[There is] bigger freedom to express opinion because there is less conditioning from national political actors or political groups' (Alessandro Farruggia, agricultural correspondent, *Nazione*). 'At the national level, there is more interest in the standpoints of the political parties, which can be overcome at the European level, [thus we are] less partisan concerning Europe' (Sr Gonyáley, *El Mundo*). 'European affairs are commented on with more freedom as party politics is not important. On a national level, trenches of party politics dominate. There are a lot of prejudices' (EU correspondent, *FAZ*). For the most part, this greater independence for political expression over Europe is an outcome of the lack of established cues and clear positions from the political system, and is not perceived as an opportunity by journalists to give ideological guidance and opinion-lead in political debates over European affairs. Mostly, they see themselves as responding to a political void by raising awareness. Generally, it seems that to the extent that there is advocacy over Europe, journalists are largely in 'educational' mode.

One notable, but almost unique, exception is the Swiss tabloid *Blick*, which takes up an educative-informative but also strongly partisan stance, to the extent that it even goes against its understanding of its readership's position: 'The most important thing is that *Blick* writes against its public when it comes to European politics; it does it consciously, rather than writing as its public thinks' (editor-in-chief). The strongly pro-European *Blick* is a rare exception of advocacy over Europe being mobilized in an 'ideological campaign' mode.⁶ It is worth noting that this stance by the newspaper evolved during internal referendum campaigns within Switzerland over possible

entry into the EU. Thus the advent of this 'ideological campaign' mode may be contingent on events such as referendums that bring contention over Europe into the public domain. One could perhaps therefore expect that public referendums such as those initiated over the EU constitution would be the type of 'triggering event' that could lead journalists to shift towards a more 'ideological campaign' mode over Europe. At the time of our study, although the constitution debates were under way, apart from *Blick*, the greater assertiveness of popular and tabloid journalists remain within the same norms and parameters as for commentaries on national affairs. As a *Mirror* journalist states: 'I don't think there is much of a difference [between Europe and national], [we are] fairly strident on both UK and European issues. We would rant and rave about foundation hospitals as well as rant and rave about why we need to get into Europe.' Thus even journalists on the tabloids and popular newspapers are mostly *informative-educative* about Europe, raising awareness for understandings within their own established editorial line, rather than being *partisan* ideologues over Europe.

To summarize, we find little evidence for journalists using commentaries for partisan purposes over Europe. Generally, commentating on Europe and the scope for journalists to express overt political positions seem to operate within the limits set by the newspaper's existing organizational culture and editorial line and to be largely confined to raising public awareness. It is mainly perceived public knowledge deficits that motivate journalists, and the emergent and relatively undefined nature of European politics that allows them the freedom to express opinions, not that they see themselves as advocates with a political axe to grind.

Discussion: whither the deficit?

Apart from the odd exception, journalists tend to operate in 'business as usual' or 'educational' mode when intervening as commentators in the public debate over Europe. Such findings go in the same direction as related research on journalists' perceptions of their general reporting practices (Statham, forthcoming), which shows that 'Europe' tends to be incorporated as a topic into existing news-gathering and reporting practices. Also, journalists see the 'democratic deficit' as an important topic, but not as a motivation for extending their own political role. On the contrary, they place responsibility for remedying the 'democratic deficit' squarely on the shoulders of elected politicians. Overall, then, it seems that the media tend to follow the political system over Europe, and the media 'represent' much more than they 'lead' political debate. But does this raise concerns over media performance with regard to European politics?

The answer here depends on what one thinks Europe should be, and what one thinks the media's role should be in building European governance. For the Commission, whose White Paper on communication (European Commission, 2006) suggests a job for the media in 'social engineering' the 'Europeans' it has so far failed to find or convince, the answer is 'yes'. However, such hopes are hardly based on realistic expectations for the outputs of an independent commercial news media, nor would the propagandist implications be especially desirable. In addition, the Dutch and French referendums' 'no' demonstrated that if the Commission has genuine federalist state-like pretensions, then European politics will have to 'get real' and make itself visible, accessible and open to scrutiny, at least to the same extent that the public expects from national governments.

Part of the difficulty in assessing media performance is that the standards raised are often those posed by normative theory for a European public sphere, mostly inspired by Habermas (2005). So far, European political institutional developments fall well short of this vision and those standards. So why is there a need for the media to match or supercede them? In any case, are the assumptions of the vision plausible and realistic? Even the Constitution, seen as an opportunity for generating a blossoming transnational participatory civil society that would carry us towards a post-national Europe à la Habermas, turned out to be a nationalist Eurosceptic moment. Also, existing empirical studies of civil society participation in Europeanized policy fields (Börzel, 2006) and Europeanized communication (Koopmans, 2007; Statham, 2007) provide more sobering accounts for future prospects. Their findings suggest that Europeanization, at least in its current direction, leads to an 'empowerment of the already powerful' and relatively less civil society engagement compared to elites than was present in the 'old' national politics.

Some argue that emergent political globalization of governance in the form of the EU has been overstated. For example, Moravcsik sees the EU as a free-trade area with few state-like characteristics, based on treaties between nation-states dealing with discrete regulatory fields (Moravcsik, 2002: 607): 'the EU does not tax, spend, implement or coerce and, in many areas, it does not hold a legal monopoly of public authority'. In this view, the location of legitimacy for European politics within nation-states is not especially problematic, and by implication, neither is the dominance of national media and viewpoints. Although this view underplays the power of supranational institutions, it perhaps represents a more realistic starting point for the present-day situation.

So far, the European integration project has primarily been economic and deregulatory, founded on the 'four freedoms' of market participation: free

movement of persons, goods, services and capital. Such impacts have far outstripped developments in the social and cultural spheres, and EU political institutional developments reflect this emphasis. In addition, it is likely that market liberalization and economic globalization have had a more profound effect on news organizations, as commercial organizations producing political information, than any shifts in the political landscape resulting from Europeanization. In any case, at present, European politics are technical, obscure, uneven across policy fields, and therefore do not necessarily merit a transfer of citizens' affections, identities and allegiance in the same way as nation-states' politics. Until and unless supranational European governance takes on a more central role for issues of social redistribution, it is perhaps sufficient for political concerns to be mediated through restricted and elite semi-public spheres of specialists with national governments representing their citizens. The Constitution with its federalist overtones was the first time that EU governance really had the whiff of a deeper general public concern. If that is a signpost to the future, there is nothing to suggest that the national press will be unable to adapt to supply adequate political information to citizens. However, that does not mean that the EU, or national governments, will like what they hear. Nor should it.

Notes

Funding support from the EU Sixth Framework for the Europub.com project (HPSE-CT200000046) and from the ESRC for the constitution project (RES-000-23-0866) is gratefully acknowledged. I would also like to thank colleagues working on those projects.

1. Our focus is on when journalists write and express opinions on behalf of the newspaper about political affairs and events. These opinions appear most explicitly and often, but not exclusively, in the newspaper's editorial and commentary sections. In the following 'editorial writing' and 'commentating' are used interchangeably to cover this practice.
2. As Hallin and Mancini (2004) demonstrate, cross-national variations in newsprint landscapes are largely shaped by, and constitutive of, differences in countries' political systems. Specific media systems, their newsprint landscapes and press cultures, are products of, derived from and constitutive of specific types of liberal democracies, reflecting their important political cleavages. Subsequently, newspaper selection also needed to take account of additional variations in specific countries, to accurately represent key political cleavages, e.g. the importance of the regional north/south divide in Italy and different language communities in Switzerland.
3. This explains the lower 'N' (87) in the data presented in Table 2.
4. The question was varied slightly to allow journalists to comment on their own field: editors/leader writers and EU correspondents were asked about the

Convention, whereas beat journalists were asked about a European issue in their specific fields.

5. Newspapers owned by Rupert Murdoch including *The Times* and *The Sun* clearly have stronger direct editorial control over their European commentating than others. However, it seems simplistic to claim a 'direct' link between the proprietor and the newspaper's commentating, as some do (Anderson and Weymouth, 1999). This 'conspiracy theory' unsurprisingly has salience among *The Times's* commercial competitors. Instead, we consider that proprietorial influence is more likely to be 'indirectly' mediated through the organizational culture. Thus *The Times* is not Eurosceptic *because of* Murdoch ownership. Murdoch ownership is part of *The Times's* organizational culture, as is being linked to a Eurosceptic Conservative Party and a readership with Eurosceptic views, which adds up to a stricter editorial line over Europe, and less perceived opportunities for journalists to deviate.
6. This finding about the exceptionalism of *Blick* for pro-European advocacy is also underlined by the findings of a content analysis where its editorial stance was more pro-European than 26 of the other 27 newspapers in this sample (Statham, 2006: 15).

References

- Anderson, Peter J. and Antony Weymouth (1999) *Insulting the Public? British Press and the European Union*. London: Longman.
- Blumler, Jay G. and Michael Gurevitch (1995) 'Towards Comparative Framework for Political Communication Research', in J.G. Blumler and M. Gurevitch (eds) *The Crisis of Public Communication*. London: Routledge.
- Börzel, Tanja A. (2006) 'Participation through Law Enforcement: The Case of the European Union', *Comparative Political Studies* 39(1): 128–52.
- Donsbach, Wolfgang and Thomas E. Patterson (2004) 'Political News Journalists: Partisanship, Professionalism, and Political Roles in Five Countries', in F. Esser and B. Pfetsch (eds) *Comparing Political Communication: Theories, Cases and Challenges*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Eilders, Cristianne, Friedhelm Neidhardt and Barbara Pfetsch (eds) (2004) *Die Stimme der Medien. Pressekommentare und politische Öffentlichkeit in der Bundesrepublik*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.
- European Commission (2006) 'White Paper on a European Communication Policy', COM (2006) 35 final, Brussels; at: ec.europa.eu/communication_white_paper/doc/white_paper_en.pdf
- Firmstone, Julie (2007) *The Editorial Opinion of the British Press on European Integration* PhD Thesis. Leeds: University of Leeds.
- Gerhards, Jürgen (1992) 'Europäische Öffentlichkeit durch Massenmedien?', pp. 558–67 in B. Schäfers (ed.) *Lebensverhältnisse und soziale Konflikte im neuen Europa. Verhandlungen des 26. Deutschen Soziologentages in Düsseldorf 1992*. Frankfurt: Campus.

- Habermas, Jürgen (2005) 'Why Europe Needs a Constitution', in E.O. Eriksen, J.E. Fossum and A. José Menéndez (eds) *Developing a Constitution for Europe*. London: Routledge.
- Hallin, Daniel C. and Paolo Mancini (2004) *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Iyengar, Shanto (1993) 'Agenda Setting and Beyond: Television News and the Strength of Political Issues', in W.H. Riker (ed.) *Agenda Formation*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Koopmans, Ruud (2007) 'Who Inhabits the European Public Sphere? Winners and Losers and Opponents in Europeanised Political Debates', *European Journal of Political Research* 46(2): 183–210.
- Koopmans, Ruud and Paul Statham (2002) 'The Transformation of Political Mobilisation and Communication in European Public Spheres: A Research Outline'; at: europub.wz-berlin.de/project_design.en.htm
- Moravcsik, Andrew (2002) 'In Defense of the "Democratic Deficit": Reassessing Legitimacy in the European Union', *Journal of Common Market Studies* 40(4): 603–24.
- Page, Benjamin I. (1996) 'The Mass Media as Political Actors', *Political Science and Politics* 29(1): 20–4.
- Peters, Bernhard, Steffanie Stifft, Andreas Wimmel, Michael Brüggemann and Katharina Kleinen von Königslöw (2005) 'National and Transnational Public Spheres: The Case of the EU', *European Review* No. 1 (supp.): 139–60.
- Schlesinger, Philip (1999) 'Changing Spaces of Political Communication: The Case of the European Union', *Political Communication* 16: 263–79.
- Shoemaker, Pamela and Stephen Reese (1996) *Mediating the Message: Theories of Influence on Mass Media Content*. White Plains, NY: Longman.
- Slaatta, Tore (2006) 'Europeanisation and the News Media: Issues and Research Imperatives', *Javnost – The Public* 13(1): 5–24.
- Statham, Paul (2006) 'Political Journalism and Europeanization: Pressing Europe?', EurPolCom Working Paper 13/06, University of Leeds; at: ics.leeds.ac.uk/europolcom/discussion_papers.cfm
- Statham, Paul (2007) 'Political Communication, European Integration and the Transformation of National Public Spheres: A Comparison of Britain and France', in J.E. Fossum and P. Schlesinger (eds) *The European Union and the Public Sphere: A Communicative Space in the Making?* London: Routledge.
- Statham, Paul (forthcoming) 'Political Journalism and Europeanisation: Pressing Europe?', *Journalism: Theory, Practice and Criticism*.
- Trenz, Hans-Jörg (2005) *Europa in den Medien. Die europäische Integration im Spiegel nationaler Öffentlichkeit*. Frankfurt: Campus.
- Trenz, Hans-Jörg, Maximilian Conrad and Guri Rosén (2007) *The Interpretative Moment of European Journalism*, Report No. 3/07. Oslo: ARENA.
- Van de Steeg, Marianne (2002) 'Rethinking the Conditions for a Public Sphere in the European Union', *European Journal of Social Theory* 5: 499–519.