

Greek correspondents and EU: Organic critiques and proposed remedies to address EU's communication deficit

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Introduction

In 2017 the European Commission published a report titled *"60 good reasons for the EU. Why we need the European Union"*, aiming to highlight EU's contribution to its member states' prosperity and -most importantly- to address and counter the widely held assumption that the EU suffers from a democratic deficit (2017:10), namely an absence of direct democratic procedures that would authorize the exercise of EU power (Wallace & Smith, 1995). Indeed, an abundance of studies has confirmed EU's democracy deficit arguing that it constitutes a potential threat to the future of Europe's integration and attributing it to a communication deficit (e.g. Meyer, 1999; Thiel 2008; Martins, Lecheler, & De Vreese, 2012), best described as the insufficient and ineffective provision of information, as well as the lack of transparent policy-making processes by the EU institutions (Thiel, 2008). Following this line of thought, it can be argued that media can play an important role in addressing EU's democracy deficit and thus legitimizing EU in the hearts and minds of citizens (De Vreese, 2001; Firmstone, 2008; Statham, 2008).

Despite the initial acknowledgment of the pivotal role of media, literature of the field seems to have neglected the most important actors in this communication process, namely foreign journalists who observe and report on the ins and outs of European political life in their local media as EU correspondents (Raeymaeckers, Cosijn & Deprez 2007). With a few exceptions, most studies fail to recognize and record EU correspondents' own organic critiques and proposed suggestions to improve EU's visibility in media and address its communication deficit. Bearing the above in mind, the purpose of this paper is to provide an ethnographically-informed analysis focusing on Greek correspondents and (a) present their views and critiques on the way that EU news are presented by Greek media organizations, (b) analyze their opinions on Greek citizens' level of information regarding EU affairs and (c) record their suggestions and possible remedies to address EU's communication deficit. Along this line, EU-media relations are adopted as an analytical framework to discuss the communication deficit within the realm of EU democratic shortcomings. Based on the findings we develop recommendations and suggestions that could help in the direction of improving EU's legitimacy and consequently enhance Greek people's trust in European institutions.

Literature Review

EU's communication deficit and media as political actors

Meyer (1999) traces the beginning of the EU's democracy deficit debate back in the Maastricht treaty of 1992–93. It was then that an abundance of studies started noticing that the processes of representation and accountability could not keep pace with EU's expansion. Moreover, as many researchers pointed out, the increasingly influential level of decision making was not sufficiently responsive to public preferences and scrutiny, thus paving the way for the emergence of the EU's democracy crisis (Wallace & Smith, 1995; Anderson & Eliassen 1996). Some years later, in 2005, the rejection of EU's attempt to produce a Constitution sent shock waves through Brussels bringing again the debate about EU's alleged democratic deficit to the forefront of public attention (Statham, 2007).

A recent strand of literature is placing this discussion in the context of EU's long-standing communicative handicaps and insufficient communication policy (Trenz & Eder 2004; Martins, Lecheler & De Vreese, 2012). This approach is based on the understanding that EU's institutions often fail to effectively communicate to the national media reliable and comprehensible information. Due to this failure, most citizens ignore or take for granted the positive and palpable effects of European integration and they are unaware of the extent to which they are surrounded by the workings of the Union in their daily and professional lives. Martins et al. (2012) summarized the three different kinds of obstacles that hinder the flow of information at the European level: complex information, voluminous information and scattered information. Indeed, an issue often brought up in reference to the EU's deficits is the complexity of the Union's institutions and its technocratic processes. Statham (2008) for instance, advocates that current communication deficits are due partly to external constraints such as 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. This is true, although as Frangonikolopoulos & Poulakidakos (2018) point out, one also needs to consider that the EU operates with 28 (soon to be 27) member states that bargain and nominate Presidents and Commissioners which struggle to deal with real problems, but also have to cooperate with leaders of the member states that leave all the thorniest issues to be dealt by the EU. Nevertheless, EU's structural obstacles related to key aspects of the EU's decision-making structures and institutional set-up (Trenz & Eder 2004; Martins et al., 2012) seem to constitute a significant obstacle towards its fight for legitimacy in the eyes of EU citizens. Following this line of thought it could be argued that a first step towards EU's democratic legitimation could be the establishment of public dialogue between the EU decision-makers and the public, with the latter's feedback incorporated in the decision-making process (Michailidou, 2008).

However, as Baisnée (2000) points out, blaming the EU institutions, and especially the European Commission, for their insufficient communication policy is an unsatisfying way of presenting the problem since it puts the emphasis only on one actor of the political communication process. In many ways, mass media and journalists have become political actors themselves since they deliver the key products for opinion formation and political debate in the national public spheres, which constitute the national discourses responsible for the formation of public opinion in the member states

(Thiel, 2008). The visibility of editorials in the public domain allows journalists a special status as an 'actor' in the mediated public debate (Statham, 2007). Their control function in addition to the provision of information, gives them a powerful position in informing citizens about and involving them in matters of European integration (Boomgaarden, Vliegthart, de Vreese & Schuck 2010), altering individuals' perceptions and ultimately resulting in changes in performance evaluations of the EU (Marquart, Goldberg, van Elsas, Brosius & de Vreese, 2018).

To this end, it comes as no surprise the fact that the debate about the legitimacy of the EU and the possibilities for its democratization has embarked upon the question of the role of the media (Risse & van de Steeg 2003). Research on this issue can be classified according to a number of parameters, such as the way news media cover issues of European integration and the European Union (e.g., Trenz 2004; Schuck & de Vreese 2006; Boomgaarden et al., 2010; Terzis, 2014), the degree of Europeanization (or domestication) of the news, the tone of the news about European integration and the news framing of EU affairs (McQuail & Bergsma 1983; Peter & de Vreese 2004; Koopmans 2007). Most existing studies emphasize factors within news production that are barriers to effective coverage for European governance. 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; knowledge deficits and overuse of 'nationalized' interpretative frameworks (De Vreese, 2001; Baisnée, 2002; Huber 2007; Raeymaeckers et al., 2007; Statham; 2008). Other researchers point out to the external factors that shape and influence news content arguing that in the case of the EU, it may matter whether or not a country is generally pro-European or rather EU-sceptic and that 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 (De Vreese 2001, Statham, 2008). Heikkilä & Kunelius (2008) attempt to combine some of the aforementioned arguments and advocate that the challenges posed by the EU for professional journalism are at least three-fold: political, cultural and economic. The *political* challenge is connected to the EU's distinct institutional system. *Cultural* challenges appear in the ways in which the EU redefines the relationship of journalists and their audiences. In *economic* terms, the challenge to news organizations boils down to the fact that there is no journalistic output without input: every act of reporting requires resources in the form of hiring a journalist to a given assignment or paying licenses for syndicated content. What renders these decisions more complicated is that the emergence of the EU as a prominent transnational political actor coincides with major shifts in media industry and its business models.

All the aforementioned approaches and explanations seem to do a good job in recording the main factors that contribute to EU's communication deficit from a media perspective. However, these researches fail to acknowledge the important role of EU correspondents who not only play an important mediating role in communication about the EU but also function as the eyes and the ears of a global audience shaping the image of EU to the eyes of foreign audiences (De Vreese, 2001; Vliegthart, Schuck, Boomgaarden, & De Vreese, 2008). The few attempts at large-scale coverage (e.g. Raeymaeckers et al., 2007) provide descriptive socio-demographic information about the numbers, geographical scope and infrastructure of journalism, but tell us relatively little about journalists' understandings that

inform their practices (Statham, 2008: 409). Only a few authors have tried to explain the factors that contribute to EU's communication deficit by investigating the perceptions of EU correspondents, their norms and practices (e.g. Baisnée, 2002; Gleissner & de Vreese, 2005; Statham 2008; Martins et al., 2012; Terzis, 2014). Despite these limited efforts, we argue that EU correspondents' professional views, narratives and critiques, still go unnoticed although they can be decisive in many respects since they can shed light not only to the understanding of the way EU news are covered but most importantly they can effectively contribute to the discussion regarding the necessary steps in order to address EU's communication deficit.

Greeks and EU: Communication deficit as a crisis of trust

The notion of trust is a significant factor in creating and stabilizing support for political institutions (Brosius, van Elsas & de Vreese, 2018, Dustmann et al. 2017). Bearing this in mind, it is easy to assume that trust is key for EU's legitimacy and effectiveness (Hobolt & de Vries, 2016). Moreover, as Raudon and Shore (2018) point out, a key assumption held by integration theorists and EU policymakers is that economic prosperity, peace and security translates inevitably into increased support for the EU and its project. By that same logic, however, as the authors argue, one could hypothesize that sustained poverty, hardship and suffering should fuel growing opposition to the EU and all that it stands for.

Indeed, the impact of the USA financial bubble on European economic growth and debt accumulation, as well as the impact of the refugee crisis, have, among other issues created a confidence crisis on the merits of the European integration (Frangonikolopoulos & Poulakidakos, 2018: 70), resulting in a considerable decline in the EU trust levels. According to the latest Eurobarometer trends, far less than half of all European citizens (42%) tend to trust the EU or its institutions (Eurobarometer 90, 2018). As it can be anticipated, the economic crisis of 2008 had a particularly pronounced negative effect on trust in the European Commission and European Parliament in the four countries that suffered the most namely Greece, Spain, Portugal and Ireland (Roth, Gros, & Nowak-Lehmann, 2014). In no other country is this loss of trust more evident than in Greece. Greeks, since late 1980s, have been amongst the strongest supporters of the EU integration process (Nanou & Vernet, 2013). Ferguson (1999) points out that Greeks joined the Eurozone with heightened 'expectations of modernity' and assumptions of economic parity with other EU member states. It is also interesting to see that in Greece trust in the European Parliament was, in fact, much higher than trust in the national parliament (Dustmann, Eichengreen, Otten, Sapir, Tabellini, & Zoega, 2017: 63). As Raudon and Shore (2018) argue, the promise of deeper integration into the EU was eagerly anticipated in the lead up to the euro's arrival in Greece in 2002. In the following years, popular optimism contained 'a certain euphoria mixed with longing to become 'Western,' to finally 'make it'' (Vradis & Dalakoglou 2011: 13). Austerity reversed that sense of the inevitability of progress since Greece was the first country that was hit by the economic crisis and suffered the hardest and longest austerity measures. This crisis has caused much political controversy, electoral volatility and civil strife, affecting political parties, voting behavior and governing institutions. As Pleios & Frangonikolopoulos, (2013) point out, the crisis triggered intra-European tensions, Europhobia, the propagation of negative stereotypes and the rebirth of Europe's North- South divide. Most importantly, opposition to Europe advocated a No vote in the 2015 EU referendum

that almost drove Greece out of the EU (Fanoulis & Guerra, 2017). Although Greece remained a member of EU and also seems to be getting over the crisis, recent Eurobarometer trends show that Greeks continue to exhibit the lowest levels of trust towards EU. More specifically, seven out of ten (70%) Greeks said that they do not trust EU (Eurobarometer 90, 2018). After Greece, the highest proportions of distrust are seen in the United Kingdom (53%) and the Czech Republic (58%), followed by France (57%), Italy (55%), . Overall, a majority of the member-states tend “not to trust” the EU in ten countries (Eurobarometer 90).

These low levels of trust are organically connected, one could argue, with the audiences’ low level of knowledge and information on EU affairs since, trust cannot exist without knowledge. Flood (2002) for instance points out that lack of knowledge and lack of interest can affect attitudes towards the EU, while contingent factors at the domestic level can further impact on frustration and critical attitudes. A strand of literature also shows that in order to gain knowledge and form political opinions, citizens rely on the mass media, particularly when an issue is distant and abstract, such as the EU and its functions (Vliegenthart & Walgrave, 2008) and that news coverage of foreign affairs influences public opinion more strongly than news about domestic affairs, where citizens may have a larger contextual knowledge to draw on (Page & Shapiro, 1992; Gavin, 1998; Norris, 2000). Moreover, Brosius et al. (2018) highlight that trust in the EU is associated with the amount of media reporting about the EU and its tonality in national news media. To this end, we argue that media can play an important role in constructing a “European Public Sphere”, shaping public opinion, creating a ‘shared European identity’, providing the necessary information and laying the foundations for the creation of trust (Schlesinger, 1999). This hypothesis is verified by recent Eurobarometer trends which show that almost seven out of ten Greeks (67%) feel that they are not well-informed about European affairs (Eurobarometer 88, 2017). Overall, in the 28 states of the EU 48% feel that they are not well-informed. Furthermore, 72% of the respondents in Greece believe that in their country people are not well informed, around eight in 10 Greeks (79 percent) believe that their voice is not being heard in the European Union and around five in ten Greeks (49%) do not feel that they are citizens of the EU (Eurobarometer 88, 2017).

Such findings point to the conclusion that Greeks not only show the highest rates of distrust towards EU but at the same time they show very low levels of knowledge and understanding about European matters. This combination, we argue, can be proven extremely dangerous since according to Lechler (2019), Eurosceptic attitudes often manifest in anti-EU voting behavior and can have detrimental effects on the stability of the EU and its growth prospects by furthering the crumbling of the Union. Dustmann et al. (2017) point out that in some cases, like that of Austria, this dissatisfaction has manifested itself as support for non-traditional (some would say extremist) movements and parties. And in some other cases it has taken a form of hostility to, and ultimately repudiation of, the European Union as exemplified by the British vote to leave the EU (Brosius et al., 2018). It is therefore important to better understand and explore the determinants of support for the EU and in this case to study the main actors responsible for communicating EU to citizens, namely EU correspondents.

Research Questions and Method

This paper has its starting point in the lack of systematically collected studies that focus on the narratives, critiques and suggestions to address EU's communication deficit, articulated by EU correspondents who constitute basic actors in the political communication procedure. Furthermore, while many authors agree over the existence of a democratic deficit, advocating that questions of media performance are inherently linked to any proposed solutions to Europe's perceived democratic deficit (Statham, 2007) they seem to disagree over what the remedies of this deficit could be (Meyer, 1999; Trenz & Eder, 2004; Statham, 2008).

To address this void, the research used in-depth semi-structured interviews with a small but specialist group of Greek EU correspondents. We chose Greece as a case study because it is the country that suffered the most by the economic crisis and because its citizens display the lowest levels of trust towards EU. Qualitative interviews have been extensively used by communication academics to assess EU journalism (e.g. Statham 2007; Raeymaeckers, Cosijn & Deprez 2007; Heikkilä & Kunelius, 2008; Statham 2008, Lloyd & Marconi, 2014.). Between July 2018 and September 2018, we interviewed six Greek correspondents based in Brussels, London, Paris and Berlin and working for various Greek high-profile media (online, print, radio and tv). The interviews lasted approximately one hour. The study aimed in recording correspondents' views on the following parameters:

- (1) the way European affairs are covered and presented by Greek media,
- (2) Greek public's level of knowledge on European matters, and
- (3) their suggestions for improving EU's visibility in the Greek media.

Their answers were recorded, transcribed and then coded based on the various common issues that emerged.

Findings

Greek media and EU news

The first research question addressed EU correspondents' views on the way that EU affairs are presented by Greek media. Findings indicate that the vast majority of Greek correspondents believe that the media they work for present only a small amount of European news and dedicate very little time to them. Furthermore, according to the correspondents' personal views, Greek media use a complicated and technical terminology while covering EU news, thus making it harder for the audience to fully comprehend the importance of the news presented.

I believe that Greek media tend to present a very small part of the European affairs. When European issues are presented, this is either done in a snapshot, or using difficult terminology and a rather complicated language. All European news is presented in extremely superficial manner (M.D.)

Moreover, as they underline, EU affairs are covered fragmentarily, and Greek media fail to provide the necessary context that could help the audience make sense of the news.

Greek media do not provide any context whatsoever. They don't devote any time either. At the most popular radio station in Greece international news do not last more than five minutes in a two hours' program (I.K.)

Another issue that we addressed during the interviews had to do with the factors that influence whether an EU story will make it to the Greek headlines. All of the interviewees emphasized the “Greece-factor” explaining that if a story had a national perspective then it had more chances of getting Greek media’s attention.

A lot of people in the Greek media field believe that when an EU story is not ‘hellenified’, i.e. when the reporter does not give the topic a ‘Greek-centered’ dimension, the public will never be interested in the news (P.V.)

The domestication of the news, namely the adaptation of a European topic to the national narratives, is not a new phenomenon. Indeed, an abundance of studies suggests that news about the EU is more likely to be accepted by domestically based news editors if it has a clear link to the nation state (Baisnée, 2002; de Vreese, 2001; Gleissner & de Vreese, 200;). Moreover, studies of EU news production commonly conclude that media coverage is colored by national considerations and portrays the same occurrence differently according to each nation’s expectations, identity and political culture (Thiel, 2008). DeVreese, (2005) offers an explanation for this phenomenon arguing that most European media are domestically owned and therefore display a preference for news coverage that emphasizes the national effects of European integration rather than overarching common European priorities. Moreover, according to Hallin and Manchini (2004) media coverage and content of foreign policy is not only the result of the prevailing nationalistic discourse, but also of the political inclination, the “internal” or “external pluralism” that characterizes the medium. This is especially true for Greece, a country whose media system is characterized by clientelism, namely a pattern of social organization in which access to social resources is controlled by patrons and delivered to clients in exchange for various kinds of support, typically contrasted with forms of citizenship in which access to resources is based on universalistic criteria and formal equality before the law (Hallin & Papathanassopoulos, 2002:184-185). Most EU correspondents commented on the status of Greek media with great depreciation, as the vast majority of the interviewees’ evoked questions of bias, political motivation and affiliation tendencies during the presentation of the news.

The news is presented fragmentarily in most cases. There’s always a serious bias. This bias is always politically motivated in all Greek media. Everything is seen through their own peculiar prisms, which are definitely more distorting than enlightening. Political affiliation is, of course, behind all the above. Everything is seen through a prism which distorts reality (A.A.)

This seems to be the case for the majority of Greek media, according to the views expressed by the EU correspondents. One correspondent specifically stated that she sometimes has to literally beg her editor to present her reports on EU developments that may have no impact on Greece. The result is one-sided and thus distorted presentation of the European news.

Greek media- not only during this period of crisis- choose to present only what they consider important for Greece and the Greeks. This domestication of EU news may be legitimate and understandable up to a certain extent. The problem starts when it leads to a one-sided or fragmentary presentation of the news (F.K.)

With regard to the barriers that Greek correspondents face in their effort to report on EU affairs, the vast majority of the interviewees mentioned significant difficulties in accessing EU sources and exclusive information. Most of them attributed this barrier to national factors and to factors related to the prestige of the media they work for.

The prestige of the media one works for is a very important factor. They know you; you are somehow listed somewhere. If they have to choose between my newspaper and Le Monde, for instance, they will definitely opt for the second one in order to give some exclusive information. The reporter's country is also an important factor. Between France and Greece, for example, it is absolutely sure that they are not going to opt for us (M.D.)

In a very interesting allegory, Raeymaeckers, Cosijn & Deprez (2007: 117) make the argument of a sort of Cinderella attitude in Brussels, where the medium for which a journalist works determines who will get the prettiest dress to go to the ball. It is perfectly understandable, they argue, that journalists from national high-quality media or from national news agencies who cover the EU on a daily basis take this as an affront to their professionalism.

If you are a correspondent of a small country like Greece, it is extremely difficult to secure an exclusive interview from a high-profile official of EU (F.K.)

Another issue that came up during the interviews had to do with the economic crisis and the impact it has not only on the Greek media landscape but on the EU correspondents as well. The interviewees described a bleak picture explaining that most Greek media cut down on the number of correspondents and preferred to rely on news agencies to get information about international affairs.

The number of correspondents is being constantly reduced, we are badly paid, and we are considered luxury goods! (M.D.)

Sambrook (2010) explains that international reporting, with its high cost was often at the forefront of budget cuts. However the number of EU correspondents in recent years has seen an unprecedented cut leading many researchers to argue that foreign correspondence is in a state of decline, if not 'crisis' (Archetti, 2013), and that foreign correspondents seem to have become an endangered species (Brüggemann et al., 2016). Economic concerns in particular have resulted in a growing number of media choosing to no longer have journalists permanently accredited to EU institutions (Raeymaeckers, Cosijn & Deprez 2007; Salaverría, 2014) leaving the worst-hit countries, which arguably needed the news and analysis the most, with a shrunken representation (Lloyd & Marconi, 2014). This is especially true for Greece. After all, as Brüggemann et al. (2016) show, both the host country and the home country (where the headquarters of the respective journalists are situated) may determine journalistic working conditions. The home country may matter as the economic situation of the national media organizations is likely to influence the situation of their foreign correspondents.

Being a reporter in expensive countries like Britain for instance, requires lots of work, patience and perseverance, as the media we are working for will never pay you according to what we are worth, to what we really work for. We live

in a country where wages are five times higher and the cost of living is many times higher than the cost of living in Greece (I.K.)

The shrinkage of the permanent correspondent corps based in Brussels or other major European countries inevitably led to a greater dependence on coverage from the news media's home base (Lloyd & Marconi, 2014). This strategy, however, has backfired since as expected it led to a downward spiral in the quantity of international news being reported and many in the profession believe there is a high cultural and social price to be paid for this retreat from international news (Sambrook, 2010).

Views on Greek citizens' knowledge of EU issues

The second issue we sought to address had to do with correspondents' perceptions regarding Greek citizens' level of knowledge on EU matters. Most correspondents expressed the opinion that the 'hellenification' of the European news, as well as the scarce and fragmentary presentation thereof, has a direct impact to the Greek public's level of knowledge and understanding.

Due to this 'domestication', many serious and substantial questions that could be the keys for understanding how a certain European issue shall evolve in the future are left aside. Let's think about Greece's financial crisis, for instance. So many people were astonished when this occurred. Before they even figured out what was really going on, we had already signed the Memoranda and the IMF had already taken care of our case. I still doubt whether everyone has understood what is really going on here (I.K.)

Another issue that can have a potentially significant impact on Greek citizens' knowledge of EU issues, causing confusion and disinformation had to do with the correspondents' own education and training.

Some of journalists that cover EU are not specialized and have not received the appropriate educational background to work on international news. They are not able to realize how important an EU story may be, and they are not aware of the role a measure or an incident may play in their everyday life. Since they don't understand it, they can't explain it effectively to their audience either. The result is that, whenever the public hears about Brussels or Europe, they pay very little attention (M.D.)

An ill-informed audience –according to the correspondents- forms distorted opinions on European issues and ends up being negatively surprised by facts that wouldn't seem unexpected for someone who would be well informed.

People very often are petrified when they read or hear about important incidents. Though, if one has access to foreign press nowadays, nothing seems unexpected (I.K.)

Most importantly, as one correspondent pointed out, the very high level of distorted information creates false expectations.

[..] And false expectations lead to wrong political choices (A.A.)

Another interesting narrative that came up from many EU correspondents during the interviews had to do with the notion of a vicious circle. As they explained, there seems to be a direct connection between the way that Greek media report on EU and the audiences' perceived level of understanding and knowledge on EU matters.

So, this is the vicious circle: the head editor does not believe that the public is in any way interested in international news and therefore he dedicates very little time to them, presenting fragmentary and scarce information. It is then extremely hard for the public to have a broad, complete picture of the news. Consequently, it is normal for the public to actually lose its interest in international and European news and in this way reaffirms the editor's assumptions (I.K.)

To this end we argue that to improve the audience's level of understanding of EU affairs, it is necessary to improve the way Greek media report on EU. The final section that follows tries to address this issue by recording Greek correspondents' suggestions and proposals.

Proposed remedies

With regards to the changes that should be made in order to address EU's communication deficit and improve Greek people's knowledge and understanding of EU issues we asked for the interviewed correspondents' suggestions and possible remedies. Their answers were classified according to the following parameters:

1. Increase the amount of time dedicated to EU news
2. Increase the number of news sections that focus on EU
3. Use of simple and comprehensible language
4. Provision of context and follow ups
5. Recruitment of specialized and trained correspondents
6. Increase the number of correspondents in EU countries
7. Continuous and systematic training for the EU correspondents

Bearing in mind the issues that were addressed in the previous two sections, EU correspondents suggested first of all that Greek media organizations should dedicate more time and space in covering EU news. Furthermore, they proposed changes in the presentation and analysis of EU news with the focus put on the use of simple and comprehensible language.

Understanding European matters is not difficult. All things can be explained in a very simple way. Complexity in speech and vocabulary is often an index of a lack of comprehension by the reporter himself. If one understands well one issue, then he/she can also explain it in a very simple way. If one does not understand well, then he/she may provide false explanations (A.A.)

There are ways to make information about EU more attractive to your audience. You could present and examine the news from various different angles, analyze how a measure is going to be implemented; to what extent it will influence everyday life, etc. To do all that however, you need to have more time (M.D)

Indeed, as Statham and Trenz (2012) point out, the opportunity for people to form opinions about the European level of governance strongly depends on the degree to which European issues, decisions and policies are visible in public debates carried by national mass media. Most media and national parties, however, do not discuss about the everyday work of EU and they just focus on some big events or breaking news (Frangonikolopoulos, 2016). To this end, it seems that an increase of the daily news sections that focus in a comprehensible way on EU could diminish the perceived distance between Greece and EU.

Another issue that came up had to do with the provision of context and follow ups to the EU news so that the Greek audience could not only make sense of the news but most importantly understand its possible impact. This suggestion is considered to be of great importance since it brings into light the journalists' duty to help people make sense of what they see or listen. After all, as Brueggemann et al. (2016) argue, the lack of foreign coverage is not so problematic in terms of access to information from other countries since in the wider digital media environment, more information than ever before is available. However, as they point out, the very abundance of information, increases the need for making sense of this information. To this end, it can be understood that foreign correspondents as professionals who 'manage meaning' across borders are needed more than ever (Archetti, 2012).

This brings us to the next issue addressed by the interviewees, namely the EU correspondents' adequacy to provide this much needed meaning and context. Most interviewees admitted that it is very difficult to keep track of all the EU developments/changes and said that systematic training is much needed.

We are always in need of training. European matters are always complicated. The EU institutions are so many, that one has to study thoroughly in order to have things clear in mind. Training has to be systematic. I believe that it is impossible to do our job without being systematically trained. (I.K.)

In terms of self-criticism, another issue that was brought up had to do with the correspondents' own mindset and beliefs towards the audience. As one of the interviewees mentioned,

There is a subconscious tendency of underestimating public's ability to understand. I think that journalists often consider that our readers/listeners/audience are either not interested or unable to understand much (M.D.)

Addressing this issue needs a change of attitude based on the understanding that it is up to the correspondents themselves to create meaning and engage people in EU stories. Again, for this to become possible, there is a great need for more specialized foreign correspondents in EU countries since for many media, EU information depends mainly on press agencies, freelancers and fixers, a less expensive workforce which replaced the established correspondents (Lloyd & Marconi, 2014).

Specialized EU correspondents can provide context and background. However, it is not unusual for many media organizations to hire a person to cover EU affairs by monitoring the foreign press agencies. This person may know a

few things here and there about EU but lacks in special knowledge and is incapable of providing the necessary context (I.K.)

In order to have and present exclusive news, media organizations must have reporters near the source of the news. If they don't, then they won't have any news and I'm saying this because I believe that "a second hand" news is not news at all (A.A.)

By and large, the EU correspondents we interviewed, suggested a series of steps that could –according to their opinions- effectively help Greek media address EU's communication deficit and improve Greek people's knowledge and understanding of EU issues. The extent to which these steps could be implemented largely depends on each media organizations owners' will and determination.

Conclusion

This article set out to explore the main factors that shape the news coverage of European matters in Greek media organizations and to record recommendations to improve EU's visibility and legitimacy. To do so, we focused on one basic political actor in national communication, namely the EU correspondents who work for various Greek media and we documented their personal narratives and suggested remedies. A general finding that stands out is that most Greek media fail to recognize the challenges –as well as the significance- that reporting on EU entails and most importantly they failed to address these challenges in a creative way. Instead, their main strategy is to adapt European topics to the national narratives, thus presenting them in a distorted and out of context manner. Greek media position EU news in the margins of their news programs devoting as little time and space as possible, assuming that their audience doesn't know and doesn't care. Like a self-fulfilling prophecy, or as described "like a vicious cycle", this initial strategy- which was in reality based on the head editors' own lack of knowledge about EU and the media owners' resistance in investing time and resources in EU correspondence- indeed, results in Greek people having a very low level of knowledge, interest and understanding regarding EU affairs.

To address this 'vicious cycle' and improve EU's visibility in Greek media as well as the audience's level of knowledge, this study also recorded EU correspondents' own suggestions and remedies. Seven suggestions stood out. Some of them addressed internal issues (e.g. the need for continuous and systematic training) and some other external issues (e.g. recruit more specialized and trained correspondents, etc.). These suggestions, we argue, constitute a first but important step towards the efforts to improve EU's visibility and legitimacy. However, as mentioned, the extent to which these steps could be implemented largely depends on each media organization owners' will and determination. We can only suppose that since it has been proven that the revenues directly generated by international news (advertising on the foreign pages for example) have never been sufficient to cover its costs (Sambrook, 2010:12), money will not be the driving force for implementing these changes.

Having acknowledged that, we argue that in order for these suggestions to actually work and improve the way EU news is covered, it is important for the head editors and in general the media people to acquire a "European perspective" and a deep understanding of EU's role and contribution. Journalists and the media in Greece, and not

only, attribute attention only to “their” politicians and “their” political system. They scrutinize and observe only the behavior of the actors and processes of their national system, which according to their understanding is the centre of all developments, internal and external. The reality of European integration, however, creates new ways of exercising politics. These are linked with the institutions of the European Union. The directly elected European Parliament represents the citizens of the member states. The Commission, it’s members who are appointed by the governments of the members states, propose legislation. The Council of the EU co-decide with the European parliament on legislation. Member states have not abandoned their sovereignty but share it through collective decision-making procedures. In addition, the complex interdependence of European integration is multidimensional (economic, cultural etc.). Irrespective of nationality, Greek, French, German, Italian or Bulgarian, European integration is characterized by discursive, mental and collective processes on diverse issues, such as the environment, education, sports, entrepreneurship and entertainment. For many the “domestic” may be separated from the “European”, but NGOs and organizations of civil society within and between the member states communicate, share information and establish relationships of trust in an effort to deal with local, national, European and global issues and problems.

Despite this reality, the “European village” is left out by the media, and the European Union is understood and covered as something that is not “familiar” but “abstract” and distant, something which disturbs “our national us”, “our national logic”. This cannot but only increase the crisis of trust towards the EU – and especially today as citizens of the members states appear to be alienated from politics and seek comfort in extreme radical movements/parties. European integration requires information and coverage that combines “our reality” (home, work, routine) with the “reality of others”. Only in this way will citizens be able to think about their position in European integration and develop and propose alternatives to their “familiar” and “distant” world. This will not only facilitate the conditions for overcoming oversimplified and divisive (us vs them) logics, but also cultivate the ground for critical thought, multidimensional information and effective communication.

Till now, however, there is relatively little evidence of organizational efforts to transform news production processes and journalist practices specifically to enhance the “European perspective”. Although such a perspective is a noble idea, many journalists feel that it will fail due to political media structural limitations¹. Will the “European perspective” be able to limit the power of governments in the EU? Important are also the problems of the journalistic world: limited staff, limited material sources and low salaries. At the same time, however, one can also argue that the media do not doubt and challenge these practices. Narrow-mindedness, however, magnifies the problems and has negative consequences on the way citizens understand European integration. It referrals and inflames traditional stereotypes and conceptions that are characterized by a dedication to political and social conflict between member-states of the EU.

The media have the ability to act as ‘communicative linkages’, a term coined by Statham et al (2005), between political institutions and their citizens and act as safe guards of accountability and democratic legitimacy. Moreover, they can

¹ See Seminar organized by the Jean Monnet Chair of the School of Journalism and Mass Communication, Aristotle University, “Greece in European News, European News in Greece”, 19 April 2018.

contribute to the emergence of a European Public Sphere and consequently to the process of creating and maintaining trust. In order for Greek media to contribute to the emergence of the European Public Sphere they first have to face their own demons, namely the deficit in media pluralism, the focus on national frames and the concentration of media ownership in the hands of a powerful few (Hallin & Papathanassopoulos, 2002). Greece's complex relationship of 'love and hate' towards EU, makes the challenge of reporting on EU even greater. However, this is the time, for Greek media to rise up to the occasion. In this specific time in history where the global agenda is so multifaceted, the European political sphere so complex (Raeymaeckers, Cosijn & Deprez, 2007) and Europe is facing a rapidly globalizing environment with new threats and challenges (Frangonikolopoulos, 2016), the performance of Greek mass media in creating a field of political communication and transforming Greeks into essentially European citizens is more crucial than ever.

The "European perspective" does not require more effort, work and money. It requires a different way of conceptualizing today's political and social reality. There is need to disengage and move away from introvert and conflictual narratives, "us" and the "EU", to extrovert understandings and opinions, such as "us in the EU" or "us" in "relation to the EU". To develop and adopt a "European perspective" means that one is thorough and analytical, one that understands that politics today does not only take place at the national level, but also at the regional-global. This is not to disregard national sovereignty and politics, but to understand that the "national" and the "European" co-exist, they complement one another and should not be treated as incompatible.

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