JOURNALISTS IMAGINING THE EUROPEAN PUBLIC SPHERE

PROFESSIONAL DISCOURSES ABOUT THE EU NEWS PRACTICES IN TEN COUNTRIES

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Abstract

This article aims to analyse journalists' professional imagination in connection to EU news. A special attention is paid to the variety of ideas about European public sphere that inform (or fail to inform) journalists' work. The article is based on 149 semi-structured qualitative journalist interviews conducted in the home offices of mainstream news organisations in ten European countries. The article takes up Charles Taylor's idea that public sphere belongs to the key *social imaginaries* of modernity and treat journalists as important carriers of these social imaginaries. These professional imaginaries are traced by looking at how journalists perceive the locus of news, how they define their professional role vis-à-vis their audience, and finally, how they would describe the political and communication problems within the EU. From this reasoning three relatively coherent lines of thought were derived: classical professionalism, secular discourse, and cosmopolitan discourse. As a conclusion the article attempts to map out these different discourses in connection to modes of political communication. The three discourses detected in the article can be seen as contemporary versions of professionalism in European news organisations. As such, they do not give much ground to assume that a European public sphere would emerge out of national journalistic cultures. Given the emergent nature of publics and public spheres, this does not mean that such practices may not be developed outside journalism.

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Introduction

Discussions about the phenomena we now refer to as the "public sphere" have been taking place now for many years. Similar to some other key notions of modern western social thought – such as "free speech" (Peters 2005) – it is a part of a broader network of concepts of social thought. As such the concept has gone through a number of re-articulations. Changing patterns of political and social power have challenged earlier notions and provoked new innovations. In recent decades, these challenges have been invoked, for instance, by the emergence of popular and consumer cultures, and new media technologies.

Journalists have been more or less disconnected from discussions about the public sphere. This disconnection may be partly due to the fact that a number of influential theorists have not either shown particular interest in journalists.[a] In the normative framework – most notably inspired by the early work of Jürgen Habermas (1962/1989) – the modern news media was treated as the ideal example of how a historically envisioned liberal-democratic ideal of a public sphere gradually ceased to exist. Later, for Habermas and many of his discussants, the significant actors in the development of public sphere(s) have not been journalists but, for instance, social movements (Fraser 1992), or leaders of the political and economic projects linked to transnationalisation (Keane 2005). These foci are, of course, relevant in their own right and work in this area has contributed greatly to contemporary social theory. In this paper, however, the aim is to try and turn the focus onto journalists.

Another reason for by-passing journalistic practice in theorising the public sphere is the opacity of the concept itself. According to Craig Calhoun (2003, 242) "the public sphere is a spatial metaphor for a largely non-spatial phenomenon." Charles Taylor (2004, 87) makes more or less the same point by distinguishing "what the public sphere *does*" from "what it *is*." There is a built-in tension between issues concerning the *structural* preconditions of spaces, spheres, or realms we call public, and the *pragmatic* questions concerning the quality of action in these spheres. These aspects are closely linked and they mutually define each other. This is to say that our conceptions of the space carry with them normative implications of how we can or should act. It is precisely this tendency to overemphasise either of these two aspects that is damaging to our understanding of the role that journalists play in the public sphere.

We begin by elaborating this distinction and suggesting how it may be overcome. As a result of this, we argue that theorists and journalists may not be as disconnected on the subject of the public sphere as the standard wisdom in the relationship between theory and practice might suggest. In addition, we suggest that the European integration sets out an appropriate context for clarifying and elaborating our conceptions of the public sphere. Our empirical case is based on the analysis of journalist interviews conducted in ten European countries.

The Public Sphere as a Space and as (Inter)action

Habermas' (1962/1989) canonical text of the field saw the emergence of a spatial-structural aspect of public sphere(s) taking place, at least in two senses. Firstly, the emergence of public spheres brought issues of critical reasoning outside the feudalised spaces of publicity (pp. 27–31). Secondly, this expansion introduced new spaces (coffee houses, salons etc.) as venues for critical reasoning. These new spaces and the understanding of them as the "sphere" emerged within the distinct

structural forces of capitalism. Later, the circumstances brought about by the self same capitalism made these inventions obsolete.

"The language of space" used in describing the public sphere directs our imagination by suggesting that the problems of the public sphere and their solutions are connected to the question of *where.* Where is it that private citizens or groups of various interests could come together under the imagined critical eyes of "the public"? This question was taken further by, for instance, Nicholas Garnham (1990, 113), who argued that it was crucial to uphold a national focus on national political processes and that public service broadcasting offered the appropriate place for this function. More than a decade later, James Curran introduced his working model based on Habermas' later definition of the public sphere as "a network for communicating information and points of view." In this model he holds that a democratic society needs a core institution of public service media, a place "where people come together to engage in reciprocal debate about the management of society" (Curran 2002, 239-245). Even if this core is merely a nodal point in a network of arenas, in effect, it still assumes that there can be a particular place where the rules of genuine public sphere action can be applied.

The spatial argument is also intertwined in the influential Habermas critique. Nancy Fraser (1992) argues that the access to a singular public sphere is never equally open to all, hence what is needed is a diversity of counter public spheres at different levels of society. Although this argument is critical to Habermas, it still mainly adheres to the spatial logic of the public sphere. As such, difficulties arise in defending it from being incorporated into a broader normative claim that we need to retain a search for such spaces, and protect those that seem to come closest to the ideal (cf. Schudson 1992). Indeed, as Calhoun points out, the emergence of counter-publics is often characterised by a sense of being excluded – from *the* public sphere.

In attempting to understand the role of journalists, the spatial argument is indeed important. It enables us to pay attention to the way in which the network of media is structured and how this positions journalists in particular places in the exchange of news and views. However, it does not help us to pay attention to what journalists actually think and do in these places. In trying to make sense of European developments the spatial-structural emphasis on the public sphere theory can lead to a debate about finding or establishing a medium that would be able to link, equally, the people of Europe to the structures of the EU. This is an attempt, which some scholars find futile both in practical and theoretical terms (Slaatta 2006, for a more positive interpretation, see, Schlesinger 1999).

Another side of the idea of the public sphere the emphasis on the presumably distinct quality of *action* within a public sphere. These theorisations can be traced back to the legacy of pragmatist philosophy and symbolic interactionism. In these traditions, the main point about *public* – it is telling that these thinkers do not employ the term "sphere" – is that it is not primarily something spatial but rather a distinct form of interaction. The public is called into being by *problematisations* of a given issue. It is constituted by people and groups, who disagree about what ought to be done and who – in the absence of common culture – are supposed to discuss the matter at hand.

The early pragmatists were highly sceptical of universal truths. For instance, John Dewey (1927) maintained that there are no guarantees that publics were always democratically representative.

Habermas (1987) in his theory of communicative action, on the other hand, coupled this optimism with universalisation by suggesting that validity claims built into all speech acts would serve as a model for the general criteria of an ideally rational public debate.

The pragmatist tradition with its focus on action and the emphasis on problems as the fuel of publics is useful for theorising the fate of publicness in the current trajectory at least for two reasons. Firstly, it stresses the point that current routines, institutions, and structures result from the actions of previous publics and their understanding of the political condition. Thus, by analytically *separating* the emergence of publics from the institutional arrangements of politics or media enables us to think that the publicness of action in itself is instrumental in creating publicness. Secondly, in terms of journalism, the pragmatist emphasis enables the questioning of what sort of thought frameworks inform the work of professional journalists.

Imagining the Public Sphere

Charles Taylor (2004, 83-99) defines the public sphere as extrapolitical, secular, and metatopical space. *Extrapolitical* refers to a principle that discussions in this place are seen to be outside of power. The discussion is supposed to be listened to by power, but it is not itself an exercise of power. The extrapolitical status of the public sphere denotes a lack of power, but it also assumes that public opinion created in the public sphere can be ideally rational and disengaged from partisan spirit. *Secularity*, in turn, refers to an idea that an external force supervising and checking power is not based on any divine order, but that laws and policies are man-made, constituted by common political action. *Metatopicality* means that the public sphere is not bounded by any particular event or purpose, but it knits together a plurality of spaces into a one larger space of nonassembly. The fact that the public sphere is metatopical implies that it not merely transcends spaces, but it also extends over time. The public sphere is institutionalised in a sense that we can expect that a possibility for conversation, and public action, will available tomorrow as well as today.

Taylor (2004) argues that the public sphere was historically constituted in "a long march" towards modernity. In this long march a relatively unified, religious and homogenous European worldview was replaced by a modern and secular understanding of the world. In Taylor's view, a key notion of explaining this process is *social imaginary*: A mode of collective understanding about the social world that is organised in the everyday consciousness of people.

Social imaginary shares some qualities with (social) *theory*. Both are deployed in trying to make sense of social existence. This understanding is based on both factual evidence and normative reflexivity. What distinguishes social imaginary from theories, according to Taylor, is that social imaginary is imagined by ordinary people, not by theorists; it is carried in images, stories, and legends, not in theoretical concepts; it is created in daily practices and routines, not exclusively in theoretical reflection. What makes social imaginaries powerful in comparison with theories is that they are shared by large groups of people and they enable common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy. Theories can be incorporated into common practices and enjoy legitimacy insofar as they are transformed into social imaginaries (Taylor 2004, 23-30).

The idea of social imaginary is helpful for our discussion in at least two ways. Firstly, it sheds light on how the dynamics between the unfolding potentials of

ideas and concepts of modernity would play out. This is critical for understanding that ideas and imaginaries are contingent, thus, constantly moving and evolving. Secondly, by turning the relationship of theories and everyday consciousness upside down – or more precisely, stressing the interaction between these two – Taylor helps us to introduce journalists into the discussion on the public sphere.

Journalists are to be regarded neither as the leading forces in the field of public sphere nor as representatives of "the ordinary people." Moreover, journalists should be treated as modern professionals, whose daily practices deploy, reproduce and recreate social imaginaries on the modern social order. It is in this spirit that we examine the 149 journalist interviews conducted for the project *Adequate Information Management in Europe* (AIM). In the interviews journalists were asked to describe the status of EU news in their respective news organisations.[b] One central task in the interviews was to unfold the variety of ideas about the European public sphere that inform (or fail to inform) journalists' work in their home offices.[c]

Not surprisingly, many journalists found these questions baffling and even irritatingly theoretical. This obviously comes down to their self-perception as "down-to-earth" people, who generally draw a sharp distinction between their realistic approach to the social world and that of free-floating academic or politically-driven discussion where such a term such as the European "public sphere(s)" is tossed around. A resistance – and sometimes outright hostility – towards thinking about journalism in these terms is, however, not an a-theoretical position, even if journalists themselves may think so. When professionals embrace, disregard, or resist this or that account of the world, this act itself is validated in one way or another. Since journalists are practitioners and not theorists by profession, the validity tends to be based not on elaborated concepts and theories, but on something that might be called a "professional imaginary." It is a view of the world coherent enough to inform journalists in their everyday work. It is a view that helps journalists to distinguish themselves from news sources and the audience, but at the same time this view produces a sense of legitimacy in what journalists do. Because legitimacy needs to be redeemed from others rather than from journalists themselves, the "professional imaginary" cannot be aloof from more broadly shared social imaginaries.

In our the empirical analysis we first looked at journalists' understanding about the *locus* of news i.e. the space or realm in which newsworthy events are supposed to take place. This spatial foundation of the source of meaning is closely linked to the question of how the news is framed. Particular realms of meaning emphasise particular frames of interpretation and exclude others: for instance, the "nation" as a locus would emphasise the frame of "common interest" instead of the frame of "pleasure."

Table 1: Research Themes and Questions for the Analysis

THEMES	QUESTIONS
Locus	Where can we find the meaning for news? What is/are the natural frame(s) for news?
Journalists vis-à-vis audience	What is role of a journalist? What is the implied or imagined reader like?
Problems within the EU	What are the main political problems in the EU? What are the main communication problems in the EU?

Another fundamental question concerns the role of the journalist vis-à-vis the audience. By probing the idea of *who* are considered to be involved in the communication that journalists create or facilitate, we can find a continuum that stretches from the idea that EU journalists aim to address educated elites, all the way to the idea that they would try to speak to uninterested, apolitical individuals. These sketches of audience, of course, have their counterparts in the professional roles that journalists suggest for themselves. An educated audience calls for journalists as experts, and the uninterested for an educator etc. Again, just as frames and spaces of reference are synchronised, so are professional roles and images of the audience.

Thirdly, we looked into how journalists make sense of how the EU functions as a supranational political system and what are the *political* and *communication problems* they detected within the EU. These problems are, for instance, connected to institutional reforms and projects such as drafting the EU Constitution and the enlargement on the one hand, and to the efficacy of EU policies and the legitimacy of the political system itself on the other. Political problems and communication problems are often interconnected.

Three Discourses on EU Journalism

Journalists' understanding of the three questions outlined above constitutes a rich texture of professional reflexivity. Thus, it is possible to draw out several threads of how journalists' reasonings are developed in the interview data. We find it useful to look at them as *discourses* that help journalists to interconnect their views about "where are we" (the locus of news) and "who are we" (relationship between journalism and audiences), and to how these questions relate to the current situation in the EU (what is the EU?). When understood in this way, discourses do not merely contribute to the sense-making of journalists, but they also help in justifying particular news practices. These justifications can be defined either positively ("this is what journalism is supposed to do") or negatively ("these are the practices we find problematic").

In our analysis we distinguished three discourses that journalists used (see, the summary in Table 2 below). They all represent lines of thought that are more or less familiar to journalists in practically all journalism cultures and newsrooms. The strategies of how these discourses were deployed by the interviewees, were dependent on a number of factors: their personal views and experiences as journalists, their organisational tasks in given news organisations, the status of their news medium in respective journalistic culture(s), and the political status of their country within the EU. Also, journalists changed from one discourse to the next depending on the type of news event they talked about. All this suggests that the analysis cannot be reduced to either the individual opinions of journalists or to the qualities of allegedly unified national journalistic cultures. Thus, in our analysis we try to describe these discourses in detail based on the journalists' own definitions and move cautiously towards the level of practices and ideologies informing their thinking.

The first discourse, here termed as *classical professionalism,* represents a common reference point for most journalists. Its basic understanding of the locus of the news is based on the centrality of the nation state and representative systems of democratic governance in political life. According to journalists, this is not merely the site where meaningful political questions are discussed and decisions made, but it is also compatible with the patterns of political socialisation and the communication

Table 2: Summary of Discourses Drawn from the Interviews with Journalists

Theme	Classical professionalism	Secular discourse	Cosmopolitan discourse
Locus	nation state, realm of politics	everyday life, realm of meanings	interdependent world of international politics
News frame	common good, often same as national interest	utility, pleasure, correspondence to public opinion	understanding others, future orientation
Journalists vis-à-vis audiences	detached observer, neutral mediator, critical commentator	service consultant, whistle-blower	expert, educator, citizen of the world
Implied reader	informed citizen, national communities	apolitical individual, consumer	multiculturalist and educated elites
Political problems within EU	lack of efficacy and popular support	intangibility of EU politics and the consequences of EU policies	lack of political dynamism, problems in the enlargement, relations to the rest of the world
Communication problems within the EU	lack of transparency, manipulation, EU propaganda	alienation of EU elites from everyday life	incapacity to communicate "European values"

systems accessible to citizens and media audiences. Journalists, in general, regard the national framework of news to be historically and empirical "true," or almost as the natural basis for journalism applied everywhere, as a Belgian interviewee stated: "All news is local. That is true for all countries. Everyone looks through national glasses" (quoted in de Bens et al. 2006, 15).

Whereas the nation state is the taken for granted locus for news, the political system of the EU lacks respective "natural" qualities. Journalists deploying classical professionalism do note that the integration has blurred the distinction between national and supranational decision-making, but they argue that the EU has failed in establishing democratic institutions that would function as satisfactorily as the national political systems do. Thus, journalists find it logical to relocate or reintroduce the EU news to the national settings. While some tend to think this runs counter to how political decisions are made in real terms, the national locus of news may also even be supported even by politicians, as was suggested by one interviewee from France: "70 per cent of our daily life is ruled by the EU, and it's not the politicians that are going to make it clear, because if they were doing so, they would be useless. They would kill themselves" (quoted in Baisnée and Frinault 2006, 54).

The most commonly used frame for EU news is said to be "national relevance," "national interest," or "common good." In its most routine way, the EU becomes news whenever national politicians visit Brussels or other member states, which implies that EU news is hardly different from national news. According to classical professionalism, EU news items are often informed by the questions what can "we" (the Irish, Estonians etc.) get from the structures of the EU. Whilst journalists rarely elaborate on the process of how the natural interest is agreed upon, Italian journalists tap into this discourse in a slightly different way from others. In their view, the cultural contract between news media and their respective audiences is ideological by nature. Thus, journalists need to build their messages on the political ideology to which their distinct audience is subscribing (Cornia and Marini

2006, 98). Be that as it may, even in the Italian case, the "political" is grounded in the national framework.

In situations where there are controversies about the national interest, journalists are able to take on the role of critical watchdogs. Moreover, within the classical professionalism discourse, journalists are perceived as mediators, whose skills are understood to rest more on reproduction and translation of messages than on intellectual and critical interpretation (cf. Carey 1969, 28). It is implied that journalists need to remain neutral about policy options. In interviews this is sometimes reinforced by denouncing the obvious binary opposites of neutrality. "We are not missionaries, we will impart the diversity in Europe, the readers have to draw their own conclusions" (quoted in Allern and Linge 2006, 132).

The role of the mediator enables journalists – within certain limits – to construe themselves as educators. In the classical professionalism it is permitted for a journalist to "tell people what they did not know before," or even to "explain things over and over again, like a teacher" (Hahn et al. 2006, 72). In the educator role journalists also emphasise that the language of EU news should be stripped from unnecessary abstractions. Curiously with regard to the role of an educator, they also take pride in assuming their audiences have little prior knowledge of EU issues. This objective tends to be particularly intensive in the format of television news, which provides very limited space for explanation, interpretation and background information (cf. de Vreese 2003).

Some researchers have criticised the news genre precisely because of the qualities that the classical professionalism presents as goals of "good EU journalism." This critique argues that the genre of "hard news" presupposes its recipient to be an almost ahistorical reader with no constant interest in important matters and with almost no memory of its own (Kunelius 1996, 286). Journalists usually do not find this to be a problem in communicating about the EU. This is probably due to the fact that the category of hard news enables journalists to argue that they are serving the democracy by informing a general audience and not its special segments (those with higher education or social status).

Allern and Linge (2006, 133) argue that in Norway the nation as political community is so strongly entrenched in the existing news values, audience orientations, and market strategies that all departures from that framework would appear to be ideological for journalists. From this follows that in this discourse journalists claim no responsibility for addressing political problems related to the EU. As far as political problems – such as the democracy deficit – are concerned, journalists suggest that the EU should be able to reform itself, and the best journalism can do is to report on how that process develops. The same argument applies to information policies both within, and relevant to communication from, the EU. Journalists, tapping into the classical professionalism discourse, state that unless the EU institutions are able to render their processes intelligible to national audiences, news organisations do not necessarily feel obligated to cover the EU systematically. "I guess that all of us [journalists] would like to write stories that would help connect the EU to everyday life and maintaining the reader's interest in it. We have really tried to do this ... Sadly, it appears that it's too difficult. So I think it's no longer our problem. It's a problem the EU has created for itself" (quoted in Heikkilä and Kunelius 2006, 40).

Bearing in mind that our interviewees work at home offices, not in Brussels, their perceptions of the EU institutions and their communication strategies tend

to be critical. This attitude is, in most cases, explained in the portrayal of the EU as a more or less external force, which is imposing, in a top-down approach, its influence and distinct practices upon member states. Insofar represent the opposite: authentic and dysfunctional.

In the second discourse EU news is placed in a different framework, that which refers to the process of secularisation. Hallin and Mancini (2001, 263) understand secularisation as decline of a political order based on political parties and trade unions, and their replacement by a more fragmented and individualised society. In a secular society, they argue, the mass media, along with other socialisation agencies, become more autonomous and begin to take over many of the functions of traditional institutions. The second line of thought in journalist interviews captures this cultural and social trajectory, albeit in the *secular discourse* the national political realm still represents an important reference for journalism. Nevertheless, in this discourse the locus of news is clearly pulling away from politics and seeking a more immediate connection to the seemingly apolitical everyday life of individuals. In the Habermasian vocabulary, the secular discourse aims to provide distance from the system and focus instead on the life-world. In their own words, journalists prefer to talk about bureaucracies and citizens. In this distinction it is not clear, whether or not citizens actually assume any political qualities. "This is where our major problem lies: to prevent Europe becoming a business of technocrats so that it becomes a business of citizens" (quoted in Baisnée and Frinault 2006, 58).

The secularisation of EU news is directly supported by the low esteem of EU politics as indicated by plummeting turnouts in EU Parliamentary elections and decreasing trust in political institutions recorded in surveys.[d] From this it follows that journalists deploying the secular news discourse wish to stay away from the system actors and institutional issues that are said to be of no interest to audiences. Instead, they regard it important to report on policies that imply tangible consequences for ordinary citizens. This means that questions about the economy gain in importance in comparison to institutional political processes such as the constitution, enlargement, or security policies. This tendency seems to be particularly strong in Lithuania, where EU news tends to be saturated with economic facts and figures without much background information (Balcytiene and Vinciuniene 2006, 113). In the interviews this observation is confirmed by journalists, who claim that they perceive the EU as an economic rather than political institution (ibid. 110).

A crucial distinction in the secular discourse is drawn between macro and micro economics. According to journalists, for example, from Ireland and Estonia a list of relevant topics for EU news concerns consumer issues: transparent comparisons of prices, taxation, work and study opportunities in other EU countries (Martin and McNamara 2006, 83–84; Tammpuu and Pullerits 2006, 26). This implies that a dominant frame for EU news is its utility to individual recipients, whilst, for instance, the well-being of industry or commerce (the media business notwithstanding) are not mentioned at all.

In the secular discourse journalists regard themselves as mediators, but also as facilitators of rational choice. These choices refer to consumption rather than politics. Nonetheless, in the secular discourse journalism takes an interest in politics in the form of public opinion. By tapping into the popular mistrust of the EU, journalism is able to take a position between the system (elites) and everyday life (ordinary citizens). This does not suggest that people should become partners in dialogue

with the elites, instead journalism sets itself up to represent the disenchanted audience. This objective is obviously most closely connected to popular newspapers, which are said to be competent in recognising topics that would rally the people, as in the case of *Le Parisien* in France, or the *Bild Zeitung* in Germany (Baisnee and Frinault 2006, 54; Hahn et al. 2006, 73). In the UK these controversial meanings seem to be the only frame that would render the EU meaningful for the regional and local press: "Anything on the evils of the euro or getting rid of pounds and ounces would be of interest" (quoted in Golding and Oldfield 2006, 138).

Whilst the classical professionalism discourse construes journalism as an independent and neutral institution, the secular discourse is openly market-driven. It seeks for resonance with its audience by rendering news tangible and useful for recipients. The secular discourse is also very flexible to pressures of audience demand and restraints set by the market. If it were up to secular thought in the newsrooms, the status of EU news would likely to decline given that it is considered as foreign news; i.e. distant to the everyday lives of national audiences. The high levels of attention paid to audience surveys seem to confirm this development, as noted, for instance, by a Belgian journalist: "The day we notice that stories are read by only five per cent of our readers, we stop reporting such stories. Those five per cent will have to find it somewhere else, because our target group is the other 95 per cent" (quoted in de Bens et al. 2006, 15).

Being allegedly outside politics and market-driven by design, the secular discourse explains that the political and communication problems result from the fact that the EU is perceived to be part of the system-world, which is hopelessly distant to the life-worlds of citizens (individuals and consumers). From this it follows that the EU is said to be incapable of responding to the needs and demands springing from the life-worlds on the one hand, and incompetent in explaining how (and when) its policies would bear practical consequences at the level of everyday life on the other. This invokes indecisiveness on the part of news organisations about what would be the appropriate timing for breaking the news about the EU. When this problem is perceived from the perspective of the recipients, satisfactory solutions are hard to find: "The compromise [within the EU] is reached when the Council starts to agree. It is the right time to publish articles ... But there are still from 18 months to two years before the agreement is formalised into a directive and comes into effect. And when the French people realise it as it kicks them back, when they can evaluate the consequences, it's been three years. And then they are told, 'the decision was taken three years ago and at the time we spoke about it.' That's perfectly true. But people do not appreciate it" (quoted in Baisnee and Frinault 2006, 55).

The paradox with the secular discourse is that it recognises the problems embedded in the transnational decision-making system of the EU, but it is interested in reporting the outcomes of these decisions at the level of everyday life "here and now" insofar as possible. If – and when – this appears to be difficult, the secular discourse runs the risk of neglecting EU news due to its limited popularity with the audience.

Even if there is a consensus among European journalists regarding the fact that news is deeply anchored to the national context (defined either by the national political realm or the media market), there is a third line of thought evident in the journalists' interviews. It the *cosmopolitan discourse* wherein the locus of news is shaped by emerging supranational trends in international politics and business. This

development is said to increase the importance of EU politics and according to journalists this should call for a broader understanding of social and political dynamics than that which the national framework allows. This idea was expressed by an Irish journalist as follows: "[In my view] the EU is a way of somehow taming and civilising globalisation ... It's unique, it's important, and it wasn't meant to be democratic in a sense, so it's a big issue. But, yes sure, we can help [making EU's democratic process more transparent]" (quoted in Martin and McNamara 2006, 88).

This worldview tends to resonate particularly well with journalists working at foreign news desks and news organisations from strong EU member states, such as Germany and France. The tendency to frame news from an international perspective puts it in clear contrast with the classical professionalism discourse. Whereas the latter finds it relevant to address international issues or controversies from the national perspective, the cosmopolitan news discourse aims to work the other way around. The national perspective on international politics is regarded as being inadequate or biased, as considered by one French interviewee (Baisnée and Frinault 2006, 59).

Contrary to a secular news discourse, a cosmopolitan news discourse is hesitant in situating EU news in the allegedly apolitical frame of the everyday life. Instead of putting emphasis on illustrating the "end-products" of EU policies, i.e. their practical consequences for individuals, cosmopolitan discourse sets journalism a task to envision possible futures within the international system. This future orientation would encompass both political utopias as well as risks of failures and unintended consequences.

In the cosmopolitan discourse a more transnational approach to news is said to serve citizens' right to know and understand the social, political, and economic dynamics of the world. On the other hand, in this discourse journalists are well aware of the fact that this news frame would probably communicate best among elite audiences. Some interviewees questioned whether a popular image of nationalist-minded and individualistic audiences is, in fact, a correct one, but more often than not, notions of the audience played a very limited role in the cosmopolitan discourse. Instead of talking about the audience, the cosmopolitan discourse concentrates more on journalists themselves and their duties to explain to their audiences what the EU stands for. The interviewees tend to consider this duty as independent from economic or commercial pressures on news organisations.

In many cases this dutiful role as competent interpreter of the EU allows – or even presumes – an explicitly positive attitude towards European integration. In the name of cosmopolitanism, some interviewees explain that they would not publish crass EU criticism, or negative stereotypes about the EU. In addition, some did not find it necessary to distinguish their personal views from their professional ones. In this context one German journalist told the interviewer that the "Yes" result in the referendum in Luxembourg was like "a ray of hope" (Hahn et al. 2006, 71), and a Finnish interviewee lent his support to EU policies for competitiveness as follows: "We have to face that it's almost as if the sun is going down for Europe. We are dropping down economically while China and Asia are in general going up. ... Given these circumstances Europe will have to come together in many respects, and this includes the media in one way or another" (quoted in Heikkilä and Kunelius 2006, 44).

Journalists deploying cosmopolitan discourse are at least at on a personal level concerned about the political problems within the EU. In their view, these problems

refer to the success of the integration process in general, the democratic deficit, and the faltering legitimacy of the EU as a political system. Journalists do not, however, think that they need to solve these problems. Instead, they assume some responsibility in grasping the communication problems within the EU. In the cosmopolitan discourse the biggest problem in communication is located at the same place as with other discourses: that is, the bureaucratic elitism, but the problem is here defined in a more refined way. It is not that the EU institutions are by definition estranged from EU citizens, but that they – most notably the EU Commission and the presidency – attempt to communicate EU policies with one voice; and presumably, by promoting themselves. In contrast, the cosmopolitan discourse would suggest that only the plurality of voices would count as being genuinely European.

In its simplest form, the plurality of European discussion would refer to the usage of guest contributors in national newspapers that could provide a contrast to national viewpoints. In this vein, some journalists related that they had become more aware of the fact that the news or commentaries published in the national media are not only received by national audiences. This idea seems significant for, several Estonian journalists, who claim that they tend to address their news stories to an implied European reader (Tammpuu and Pullerits 2006, 27). In this sense, cosmopolitan news discourse entails – albeit very thinly – an idea of Europe as a "community of fate." In late-Habermasian terms this echoes *constitutional patriotism* (Habermas 1996), which may serve as an ideological basis for envisioning political structures – and perhaps media structures as well – that escape the contemporary boundaries of Westphalian thought (cf. Fraser 2005). The point here is, of course, that while the structures at the moment do not cut across national boundaries, the professional imagination of journalists – at least momentarily – does.

The attempt to imagine the European "community of fate" within the deeply national media structures and journalistic cultures tends to be a highly elitist exercise. Some interviewees, however, aim to go further than that by envisioning news practices that would decentralise reporting on EU policies. Instead of focusing exclusively on either the home country or Brussels or the interaction between these two, the cosmopolitan discourse wishes to invest in the cooperation of correspondents based in different parts of Europe. While most interviewees are merely timidly testing the idea, in *Le Monde* this style of reporting was modestly experimented with at the beginning of this millennium. According to one interviewee a realisation of this idea proved, however, to be the "Achilles' heel" of the paper's ambitious intentions to improve its reporting on the EU (Baisnée and Frinault 2006, 49).

Journalism and the European Public Sphere

The three discourses outlined here cannot be situated simply in the various positions occupied by journalists in the European news media system. They need to be seen as relatively shared resources of professional cultures; as versions of current professionalism. The fact that journalists in the interview sample may articulate all three discourses makes perfect sense. The overlap notwithstanding, we argue that the three discourses enable us to see how the professional imaginaries of European journalists are structured. That is, they illustrate how the understanding of the locus of news, the roles of communication and the problems of EU are articulated and synchronised into relative coherent positions and logic within the "journalistic field" (Bourdieu 2005).

In order to reconnect the discourses to the debate about a European public sphere, we need one more conceptual apparatus. Fittingly, Habermas offers us an opening through his most recent definition of the "public sphere." In that model he connects the public sphere to analytically dualistic model of deliberation: "Imagine the public sphere as an intermediary system of communication between formally organised and informal face-to-face deliberations in arenas both at the top and at the bottom of the political system" (Habermas 2006, 10).

This definition is grounded in the pragmatist-inspired notion of deliberation, but Habermas insists in situating it in a system-level model. This provides us with one basic dimension of discussing the public sphere and the role of journalism in political communication. Put simply, any discussion of the public sphere carries with it implications about *horizontal* and *vertical* functions of political communication (cf. Hallin and Mancini 2004, 22). Horizontal functions refer to deliberation that takes place between actors at the same level of social space (at the top or at bottom, as Habermas metaphorically writes). In the language of systems theory, this communication serves the function of coordinating action. *Vertical* functions, in turn, refer to communication mediating *between* different levels of social space. Vertical communication, by definition, focuses on the legitimacy functions of communication. In the case of journalism, the horizontal—vertical dimension tends to overlap with a familiar distinction of the elite and the popular. Journalism traditionally functions between institutional actors on a system level (politics, business, education etc.), but it also claims to take care of vertical political communication by addressing the relationship between citizens and power holders.

A system-perspective always begs a question about the limits of the system, and correspondingly about the sense of a minimal shared identity that perhaps has to be assumed in order for deliberation to work. Habermas (1996) notes this problem when theorising about the possibility of constitutional patriotism, i.e. a shared political culture that may enable democratic deliberation to transgress national identities and boundaries. In the case of the EU and the European public sphere, then, it is useful to stretch an analytical dimension from a public sphere based on the idea of shared national identities to possibly more cosmopolitan ones. Thus, a rough distinction between a *national* and *cosmopolitan* imaginary of citizenship helps us to compare the professional discourses of journalists.

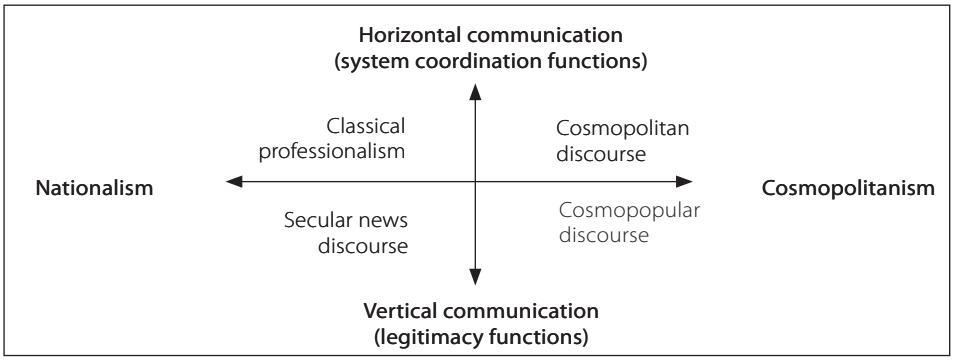
A *national* vocabulary identifies the nation state and citizens of nations as the privileged concepts in making sense of politics. In a nationalist perspective, democratic politics – representation, debate, pressure group activity – take place within in the polity of a nation. A *cosmopolitan* position, in contrast, aims to look beyond the nation and suggest that supranational political problems would call for transnational political identities. In a nationalist position, the social world is rendered meaningful within national identities; in a cosmopolitan position, understanding the social world tends to require the opposite: uprooting one's identity from nationally grounded categories.

Once we place these dimension into a relationship with each other, a conceptual map can be discerned (see Figure 1). This map covers at least some fundamental parts of the "background" against which we make sense of various (implicit and explicit) views on a European public sphere. Briefly, it offers four basic versions of an ideal public sphere.

The upper left corner in the field refers to a version of a public sphere where

political debate takes place between representative actors within the national settings. The lower left corner prescribes a public sphere, which highlights the debates about the legitimacy of national political decisions. The upper right corner of the field refers to a model of public sphere where meaningful political debate takes place between elites across national borders. Finally, a cosmopolitan—vertical position emphasises political communication addressing questions of the legitimacy and accountability on the transnational level.

Figure 1: Mapping the Journalists' Professional Imaginaries on European Public Sphere



The *classical professionalism* fits into the upper left corner of the graph. This professional attitude thrives in different versions of the "serious" press and it is also forcefully put forward by journalists working in public service broadcasting. It is a common discourse all across the ten countries based on the interview material – with the possible exception of Lithuania. The manner in which nationally grounded and horizontally oriented professionalism presents itself differs somewhat across Europe but these differences are rather marginal. An obvious exception, however, are the Italian journalists, whose accounts demonstrate the radically pluralistic political culture and the tradition of instrumentalism within the Italian press (see also Hallin and Mancini 2004). It implies that the national interests are very much in focus, but the horizontal communication rather takes place *between* elite media outlets than inside their coverage (which would be the case for the Nordic countries, Norway and Finland).

The *secular news discourse* by and large stands for the belief that EU news stories should have a national focus. It tends to be pulled away from the political realm and to be relocated in the domain of everyday life. In most cases, however, everyday life is understood to be national, not because it is shaped by national politics, but because it is said to be shared by audiences subscribing to the national (or regional) news media. Secular discourse appears most naturally in the visibly and unashamedly commercial news media. Thus, it is most strongly articulated by journalists from popular newspapers, commercial TV newscasts and to a lesser extent by those working for the regional press. It also enjoys some support among duty and desk editors at the national news organisations. Secularisation of news is a tendency recognised all over Europe, with the possible exception of journalists in the French and German elite newspapers, who seem to be able to talk about their work without referring to everyday life as the primary frame for news, or to mar-

ket pressures reinforcing this idea. In our interview sample the secular discourse seems to be strongest in Lithuanian journalistic culture.

Classical professionalism and secular news discourse are the two main discourses of the professional culture of mainstream EU journalists situated at their home offices. It is hardly surprising but still impressive, how strong and naturalised a position the category of national identity still holds in journalism. It is only a slightly provocative to conclude that mainstream journalism is a *nationally fundamentalist* profession. The historical connection between the nation state and political community is so strong in fact, that it is often not understood as historical but rather a natural connection. Nations and national identities are regarded as being true, cosmopolitanism – even in the imagined and partly elitist form and perhaps because of that – as artificial or utopian.

The *cosmopolitan discourse* we identified above fits clearly into the third quadrant of the map. It endorses a transnational perspective for EU news stories, underlining the importance of providing a broad picture of the political interests within the EU as well as of the ramifications of EU policies for EU citizens. The cosmopolitan line of thought assumes that news can set off – and that it also should aim to inspire – normative discussions about European values. Cosmopolitanism articulated by journalists is more than slightly elitist in its understanding of the public sphere. Public discourse is expected to flow from the top down, but this is accepted as a necessary evil in order to move beyond nation state politics.

Cosmopolitan discourse is most strongly endorsed by journalists who specialise in EU affairs, irrespective of the news organisation for which they work. It is articulated by journalists working for quality newspapers, particularly in the politically strong member states such as Germany and France. Thus, ironically, cosmopolitanism is perhaps not in contradiction with national interests. Interestingly, however, cosmopolitan frames were put forward also by "public service minded" journalists from smaller members states – such as Finland and Ireland.

There are four principal positions in the diagram, but only three discourses to speak of. The lower right position in the diagram would imply that journalists aim at covering the EU from a transnational perspective and address questions of legitimacy of the EU institutions and EU policies without reducing them to the national context or portraying EU politics as a battle of nations. Not surprisingly, this "cosmopopular"[e] perspective was only thinly represented in the interviews. The idea of bottom-up deliberations cutting across national identities and connecting them to the transnational elite deliberations seems to be a far-fetched option for journalists.

It is clear that in the current circumstances, any form of cosmopolitanism needs to be based on a highly self-reflexive and consciously *constructionist* approach to political identities. Our ability to develop a more cosmopolitan imaginary would have to work its way first through a deconstruction of a Westphalian model of the public sphere and the idea of shared national identities as a precondition of political deliberation. A cosmopopular line of thought or "vertical cosmopolitanism" would mean that journalists actively looked for political identities that cut across national borders. Given the findings in the AIM project about the organisational cultures of newsrooms, and the strong agenda-setting power of national political sources, this seems very unlikely. Even if the conceptual ingredients for this direction existed in the discourse of journalists, their organisational positions would create a pressure that renders their realisation unrealistic.

Having said that, it is necessary to remember that democratic cosmopolitan imaginaries should be developing in places where people (who have been so fundamentally defined as national citizens) have to re-invent themselves and their identities. In this issue, Joke Hermes argues that popular culture is a site where such identities are formed. Lewis Friedland, Tom Hove and Hernando Rojas point to the way in which the reality networked life challenges us to rethink the relationship between individuality and the public sphere. Elsewhere, Craig Calhoun (2002) has pointed out that public spheres are not merely based on solidarity and shared membership but they can actually also produce it. Theoretically, at least, we assume that there may be different kinds of transnational communication networks outside journalism that explicitly and implicitly build transnational political identities. The fact they are now mainly marginalised in the practices of a mainstream mediated public sphere does not mean that they could not later emerge more prominently. The emergent nature of publics and public spheres offers at least some kind of hope for those who think that the seemingly irreversible transnationalisation of power – and common problems calls in turn for transnationalised public spheres.

Endnotes:

1. There are several research traditions that negate this generalisation. For instance, a vast literature on political communication (cf. McNair 2000) and public journalism (cf. Glasser 1999) aim at connecting journalists and theories of public sphere in one way or another.

2. *AIM* is a partly EU-funded research project involving eleven European countries: Germany, Belgium, Estonia, Finland, France, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Norway, Romania, and United Kingdom. In summer and autumn 2005, researchers interviewed, on average, fifteen editors and journalists responsible for EU news in each county. All interviewees worked in their home offices. Based on these interviewees, national research teams wrote a report on their case study. This article is drawn from those reports and their previous versions, the Romanian case notwithstanding.

3. Brussels correspondents working for respective news organisations were interviewed separately. These case studies will be published at the end of 2006 (for further information see, www.aim-project.net).

4. In the 2004 European Parliament elections, 186 million voters out of the total electorate of 340 million chose not to cast a ballot (Rose 2005). The voter turnout was the lowest in new member states Slovakia (17 per cent), Poland (21 %), and Estonia (27 %). According to surveys this is connected to the state of political communication. Polls indicate that more than half of respondents (53 %) think that their voice does not count in the EU, and about half (49 %) say they know little or nothing at all about the institutions and policies of the EU (Eurobarometer 2005).

5. We would like to thank Barbie Zelizer for coining this term in connection with our analysis (personal communication).

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