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**Firmstone J. 2008. Approaches of the transnational press to reporting Europe. *Journalism: theory, practice and criticism*. 423-442 9.4**

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**Biography:** Dr Julie Firmstone is Lecturer in Communications Research at the Institute of Communications Studies, University of Leeds, and Associate Director of the International Research Network For European Political Communications (EurPolCom). She is co-applicant of an ESRC/ESF project that examines the role of civil society organisations in mediating the preferences of citizens to the EU and public claims making in the media over issues related to the future of Europe (RES-000-23-0886).

**Abstract:**

The concept of a European public sphere, and the emergence of a transnational media within this space, has been the subject of debate in recent years, yet little attention has been given to investigating the functioning of the media that currently occupy this space. This article provides an empirically based insight into the organisational context within which transnational newspapers produce coverage of the EU. Material collected in interviews with journalists from four transnational newspapers (Wall Street Journal Europe, International Herald Tribune, Financial Times Europe and European Voice) is presented, and the way in which a range of internal and external factors shape transnational coverage of the EU is discussed. The findings suggest that as a consequence of the diverse range of approaches adopted by transnational newspapers, the EU remains unreported as a polity in its own right, and is predominantly covered from an external point of view.

**Key words:** transnational media, journalism and the EU, EU correspondents, democratic deficit, public sphere.

# **Approaches of the transnational press to reporting Europe**

## **Introduction**

The media have a potentially important role in bridging the perceived democratic deficit between the EU and its public. A transnational media is commonly cited as one of the preconditions for the emergence of a European public sphere. To date, research into EU wide media has focused on the failure of a transnational broadcast media to develop due to language barriers and a lack of economic viability. Arguably, newspapers have been more successful in establishing a media whose remit transcends the usual boundaries of national borders. In focussing on explaining why a European public sphere mediated by a mass transnational media has not developed, the discussion has neglected to empirically examine the nature of the transnational media that have emerged. The research addressed this gap through an examination of the practices of the transnational press in producing news about the EU. The research design uses in-depth semi-structured interviews with a small but specialist group of transnational journalists to give some first insights into the influence of internal and external factors on the production of EU news at four newspapers.

## **The democratic deficit, the European public sphere and the media**

Suggestions for solutions for the EU's perceived democratic deficit most typically relate to reform of EU institutions or simplifying decision-making processes, and rarely address any issues relating to the communication of EU politics<sup>1</sup>. Despite this, discussions of democratic deficit are often synonymous with criticisms levelled at media coverage of EU affairs in member states, or at the failure of EU institutions to communicate effectively with its citizens. It is widely considered that a European public sphere is necessary in order to maintain the transparency and thus democracy of the EU. However, there are a number of obstacles to the creation, and perhaps more importantly, to ways of defining the space that academic debates have attempted to identify as the 'European public sphere' (Baisnée, 2007). Whilst it is beyond the scope of this article to address the difficulties in defining what exactly the European public sphere exactly means, the research is motivated by literature that constructs media coverage of the EU as a primary indicator of the existence of such a space. In the same way that national media are assigned a key role in communications between the public and the state in traditional models of the national public sphere, a 'European' (meaning EU wide) mass media, is commonly seen as one of the preconditions for the emergence of a European public sphere which would facilitate a connection between EU institutions and their publics (Kevin, 2003; Neidhardt, Koopmans, & Pfetsch, 2000; Schlesinger, 1999; Schlesinger & Kevin, 2000).

Based on the idea that a functioning European public sphere requires three actors, the public, collective political actors and the media, Neidhardt et al. (2000) argue that a transnational media would fulfil a crucial role in bringing the EU public and collective actors together. Schlesinger also argues that to facilitate true democratisation of the EU, and a European public sphere, there must be a level of

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<sup>1</sup> See discussion of the democratic deficit in the introduction of this volume, and for an overview of theoretical approaches to the deficit see (Meyer, 1999).

supranational communication to engage and empower EU civil society (Schlesinger, 1999).

Although the concept of a European public sphere, and the role of a transnational media within this space, has been the subject of increasing academic debate in recent years, little attention has been given to investigating the functioning of the media that currently occupy this space. Empirical researchers have so far focussed on two aspects of transnational media. First, policy orientated research has investigated the impact of media policy on the development of EU-wide media such as the efforts to develop a European audiovisual space and other common communicative spaces (Ward, 2002). Secondly, attempts at EU wide public service broadcasting and specialised European newspaper publishing have been assessed (Collins, 1993; Neveu, 2002). Theoretical debates have been limited to questioning the likelihood that a transnational media, typically envisaged as replicating the format of national media, will emerge at EU level. Such discussions explore the lack of a number of conditions perceived to be necessary for the emergence of a transnational mass media such as a common language (Neidhardt et al., 2000), differences in journalistic and media culture (Machill, Beiler, & Fischer, 2005), and a lack of economic viability. It is argued that the media will only become active on a transnational level if a sufficient number of the public demand a style of EU orientated coverage that national media are unable to provide (Neidhardt et al., 2000).

Despite the existence of these impediments to its development, a small EU wide transnational press has established itself and represents a distinctive forum for communicating EU news to a public that exist across member states. In an examination of the changing nature of the communicative space of the EU, Schlesinger concludes “It has started to make sense to think of such emergent media audiences as occupying a transnational space [...] some Europe-wide media are creating a distinct space or spaces for a form of collective debate, albeit a highly restricted one” (Schlesinger, 1999: 271). Although transnational newspapers currently available in member states cater for a specialised and niche audience, they represent a form of communicating the politics of the EU that is significantly different from national media, and therefore merits further investigation. In operating above the level of the member state, the transnational media occupies a position from which to present EU affairs to the EU public from a non-national perspective. Indeed, to report on the EU as a polity. The investigation presented here aims to add to understanding on the circumstances and constraints under which transnational newspapers exist, and to propose some explanations for why the transnational press has emerged in its current specialised format.

### **Research questions and design**

The study was guided by two research questions relating to the context within which EU coverage is produced<sup>2</sup>. First, what factors influence the production of EU affairs by transnational newspapers? Secondly, how do these factors influence the way in

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<sup>2</sup> Funding support from the EU FW5 for Europub.com (HPSE-CT2000-00046) and the ESRC for the Constitution project (RES-000-23-0866) is gratefully acknowledged and thanks go to all colleagues working on these projects. The study of transnational newspapers was part of a wider Europub.com work package on journalism and the EU. Paul Statham led the development and design of the framework for analysis of this WP along with Julie Firmstone and Emily Gray.

which transnational newspapers communicate EU affairs to the public? Within this framework the differences and similarities between transnational and national newspapers, and the opportunities for the transnational press to provide a non-nationally anchored style of information about the EU were evaluated.

Taking a sociological approach, the design drew on Shoemaker and Reese's review of influences on media content. They state that examining content alone is not sufficient for us to understand the forces that influence newspaper content (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996: 28). Given that existing EU news production research has predominantly focussed on national media systems, the current state of the art tells us very little about transnational newspapers. Nationally orientated studies have examined arrangements for gathering EU news by Brussels based national newspaper correspondents (Baisnée, 2002; Meyer, 1999; Morgan, 1995), television news production (de Vreese, 2001; Gleissner & de Vreese, 2005), the production of EU news by national journalists (Statham, 2006, 2007), journalists' professional imagination in connection to EU news (Heikkila & Kunelius, 2006; Kunelius & Sparks, 2001; Statham, 2007), journalists' access to official EU information (Tumber, 1995), and the production of editorial opinion on the EU (Firmstone, 2007, 2008, Forthcoming). In common with Shoemaker and Reeses' work, these findings also point to the importance of investigating transnational newspapers' EU reporting as a dependent variable that is influenced by a range of internal and external factors. Therefore the study was designed to evaluate influences from outside newspapers such as readership demand and market sectors as well as internal influences such as organisational resources and infrastructures for newsgathering, journalistic cultures and role perceptions, and editorial policies<sup>3</sup>.

Following an assessment of the range of newspapers operating at a transnational level within EU countries four publications were selected: the Wall Street Journal Europe (WSJ), the International Herald Tribune (Tribune), the Financial Times Europe (FT) and the European Voice (EV). Although Le Monde Diplomatique also met the transnational criteria, it was decided that as a monthly French language newspaper it was not suitable for comparison with the other publications, which are all produced daily and in English. To investigate the influence of factors related to arrangements for newsgathering and editorial policy, one journalist reporting on EU affairs (usually the EU correspondent), and one journalist responsible for producing editorial opinion were interviewed from each newspaper<sup>4</sup>. Eight semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted and took between 45 and 75 minutes<sup>5</sup>. The interview schedule was designed to collect information in a systematic way in order for the material to be compared and contrasted between newspapers and used a combination of open and closed questions (Statham, Firmstone, & Gray, 2003). The following discussion draws on the opinions of a relatively small group of journalists whose comments are likely influenced by their normative expectations of 'good' journalism, and a desire to portray their efforts in a positive light. Despite this limitation the article presents some important first insights into four key areas of EU reporting by

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<sup>3</sup> The findings relating to sources (an external influence) are not detailed here due to limitations of space, and the conclusion of the project report (Firmstone, 2004) that attempts by sources to contact newspapers are the least significant influencing factor in how newspapers report on the EU.

<sup>4</sup> This included the Editor of the FT and the EV, and senior journalists responsible for opinion pages at the Tribune and Journal.

<sup>5</sup> Thank you to the journalists who took part.

transnational newspapers: infrastructure and arrangements for gathering EU news, cooperation with other newspapers, perceptions of readership, and editorial opinion and political positions towards the EU.

## Findings

### Readership demand: Specialist niche markets

Studies of EU news production commonly conclude 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, 2005; Morgan, 1995), and that national journalists tend to relocate EU news into national frameworks of meaning (Heikkila & Kunelius, 2006; Kunelius & Sparks, 2001). Similarly, impact on domestic readers is a key motivating factor in British newspapers decisions to publish editorial opinion on European issues (Firmstone, 2007, 2008, Forthcoming). But how do transnational journalists treat EU news given that they do not have a clearly identifiable national readership for which news can be packaged in domestic terms?

This is addressed by first examining how the market sector within which transnational newspapers operate impacts on journalists' perceptions of readership demand, and secondly by assessing the influence of journalists' perceptions of their readers' interest and knowledge about the EU on the type of coverage they aim to provide. The target audience and position in the transnational media market are major differentiating factors between the newspapers. Each aims at a different sector of the market and tailors its coverage of EU affairs accordingly. The EV focuses on reporting and analysis of the EU and its institutions for a weekly Brussels based elite readership that comprises of "everyone involved in EU policy making, those who seek to influence the decision-making process from outside, and those whose work is directly affected by decisions taken in Brussels"<sup>6</sup>. This represents a style of covering the EU that is distinctively different from other transnational and national newspapers. EV journalists' concentrate on reporting the technicalities of the EU and, unlike the other transnational papers, do not attempt to cover domestic issues or NATO. Conversely, the FT, WSJ and the Tribune have daily readerships spread throughout Europe and, through their sister publications, the rest of the world. The WSJ and the FT cater for a business-orientated readership. The Tribune positions itself as a less specialist publication and is bought by an international readership that comprises largely of ex-pat Americans<sup>7</sup>. WSJ and Tribune journalists claimed to cover the EU from an international perspective and explained how they apply news values to measure the implications of a story for member states, the EU and other countries. As one WSJ reporter said: "...our litmus test is we don't do a story unless it's important to people in more than one country. Whereas with most journalists here [Brussels], you get exactly the opposite, they'll only write about it if it's important to their country." (Staff Reporter, WSJ). Although such comments suggest that transnational journalists cover the EU in a way that does not present EU affairs within a domestically focussed

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<sup>6</sup> Approximately 80% of the EV's readership is based in Brussels with the remainder spread throughout other EU member states, Eastern Europe and North America. Source: <http://www.european-voice.com/ev/info.asp?id=55> (Accessed 09/07/07).

<sup>7</sup> At the time of the research the Tribune had a circulation of 150,058 and American ex-pats made up 64% of its readership (Dawley, 2004).

framework linked to any individual nation state, other descriptions indicate that they do feel constrained to refer to implications for individual countries (WSJ and Tribune in particular).

### **Less competitive than national markets**

As a consequence of the focus of transnational newspapers on specific niche markets only two papers are in direct competition for readers: the FT and WSJ. This competition has an impact on the reporting practices of the WSJ due to expectations from within the newspaper that WSJ journalists should cover the same stories as the FT. Although he claimed that news editors generally respected their decisions, the WSJ reporter described how news judgements in deciding not to pursue the same agenda as the FT often had to be defended. He was discontent with what he saw as a widespread, and incorrect, perception among journalists and editors that the FT is the 'gospel' on Brussels affairs. Indeed, other journalists also implied that the FT is seen as the only newspaper that has a clear editorial policy supported with sufficient resources to operate as a 'paper of record' on the EU, and that this results in other newspapers looking to the FT as source for ascertaining important EU stories. This corresponds with the finding that the FT is favoured by official sources in Brussels (Morgan, 1995), and with the FT's own opinion of its position in the market, which was well expressed by their reporter: "the FT is aware that it has a role as a leading opinion former, a leading newspaper in the EU, in Brussels itself". However, some journalists questioned the wisdom of transnational newspapers' attempts to follow the FT's agenda, and in one case alleged the FT to be heavily influenced by the need to compete with national, often anti-EU UK newspapers as illustrated in this off the record quote: "the UK press and the Euro-sceptic press in particular does all of Europe and the world a disservice by inventing stories and distracting people from the things that ought to get covered in Brussels.... and if their [the FT's] level of reporting is lower than it otherwise could be, because they're competing with UK rags, that drags down the level of journalism in Europe in general." With the exception of this relationship, the comparatively low level of competition between transnational newspapers is a characteristic of the different environment in which transnational journalists operate in comparison to national EU correspondents who produce news in highly competitive national markets.

### **An extra constraint: appealing to readerships 'back home'**

Looking in more depth at the institutional arrangements and ownership structure within which EU news is produced reveals a further source of influence. In addition to tailoring coverage to specific areas of the European based market (not necessarily just EU), three of the newspapers have to take readerships outside their primary market sector into consideration when covering EU affairs. With the exception of the EV, each of the papers is part of a larger ownership group that publish other newspapers and/or editions either in Europe or worldwide. The WSJ and the Tribune are owned by North American companies and institutionally based in Brussels and Paris respectively<sup>8</sup>. Run by the Pearson owned Financial Times group, the FT is institutionally based in the London, and has a bureau office in Brussels. Reporting of

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<sup>8</sup> The WSJ Europe is a special European edition of the USA based Wall Street Journal and was owned at the time of writing by the Dow Jones Company. The Tribune is published in 26 sites around the world and has been owned by the New York Times since 2003.

world affairs at these three papers benefits from access to extra resources gained from their place within the infrastructure of international news organisations. They are able to utilise their close working relationships with their well-resourced ‘parent’ publications in order to exchange news stories and share foreign correspondents that they may not otherwise have access to.

However, this editorial policy for cross newspaper coverage of Europe has significant implications for the type of EU news that the transnational newspapers produce. Journalists’ news values are constrained by the necessity to produce EU news that is also suitable for other publications within their parent group rather than exclusively for their newspaper. Since FT journalists are not conscious of which edition, UK (London) or Europe, their articles will be published in, they are written with both readerships in mind as this quote from the FT’s reporter demonstrates: “I have a job in Europe, there is a European edition, therefore my stories are generally likely to be more prominent, more likely to be on the front page of the European edition, than they would be on the UK edition. But, it’s very rare that anything I file doesn’t go into the UK edition, it’s not as if I work for only one edition rather than the other.” Usually the EU Correspondent’s stories go in both editions, but would be given more prominence in the Europe edition. Stories produced by the WSJ and Tribune are also published in their parent publications distributed in the USA (the WSJ and the New York Times respectively), and other editions of their title distributed throughout the world. At the WSJ, it seems that this results in many EU issues that are not perceived to be of interest to both sets of readers being excluded. The WSJ’s reporter described how making a story interesting to their readership was the greatest problem the paper’s journalists had to overcome when writing about the EU. Journalists’ awareness of the fact that readers of the paper’s reports are statistically more likely to be read by subscribers to the USA edition rather than the European edition represents a major difficulty<sup>9</sup>. Indeed, as one reporter working for the WSJ expressed it:

“There are so many things, which for as a pure European newspaper are obvious stories, but if you’ve got to the extra hurdle that you’ve got to convince someone in Chicago they should care about the story, that raises the bar up the news a lot [...] I’d say about 80-90% of my stories will get in the US edition as well [as the European edition]. Whereas if I wrote every time a Commissioner farted, about 15% would get in the US edition!” (Staff Reporter, WSJ).

### **An interested readership**

Journalists’ responses when asked about their perceptions of their readers’ understanding of and interest in EU issues demonstrate that they felt very knowledgeable about what sorts of stories and issues appeal to their transnational readers. Ultimately, journalists apply this understanding to the news value criteria they judge EU issues by. When asked to rate the level of interest among their readers, all journalists perceived readers to be between moderately and greatly interested in EU politics (with relevance to readers of their newspaper rather than any sister publications). The perception that WSJ and FT readers are specifically interested in

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<sup>9</sup> The WSJ readers represent approximately 100,000 out of a total of 3 million readers shared between the USA edition, Asian edition, European edition and online subscribers.



the commercial implications of the EU significantly shapes the way in which these papers cover EU politics. According to the WSJ reporter, when their “business readers say European, they don't necessarily mean EU, they want to know about Europe as a region because that's the entire political environment in which business takes place”. Similarly, the FT's Editor pointed out that the paper's unique combination of business and politics is one of the things their readers find appealing about its coverage: “The FT's big strength by comparison with other international business newspapers is the emphasis we put on the relationship between business and politics. That is something that our readers prize very highly.” These quotes provide evidence to support Schlesinger's assumption that journalists' viewpoint, internal or external, are conveyed in their practices. According to Schlesinger “how media enterprises and their journalists regard the European arena plainly depends on their vantage point” and therefore we should distinguish between an “internal” and an “external” journalistic perspective (Schlesinger, 1999: 272). An internal standpoint is concerned with the implications of developing the EU as a political entity, and deals with issues most important to EU elites involved the process of European integration. An external point of view is only interested in the internal issues of the EU in terms of their implications for “the political stability of the continent, the sharpness of economic competition between blocs and states, and the attractiveness of investment conditions” (Schlesinger, 1999: 272). The news values of WSJ and FT journalists recognise their readers' demand for information about the EU presented from an external perspective. Their readers' interest in internal EU issues is limited to the perspective of how those issues may affect business interests in the EU as a region. The Tribune also perceives its readers to demand EU news from an external perspective, but it differs from that of the FT and WSJ readers because it considers the implications of EU affairs first of all for the world, and secondly for the USA and does not have a bias towards business concerns. This position was made very clear by an EU Correspondent working for the Tribune:

“We put it [enlargement] into the bigger picture, but we look at it in the sense of, here is the European project, will Europe actually function with twenty-five members, are the institutions ready for this, and if it does function with twenty-five members, what are the implications for the US, what does that mean for the world, we try and look at it from a less, to use a loaded word, parochial perspective.” (EU Correspondent, Tribune).

The EV is the only transnational paper whose readership composition demands journalists to produce news and information exclusively about the EU and from an internal perspective. Its elite readership is perceived as more interested, knowledgeable and supportive of the EU as a project than readers of other transnational newspapers. The great interest of EV readers in EU politics is unsurprising due to its high circulation among what the Editor described as “decision makers at the heart of Europe” and he pointed out that their “subject matter is the EU”. Furthermore, perhaps unsurprisingly, EV readers were the only readership perceived to have a high level of understanding of EU politics. For the same reason EV journalists perceive that their readers are more supportive of the EU than the general public. Overall, readers who are not involved in the politics of the EU were seen as having little chance of understanding its politics due to the complex nature of the process of European integration. For example: “Europe is constructed in such a way that even after these constitutional changes, if they go through, the structure is

too complex for the average European to understand. It doesn't resemble anything on the national level, and the decision making is opaque." (EU Correspondent, Tribune).

### **Infrastructure and reporting practices**

Financial restraints mean that many national news organisations cannot afford to have large bureaus or permanent correspondents in Brussels. As a consequence journalists are unable to achieve continuity in their coverage of EU affairs and are only able to report on main events and summits (Gleissner & de Vreese, 2005). In addition, editorial agendas are more likely to focus on the domestic angle of EU stories when newspapers do not have access to reporters based in Brussels (Firmstone, 2007, Forthcoming). Comparing transnational papers' resources allocated for gathering EU news established that a great degree of variation exists in the numbers of journalists assigned to reporting in Brussels by each newspaper. The FT has the largest circulation and biggest team based in Brussels: a total of seven journalists who produce news for all four FT editions rather than solely for the European edition. The other dailies have much smaller teams: the WSJ has three journalists based at its Brussels headquarters; and the Tribune has one EU correspondent who splits his time between Paris and Brussels. Each of the EV's team of five reporting journalists based at the Brussels headquarters has a specific area of responsibility.

The differences in resources at the daily publications are reflected in the style of reporting they practice. Only the FT attempts to be a 'paper of record' on the EU and reports on the daily activities and events of EU institutions and politicians. As the FT's reporter explained, the large amount of resources allocated to reporting allows the team of journalists to cover a range of specialist areas that replicate the division of areas covered by the work of the Commission: "We're basically divided up into people covering different commissioners, because the Commission is the origin of almost everything, in a way, that we cover". In contrast, the Tribune and WSJ focus more on in-depth feature style articles than detailed coverage of daily events. While the WSJ dedicates journalists to specific areas in a similar way to the FT, the bureau is half the size of the FT's, and therefore only aims to cover 'major' EU day-to-day events and concentrates on providing 'value added' coverage in an attempt to give it a competitive advantage over the FT. At any one time, two out of the three WSJ reporting team works on feature stories while the remaining reporter is assigned to daily news duty. As a result of this arrangement the WSJ often only publishes EU stories every couple of days. Similarly, the Tribune reporter does not report daily on Brussels developments and files EU related stories only three times a week. He describes their approach to EU news: "We want to capture the directions that things are going in, we want to talk about the big themes in Brussels, and we want to never miss the big stories." (EU Correspondent, Tribune).

### **Journalistic cultures and role perceptions**

The style of in-depth articles described by the WSJ and Tribune journalists is indicative of an important difference between American and British journalistic cultures (Donsbach & Patterson, 2005). Staffed by British journalists, the FT uses a typically British style of news reporting to cover the day-to-day events of the EU. In contrast, the feature led approach practiced by the WSJ and the Tribune can be attributed to their American journalistic background as well as to their organisation's

allocation of resources to EU news. This style of reporting should not be confused with a commentating role as it is not the case that feature stories are given an angle through the inclusion of comment or opinion. Rather such stories require in-depth research and are produced over a longer period than daily news coverage. In fact, the findings highlight the distinctive American practice of maintaining a strict separation between the editorial commentary journalistic function and the news reporting function. Each of the Tribune and WSJ journalists explained the separation between the production of their newspaper's editorial opinion and news as a 'Chinese wall' as is illustrated by this quote from the Tribune's Correspondent: "we [reporters] have no contact with them [the editorial team]. I see them from time to time, they're my friends, but purposefully we don't. If it's a factual question, they know that I understand Brussels better than other people; they would say do you know this or that, that might happen once every 6 months."

This further supports the findings of Donsbach and Patterson who demonstrated that American journalists rely more heavily on personal initiative to gather stories such as interviews rather than using news wires as sources, and were found to separate the tasks of editing and commenting to a greater extent than journalists from other countries (Donsbach & Patterson, 2005).

Journalists' perceptions of their roles in reporting the EU are an additional shaping factor on EU news. As already discussed, each paper has a different approach to reporting the EU, with differences in the target readership and style of reporting (news or feature). As a consequence, journalists have different perceptions of their roles as EU correspondents. Significantly, none of the correspondents saw their role as reporting on EU affairs in terms of the consequences for the EU, its member states, citizens, and as a polity. An element of journalistic perceptions common to transnational journalists can be seen in their perceptions of the reporting styles of other journalists who report for national newspapers. Transnational journalists were highly critical of the way in which the press in member states have chosen to cover the EU in recent years. National newspapers were criticised for neglecting to cover the implications of EU issues for the EU as a whole and focussing entirely on the national implications of EU politics. Journalists perceived that, by 'anchoring' reporting of the EU to the effects of issues on their own country, national journalists were responsible for restricting the quality of information that the public has access to about Europe. This was well expressed by the Tribune's EU Correspondent:

"... the whole structure of the European media is national, no question about it. Where do you find EU news in most European papers, in the foreign section of the newspaper, I think that speaks volumes? Correspondents from a national newspaper in Brussels are not there to report on the wonders of the EU, they are there to report on the parochial interests of their individual constituencies." (EU Correspondent, Tribune).

The WSJ reporter considered that, with the exception of themselves and the EV, : "all other major media tend to treat Europe as a collection of nation states, and EU affairs do not get as high a profile as national news. You'll always see national news on the front page and page two, and EU would be somewhere on page four or five." (Staff Reporter, WSJ). Despite its wide circulation in Europe, large Brussels bureau, and

commitment to reporting on the EU, transnational journalists see the FT as a British newspaper. It is perceived as competing with other national British newspapers, and it was implied that this constraint negatively influences the paper's reporting to relate to the anti-European and nationalised debate perceived to be represented in the British press.

### **Role perceptions and the democratic deficit**

When asked about the role of the media in reducing the democratic deficit, several of the journalists pointed to faults in national newspapers' approaches to covering the EU. This included suggestions that there is a domestic bias in much of the coverage in member states and it was suggested by one journalist that the national press are incapable of fulfilling their democratic role because they do not dedicate enough resources to reporting on the EU. His view was that a similar level of infrastructure and resources should be allocated to reporting the EU as is invested in the reporting of national parliaments:

“They [national papers] should play an important role [in bridging the democratic deficit], but they're doing a lousy job, because most of them are still stuck in a national rut and above all, the top editors have not understood the degree to which European integration has already taken place [...] Brussels should be, as important as a national capital, at least” (Staff Reporter, WSJ).

Other journalists criticised media coverage of Europe for not paying sufficient attention to complex issues and suggested that the media had been 'deficient' in informing the public about European integration<sup>10</sup>. For example, in the opinion of the Editor of the European Voice the quality of press coverage of the EU varies from country to country, and is particularly poor in Britain: “Some countries are more aware of the European context because their media covers it in more depth, other countries, my own country springs to mind, are less aware, because the EU is not covered in great depth in British newspapers, even in broadsheets.” Counteracting or trying to balance out the perceived national bias in coverage of the EU is therefore a common theme in transnational journalists' role perceptions.

### **Editorial policies**

The WSJ and EV pursue an active role in attempting to influence EU politics by running campaigns on specific EU issues. It is noteworthy that both newspapers have editorial policies to campaign on issues relating to the EU as a whole rather than campaigning on issues that are specifically relevant for some nation states. In Britain, newspapers' EU campaigns tend to relate to be restricted to issues questioning Britain's involvement in the EU, such as membership of the Euro (Firmstone, 2007, 2008, Forthcoming). The WSJ has campaigned in the past for the EU to abolish the CAP. The EV strives to use its journalism to encourage the general concept of transparency in all EU institutions, and focuses on demanding that MEPs publish a declaration of their interests on the European Parliament's website. In order to expose those MEPs who refuse to make their interests public, the EV has published a list of

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<sup>10</sup> Off the record comment.

those MEPs who have and haven't declared their interests once every few months since 2001. Clearly, the newspaper and its journalists perceive themselves as playing an important democratic role in holding the EU and its institutions to account. This was firmly expressed by the Political Correspondent of the EV when he said: "We've to explain how the EU works in clear and simple terms and cut through all the jargon. Secondly, we've to try and make up for the fact that EU institutions... aren't exactly models of transparency". The paper's Editor reiterated this aim: "They're [the campaigns are] mostly geared around transparency. Transparency is the heart of what we are about, we're there to hold the executive and the EP and the Council to account. That's what newspapers do, or should do."

## **Conclusions and implications**

The interviews with key players in four transnational newspapers illustrate how their reporting of EU political affairs is influenced by four key factors: infrastructure and resources, journalistic culture and role perceptions, editorial policies, and readership demand/market sector. Examining the differing organisational infrastructures at each newspaper has shown that the resources allocated to EU newsgathering and a newspaper's country of origin are of key importance in shaping transnational journalistic cultures and reporting practices. These internal factors are inextricably linked with editorial policies which operate as an additional internal influence by determining the level of resources devoted to covering EU issues, the paper's policies for running EU stories in sister publications, and, at two newspapers, the pursuit of campaigns aimed at influencing EU institutions. These factors significantly contribute to transnational newspapers' approaches to reporting the EU in five main ways.

First, the differences in infrastructures result in the FT covering the EU along the lines of a daily 'paper of record', whereas the WSJ and the Tribune adopt a more varied style centred on irregular in-depth feature style articles instead of daily news reports. It is difficult to say whether this style is more a function of the differences in resources allocated to covering EU affairs, or more a result of differences in journalistic cultures at each newspaper. In either case, the findings are supportive of comparative research which has demonstrated distinctions between American and Western European journalistic practices (Donsbach & Patterson, 2005). Second, the differences in style are also indicative an attempt to create a unique selling point that distinguishes EU coverage from that available in other transnational and national publications, and create a competitive advantage. The pursuit of this strategy supports the view that the media will only become active on a transnational level if a sufficient number of the public demand a style of EU orientated coverage that national media are unable to provide (Neidhardt et al., 2000).

Third, notwithstanding these differences in style, common role perceptions among transnational journalists distinguish the role from that of nationally based journalists, or foreign correspondents. One element of the transnational role is to operate as a counterbalance to the nationalisation of EU affairs by the press in member states. National newspapers were widely perceived as reporting the politics of the EU through a 'national filter' in a way that is detrimental to public knowledge of important EU issues. In acting out this 'counter balancing' role, transnational journalists do not necessary pursue a pro-EU perspective, rather they aim to provide a different style of coverage that gives a birds eye view of events and issues that is not

anchored in the concerns of nation states. This is markedly different from the role pursued by some British pro-EU journalists whose reaction to what they see as unfair negative coverage of the EU is to respond and retaliate with coverage positioned in support of the EU (Firmstone, 2007, 2008, Forthcoming).

Fourth, the differentiated nature of external influences from the transnational market sector and perceptions of readership demand make an overarching contribution to the way transnational journalists cover EU affairs. Journalists at each paper are constrained by a differing set of perceptions about the specialised or professional reasons that stimulate their readers' interest in the politics of the EU. Fifth, with the exception of the EV, transnational news values are influenced by the need for stories about the EU to be of relevance to readers of other (nationally distributed) newspapers within their ownership group. This highlights the fact that these newspapers are not transnational in terms of ownership. None are owned or run by a group of companies from several EU member states. In addition, given that all four newspapers belong to large news organisations, an EU wide transnational press may only be a viable proposition when it can rely on a wider network and infrastructure for support. Readers of transnational papers (with the exception of the EV) expect world news coverage in the same way as readers of national papers, and this requires an expensive network of foreign correspondents. However, access to such infrastructures does not come without strings attached.

Although based on a relatively small number of interviews, these findings have potentially significant implications for the way in which transnational newspapers provide a forum for the communication and deliberation of EU affairs, and point to the potential to make a further distinction between the two journalistic perspectives proposed by Schlesinger (1999). Instead of internal and external, the findings suggest that three approaches shape transnational journalistic practices and news values: internal institutional, external business, and external international. First, an internal institutional perspective is practiced by the EV, whose Brussels based elite readers demand information about the internal issues and events of the EU, its institutions, and European integration as a process, without any coverage of international or national news from member states. Secondly, the perspective pursued by the WSJ and FT can be thought of as external and business orientated. Dominated by elite businessmen their readership requires EU affairs to be presented from an external point of view in terms of the commercial and investment interests of the EU as a business region. Third, Tribune journalists cover EU affairs from an external point of view with a focus on international consequences. If one further applies this line of thinking to what other research shows about national newspapers' approaches to covering the EU, then a fourth perspective can be added to the way journalists approach EU affairs: internal member state. National newspaper coverage of the EU in member states has consistently been shown to be constrained by the need to present EU affairs in terms of national consequences (Baisnée, 2002; Firmstone, 2003, 2007, 2008, Forthcoming; Gleissner & de Vreese, 2005; Heikkila & Kunelius, 2006; Morgan, 1995). Moreover, content analyses provide evidence of this national focus (Anderson & Weymouth, 1999; Firmstone, 2003, 2007; Kevin, 2003; Pfetsch, Adam, & Berkel, Forthcoming; Trenz, 2007). Taking this nationally orientated perspective into account, it can be argued that the production of EU news is fragmented into four sectors, each of which demands EU news to be produced from a different perspective.

Crucially, none of these perspectives cover EU affairs in terms of consequences for the EU as a polity, or from what could be termed the internal EU polity perspective. Ideally, the relevance of these perspectives should be interpreted in conjunction with the end result of the news production process through a content analysis of transnational coverage. Such a dual method approach would give much needed empirically based evidence of the ways in which journalists' perspectives on the EU translate into coverage of EU issues.

Considering the contribution of these perspectives to understanding the current role of transnational media in the construction of a European public sphere turns our attention to the consumers of such media. Rather than focussing on the media, it seems necessary to give further consideration to the question of who constitutes the public in the triangular relationship between the citizens, the transnational media and collective actors that Niedhardt et al's (2000) map out as necessary for a functioning European public sphere. Although the transnational press represents a departure from the internal member state perspective where media coverage is structured by national concerns, it does not provide EU citizens with an opportunity to access information about the EU presented from a truly transnational perspective. This is important because discussions of the potential contribution of an EU transnational media to the European public sphere, and its role in addressing the democratic deficit, presuppose that such a media would function to communicate EU affairs to EU citizens. From the outset of this study it was never supposed that transnational newspapers represented the concerns of the average EU citizen. Rather they were thought to represent the views of a European public made up of a readership restricted to 'European' elites (Schlesinger, 1999). On closer inspection, it seems that the picture in terms of the creation of a space for transnational communication that could bring EU citizens and EU civil society together is even gloomier. Not only do the transnational newspapers pursue an EU news agenda that is shaped by the concerns of an elite and unrepresentative readership, their coverage is also influenced by the need to appeal to readers who are not eligible to vote in European Parliament elections (American ex-pats living in the EU), and in the case of the WSJ and Tribune, the nationally focussed interests of the domestic American public. The space or spaces for transnational debate are even more restricted than previously considered. There appears to be little hope of escaping the historical and structural links between the media and nation states to create a European wide media that represent 'ordinary' citizens of the EU (Kunelius & Sparks, 2001: 10). Further, a discord exists between this situation and transnational journalists' role perceptions in which journalists see themselves fulfilling a distinct and, often more highly regarded, role where communicating the EU is not rooted in national concerns. However, by locating their reporting of the EU vis-à-vis the implications for the rest of the world, and/or the national interests of citizens of the USA, rather than to citizens of EU member states, the current approach to transnational coverage achieves little in bridging the gap in communications between EU institutions and their citizens.

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