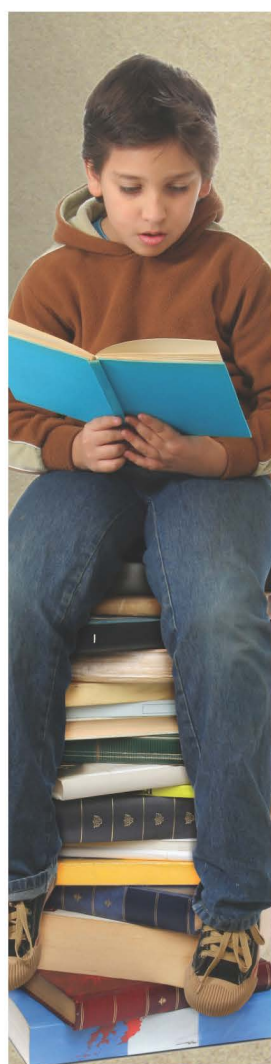


DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR INTERNAL POLICIES

POLICY DEPARTMENT
STRUCTURAL AND COHESION POLICIES **B**



Agriculture and Rural Development

Culture and Education

Fisheries

Regional Development

Transport and Tourism

**COMMUNICATING
'EUROPE' TO ITS CITIZENS:
STATE OF AFFAIRS AND
PROSPECTS**

STUDY





DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR INTERNAL POLICIES
POLICY DEPARTMENT B: STRUCTURAL AND COHESION POLICIES

CULTURE AND EDUCATION

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STUDY

This document was requested by the European Parliament's Committee on Culture and Education.

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Abstract

This study examines how 'Europe', both in terms of institutions and values, is communicated to its citizens. It seeks to explain the main trends in public perception, assesses the communication strategy of relevant actors and finally provides recommendations for future actions to be taken.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AT	Austria
BE	Belgium
BG	Bulgaria
CAV	Community Added Value
BRIC	Brazil, Russia, India and China
CH	Switzerland
CY	Cyprus
CZ	Czech Republic
DE	Germany
DG	Directorate-General
DG COMM	Directorate-General for Communication
DG EAC	Directorate-General for Education and Culture
DG EMPL	Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion
DG REGIO	Directorate-General for Regional Policy
DG TRADE	Directorate-General for Trade
DK	Denmark
EC	European Commission
EDCC	Europe Direct Contact Centre
EDIC	European Direct Information Centre
EE	Estonia
EL	Greece
EP	European Parliament

ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ES	Spain
ESF	European Social Fund
EU	European Union
FI	Finland
FR	France
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
HR	Croatia
HU	Hungary
IE	Ireland
IGI	Interinstitutional Group on Information
IS	Iceland
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
LLP	Lifelong Learning Programme
IT	Italy
LT	Lithuania
LU	Luxembourg
LV	Latvia
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
MS	Member State
MT	Malta
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NL	Netherlands

- NO Norway
- OECD Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
- PL Poland
- PT Portugal
- RO Romania
- SE Sweden
- SME Small and Medium Enterpris
- SI Slovenia
- SPP Spokespersons' Service
- SK Slovakia
- TK Turkey
- UK United Kingdom
- USA United States of America

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background and aim of the study

The aim of this study is to offer an analysis of the role of the EU in communicating both its policies and 'European values' to its citizens. The strengths and weaknesses of communication policies are identified, and recommendations are formulated for improving the communication of 'Europe' to its citizens. Communication in this context is understood as pursuing the following three objectives: (1) to inform about the EU, (2) to promote the work of EU institutions, and (3) to engage citizens in constructing an ever-closer Europe.

The study focuses on three domains which play a key role in the above-mentioned communication efforts, namely: (1) the role of the EU institutions, (2) the role of the media, and (3) the role of the political sphere in communicating Europe. Conclusions and recommendations for each of these domains are summarised below.

General conclusions

First of all, this evaluation of various communication efforts made by EU institutions builds further on and echoes past evaluations and reports. In different studies, recommendations have included better cooperation, social action, targeting, framing, searching for citizen dialogue, going local and many others. On the basis of these recommendations, strategies were developed, higher budgets were allocated, and services and instruments were put in place, but the Union continued to face communication challenges. At the same time, public support has been declining over the years, sometimes giving the impression of a 'deadlock' in the EU.

Secondly and as in the case of previous studies on communication, this study once again shows that communicating Europe is a complex matter in which a large number of factors play a role. Much also depends on the performance of European legislation and policies (output), democratic processes (input), and the media, but also crucial are the state of the economy and the cultural-historical context of the Member States (MS), as all of these factors combine to determine citizens' expectations vis-à-vis the EU. In some MS communication can bolster positive attitudes towards the EU, while in others positive communication about the EU can be counter-productive, since citizens might reject pro-European messages.

Thirdly, there is no Holy Grail or panacea for engaging European citizens or encouraging European identity. There is a limit to the effectiveness of mediated European communication. What has proved to work are the funding programmes which stimulate social action, going beyond the verbal sphere, and address the cultural component of Europe.

Role of the EU institutions in communicating 'Europe'

As a consequence of the growing competences of the EU, turning from a merely economic to a political Union and directly affecting an ever-increasing part of European citizens, the role of communication to gain public support for the European project became more important. Especially since 2004, the EU institutions, and predominantly the Commission, have adapted a number of strategic documents describing their policy ambitions for better informing citizens and promoting the work of the EU as well as increasingly engaging citizens in building an ever-closer Europe. Keywords guiding these documents have been: 'dialogue with citizens', 'interaction', 'going local', 'active citizenship', and 'communicating in partnership'. Over the years, the EU has implemented a wide range of sophisticated communication services and instruments. Communication at the central level is the responsibility of the EU institutions, individual Directorates-General (DGs) at the Commission, and decentralised services in the MS. MS deploy additional - often formal - communication activities, over and above what has been done by Commission representations and EP information offices. Furthermore, civil society actors play an important role in raising awareness for Europe.

On the basis of an assessment of the current situation, the following conclusions are drawn:

- There is still a lack of clarity as to what is actually meant by going local, setting up a dialogue, and promoting engagement, what actions should follow, which public groups should be involved and how.
- Although the EU aims to communicate Europe in partnership, there is evidence that EU communication is often still too fragmented and disjointed. In addition, the role of the Commission's Directorate-General for Communication (DG COMM) in coordinating communication policies across EU institutions and internal departments is still regarded as fragile. Partnership agreements have been established between MS and the EU, based on joint communication plans. These plans help to adapt communication activities to local circumstances and link them to national political agendas. These partnerships are generally assessed positively.
- The goals of communication efforts - (1) to inform about and (2) promote the work of EU institutions, and (3) to engage citizens in constructing an ever-closer Europe, further developing a sense of European citizenship - are sometimes mixed together in policy documents where separate political and public communication strategies would be more advantageous.
- Evaluations of communication activities generally show positive assessments of these services and instruments, but also indicate that the vast majority of information services only reach the usual suspects who are already informed about the EU and not the general public. This points to the need for a serious debate on the cost-effectiveness of these services and instruments in terms of outreach.
- The study identifies some important challenges for communicating Europe at all levels of communication (EC's DG COMM, other Commission DGs, the EP, and decentralised services):
- The content communicated is often of limited relevance to the majority of citizens and is seen as too detailed and irrelevant to the average citizen's daily life (and mostly related to 'insiders'). Attention is mainly focused on communicating the overarching sectoral policies and policy decisions taken. European values and norms, on the other hand, tend not to be communicated by EU institutions in a consistent and structured manner.
- The tone of EU communications, aiming at informing, promoting and engaging EU citizens, is considered to be impersonal and distant, too bureaucratic, too formal, too technical, too long-winded, too inward-looking, too abstract, and sometimes too complacent.

- Evidence shows that programmes aiming to engage citizens, such as the Citizenship Programme, but also Erasmus+ and Creative Europe, are relevant for developing emotional attachment to Europe and for cultivating the cultural component of European identity. The literature argues that creating emotional attachment by means of socialisation processes is a far stronger force in helping to 'uphold' European integration than giving utilitarian support.

On the basis of these conclusions, the following recommendation can be provided on the role of EU institutions in communicating Europe:

Recommendation 1: It is recommended that communication strategies should re-emphasise the importance of starting up a dialogue with citizens, empowering citizens, developing a European public sphere and communicating in partnership. The new strategy should be a cornerstone in all EU operations. The following points should be taken into consideration:

- Further operationalising and specifying the understanding of dialogue with citizens, 'going local', empowering citizens and developing a public sphere, underpinned with clear activities. What is meant by these terms? And how can they be made more concrete?
- Including a strategic plan making provision for a minimum level of differentiation of various target groups, placing specific focus on youth, citizens abstaining from voting and marginalised groups.
- Rethinking communication channels based on this target group differentiation. Also, diversifying information for different target groups (policymakers, business representatives and citizens).
- Evaluating the cost-effectiveness of communication services and instruments in place (keeping in mind outreach).
- Improving cooperation between and within EU institutions in communicating Europe, while respecting the diversity and the roles of these institutions.
- Launching a discussion on what European values are and integrating them consistently in future communication activities.
- Making better use of hard evidence showing the added value of European cooperation, such as the evidence collected in the studies on the 'costs of non-Europe' or on the local impact of the common market, regulation or funding programmes.
- Rethinking the content and tone of communication to make a better connection with citizens; making communication messages less technical and formal, keeping background information available for the interested reader. Adapting messages better to the national contexts and providing a better explanation as to why certain policies are likely to work in a particular MS should be considered.
- Better training of officials on how to communicate policies and EU values to different target groups (EU citizens, but also the media).
- Better engage Commissioners and senior management staff in communicating Europe, visiting MS and attending public events, instead of staying in the Brussels 'bubble'.
- Investment should be made in school curricula and teacher training to ensure that young people become familiar with Europe from an early age. Good practices across countries should be shared and more teachers should take part in mobility actions (Erasmus +).

In addition to the above-mentioned points, the insurmountable limits of traditional information strategies need to be reconsidered in a new strategy. The study provides clear arguments for investing in action-based programmes that have clear effects in terms of participants becoming more engaged. This could be achieved by allocating more funds to programmes such as the Europe for Citizens Programme, Erasmus +, Creative Europe and other programmes stimulating interaction between citizens across borders.

Role of the media in communicating Europe

The media play an important role informing citizens on European affairs. As no pan-European public sphere yet exists and national media systems differ from country to country, the way EU citizens are informed also varies greatly. Information provision very much depends on what the public and media find newsworthy. On the basis of an assessment of the current situation, the following conclusions are drawn concerning the role of the media:

- Research shows that the coverage of EU news is cyclical in its nature, with 'priority peaks'. Moreover, the EU is considered largely faceless in the news, with coverage often presented in neutral or slightly negative terms, as is the case for political news in general. Research on media data, however, shows that the more often EU news was framed in terms of benefits of EU membership, the higher the proportion of people who perceived their country's EU membership to be beneficial.
- The EU receives limited coverage in the news. This is explained by several interrelated factors that lead to media news on Europe, namely:
 - Journalists from national and regional newspapers consider their readership to be less interested in European politics than politics in general and that readers have a low understanding of the workings of European politics.
 - EU institutions make relatively little effort to penetrate the information resource pools of national and regional journalists. The distribution of information has different features, which can be challenging for journalists in terms of processing information to ensure it is newsworthy (focus on EU correspondents/topical specialists, highly technical nature of press material, heavy flow of information, scattered nature of information on the EU).
 - Since journalists/media organisations generally look for (conflicting) stories and as the communication of the EU is often neutral, positive, or without any debate, this is not always reported in the news. Studies carried out regarding journalism point to barriers towards effective coverage of European news, namely limited resources, insufficient links to EU institutions, low priority given to European stories, insufficient language skills and insufficient knowledge as to how the EU works. When discussing these barriers, the financial situation of the media industry, particularly decreasing budgets and cost restrictions, has to be considered as a factor.

On the basis of these conclusions, the following recommendation can be made on the role of the media in communicating Europe:

Recommendation 2: It is recommended that the EU institutions take greater account of political communication and news framing, whilst remaining fully aware that news media operate on the basis of an audience-led logic (some with additional 'public service' obligations) and will therefore only cover issues if they are new, relevant and/or contentious. Nevertheless, the neutral and objective character of the EU institutions should be respected. The following points should be taken into consideration:

- Better adaptation by EU institutions of press releases to the specific contexts of countries or groups of citizens, not by changing the message but by better contextualising it (e.g. organising their press unit into national desks following the example of the EP).
- Improving information supply to journalists to help them find information more easily (e.g. by setting up a helpdesk for EU journalists). Producing information in all EU languages is also considered helpful when doing press work.

- Hiring and training press officers who are able to properly describe and find the national angle and who can explain the broader meaning of developments and especially the relevance thereof at the national level.

Role of the political sphere in communicating Europe

Politicians, policy debates and the political agenda play a vital role in determining which issues are considered important in a given society. On the basis of an assessment of the current situation, we have drawn conclusions concerning the role of the political sphere.

From the assessment of the political sphere at the national level, the following can be concluded:

- Public debate and dialogue regarding the EU is generally missing at the national level, although this varies to a great extent across the MS. The EU is often a divisive issue on which politicians are reluctant to enter into debate.
- European institutions are very often used by political decision-makers at the MS level as scapegoats to camouflage controversial political moves undertaken at the national level.
- Experts indicate that a small group of national politicians are fully aware of how the EU works and what policies are in place. This sometimes leads to situations where politicians wrongly accuse the EU for decisions that were encouraged by MS themselves.

At the EU level, the following can be concluded:

- Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) are not always visible in national debates and work at a distance owing to their increasing workload as legislators. Research shows that it is not generally easy to approach MEPs by email.
- MEPs increasingly make use of social media (Facebook, Twitter). Nevertheless, the social media discourse in Europe has been rather focused on the elite. Moreover, the authority of social media and the accuracy of information is questioned by some actors. In addition, social media are used only to a limited extent by citizens during election campaigns when it comes to making their voting decisions.

On the basis of these conclusions, the following recommendation can be provided on the role of the political sphere in communicating Europe:

Recommendation 3: It is recommended that national and EU-level politics and politicians operate in closer alignment in order to increase transparency of the role of the EU, its mandate and how the EU works. The following points should be taken into consideration:

- National politicians should be better informed with regard to EU institutions and policies, and should correctly frame the EU in national debates. This is considered to be one of the most crucial points for improving the public's opinion of the EU, in view of national politicians' multiplier role in terms of influencing national media and citizens directly.
- It is important that the EU is not seen as being isolated from national policy or used as a scapegoat for unpopular policy decisions. National politicians should integrate EU policy (much more) into national policymaking, e.g. by actively debating EU policy in national parliaments and using existing standing committees for discussing EU-related matters, rather than delegating EU material to specialised committees.
- Both MEPs and Commissioners should be more actively present at the national/regional levels, explaining the added value of European policies and decisions and the links to the national context.
- Better use of trusted national-level actors to convey the EU's messages might be the only way to get round the distrust felt by many citizens who reject the reasoning of EU institutions.

1. BACKGROUND AND AIM OF THE STUDY

1.1. Background of the study

The policies of the European Union affect everyone's lives, whether through its rules on issues such as passengers' rights or food labelling or through the free movement of people and goods. However, citizens are not always aware of these policies or the EU's achievements, even if the effect on their lives might be immediate and positive.

Much has been invested by the EU in recent decades in order to better communicate 'Europe' – be it European policies, the EU institutions, or rather 'European values' –and thus bring Europe closer to its citizens. Although the first information campaigns were launched in the 1970s, increasing policy attention was given to communicating Europe after the difficulties surrounding the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty¹. Communication was established as a strategic objective and a policy in its own right by the Barroso Commission when it began its term of office in 2004; this was exemplified by the appointment of the first ever Commissioner for Communication Strategy. The communication strategy which has since emerged has been constructed around several important documents, namely the 'Action Plan' to improve communicating Europe by the Commission; 'Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate'; and the White Paper on a European Communication Policy. In October 2007, the Commission followed up these initiatives with the publication of the report 'Communicating Europe in Partnership'². All these documents were based on commitments to better listening, communicating and connecting with citizens by 'going local', facilitating the emergence of a European Public Sphere, and better partnerships between EU institutions and Member States (MS). These documents have contributed to the construction of a discourse whose aim is to 'move away from one-way communication to reinforced dialogue, from an institution-centred to a citizen-centred communication, and from a Brussels-based to a more decentralised approach'³.

Nevertheless, paradoxically, the results in terms of public support for the EU and the image of the EU and its institutions have not always been proportionate to the communication efforts. Analyses of Eurobarometer statistics show that the EU's image is increasingly negatively assessed by a large group of EU citizens. Negative trends can be seen across indicators such as citizen trust, knowledge of the EU and the feeling of being represented in the EU. The participation of EU citizens in past European Parliament (EP) elections also shows a declining trend (from 62.0% in 1979 to 43.1% in the most recent elections of 2014), although this stabilised somewhat during the period between 2009 and 2014. The most recent elections (2014) saw major gains across Europe by Eurosceptic parties of both left and right and anti-establishment parties, especially in countries such as the UK, France and Greece, although the mainstream centre-right European People's Party remained the biggest political group at EU level⁴.

The question is how the communication policies, programmes and activities of the EU institutions have responded to these developments over time and what role they played in forming the public perception of Europe and of the institutions. In 1994, the European Commission (EC) concluded that its lack of public support was largely due to inadequate information and understanding, and so endeavoured to increase the transparency of its

¹ Monaghan E. (2008), 'Communicating Europe': The Role of Organised Civil Society. In: Journal of Contemporary European Research, 2008, Vol.4 (1), p.18.

² http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/communication/about/communication-initiatives/index_en.htm

³ European Commission (2006), White Paper on a European Communication Policy, Brussels.

⁴ <http://www.elections2014.eu/en>

policy-making⁵. The question now is whether this analysis (still) holds true or whether other mechanisms play a role.

1.2. Aims and objectives of the study

The Terms of Reference for this assignment address three central questions to be answered by this study⁶:

1. What are currently the main strategies in communicating EU policies and the results of such policies, as well as broader 'European values', to EU citizens?
2. How can these strategies be assessed in terms of respective strengths and weaknesses, e.g. failing to increase awareness of and attachment to the 'European project'?
3. What recommendations can be made for improving the communication of 'Europe' to its citizens, with the ultimate aim of creating a critical awareness of and interest in European affairs?

This study describes how and by whom Europe is communicated, assesses the communication strategy of the different actors involved and, finally, arrives at recommendations for improving the communication strategy by drawing all the information together. The aim is to provide recommendations as to what could be done more, better, differently or less when communicating Europe to its citizens, as well as considering why this should be done and what factors play a role beyond the influence of the EU institutions.

1.3. Conceptual approach

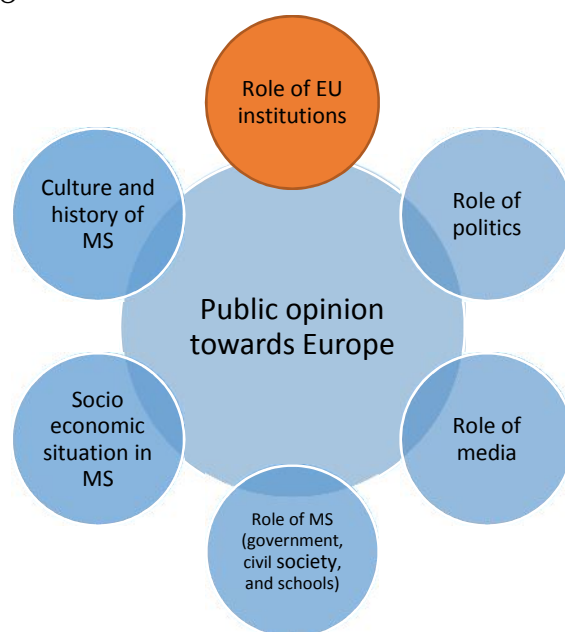
Communicating Europe is not an endeavour over which EU institutions have much formal influence, as to a great extent how Europe is communicated takes place at national level and is influenced by the national context. It is suggested by this study that within any given national context various elements are important in the creation of public opinion (over and above the role of the EU institutions and the challenges for European integration)⁷. These elements are: the role of the media, politics, national governments, civil society and schools, the socio-economic situation, and the cultural and historical identity of a country. All these factors are included in Figure 1.

⁵ European Commission (1994), Information, Communication, Openness. ISEC/B25/1994, London.

⁶ Terms of Reference. Communicating Europe to its Citizens: State of Affairs and Prospects.

⁷ When referring to public opinion, we mean the collective opinion of (groups of) people on a particular issue, problem, object or idea, especially as a guide to action, decision or the like. This opinion could lead to support, emotional attachment and, finally, European identity. Some elements of identity – and emotional attachment – can be identified. Firstly, identity arises only in relation to social action and can therefore change over the course of time. Secondly, identity has a narrative dimension, conveyed in the stories people tell about themselves or an object in order to give continuity to their existence. Thirdly, identity concerns a relation of self and other by which the identity of the self is constituted in symbolic markers. In this sense, identity is based on difference and thus exists in a relational context (individual or group). Fourthly, intrinsic to any discussion on collective identity are so-called multiple identities. Collective identities can be overlapping (as in hyphenated identities), mixed (or hybrid), or coexisting. Source: Delanty G. (2003), Is there a European identity?, *Global Dialogue*, 5(3-4), 76-86.

Figure 1: Conceptual framework on (f)actors playing a role in communicating Europe



Source: Authors

The mechanisms which we define at the national level also influence and reinforce each other, making the communication of Europe a continuous and reiterative cycle. As a result, this study focuses its analysis on the role of the above-mentioned factors in communicating Europe, analysing the context, the mechanisms in place, and how this eventually impacts on public opinion⁸. First of all, the role of the EU institutions is addressed. These institutions (such as the EC, the EP, and the Council of the European Union) apply different approaches in communicating their messages to a wider public, ranging from (a) informing, to (b) promoting and (c) engaging stakeholders. Secondly, Members of the European Parliament (MEP) or MS representatives are keen on promoting their political views as well as gaining public support for their actions. Closely related to the political sphere is the role of civil society, which can act as an intermediary between citizens and the state, and in so doing enhance the democratic legitimacy of governance structures. Thirdly, the media plays an important role since they can influence public discourse by placing emphasis on certain preselected news elements. There is a cyclical relationship between public interest and media; the media report on what the public finds newsworthy, and in covering issues the media make a particular topic appear more or less important to the public. Fourthly, national governments and civil-society actors play a role in communicating Europe in terms of providing information on EU institutions and policies, as well as engaging citizens in the political process. Also, schools play an important role in communicating Europe at national level, by including Europe and the EU as topics in their curricula. Fifthly, the culture and history of a country play an important role in how Europe is perceived, laying the foundation for a set of shared norms and values, as well as expectations of how life should be. This understandably leads to expectations concerning a political or governing body such as the EU. Finally, the socio-economic situation plays an important role in forming opinion on the EU, since economic developments have a direct impact on the standard of living in a country (and on the citizens). The literature indicates that the economy is viewed as one of

⁸ According to Pawson and Tilley (1997), science deals with intricacy by using an analytical framework to break down systems into their key components and processes. Realistic evaluation stresses four key linked concepts for explaining and understanding policies: mechanisms, context, outcome pattern, and context mechanism outcome pattern configuration. Pawson R., Tilley N. (1997), *Realistic Evaluation*, London, Sage.

the primary determinants in shaping attitudes towards democracy and the democratic process.⁹ Governing bodies are often seen as being responsible for regulating and upholding economic progress. Where, for instance, the socio-economic situation is below citizens' expectations, the governing body is looked to for action and improvement.

It is not possible to measure the exact impact of these factors on public opinion within the scope of this study (testing cause and effect by experiment). Therefore, this study applies a contribution analysis to assess the role of these actors in communicating Europe¹⁰. Public opinion data are therefore only used for describing the context of changing support for the EU. Eurobarometer surveys are explored addressing issues such as trust, commitment and satisfaction, as well as attachment considered directly¹¹. These data have unfortunately not always been tailored in such a way as to meet the specific requirements of this study, and can therefore only be used as an indirect measure¹².

1.4. Methodology

Given the breadth of this study, the research employs multiple research instruments to answer the three major research questions (including desk research, interviews, and case studies) at both European and national levels, concluding with an expert meeting.

- At the EU level, relevant policy documentation, evaluations, and academic research on public opinion and EU communication were assessed. The purpose of this exercise was to provide a meta-evaluation on the basis of existing information on the role of EU institutions, the political sphere, social actors, and the media in communicating Europe. This evaluation does not attempt to assess the communication policies of individual EU institutions or Commission Directorates-General (DGs) in detail. Rather, it seeks to offer an overview of the current state of play as regards the literature and (evaluation) studies. In addition, interviews were carried out with policymakers, representatives of the media, and experts at EU level.
- In order to grasp how Europe is communicated at the MS level and the mechanisms in place which influence public opinion, as well as the cooperation between the EU and MS levels, the study assesses six countries in greater detail (DE, NL, RO, ES, SE, UK). For this purpose, relevant documentation was studied and interviews were carried out. The countries were carefully selected taking into account economic performance (based on the evolution of GDP per capita) and the nature of national public opinion regarding the EU (making use of Eurobarometer statistics), to ensure that a broad range of countries were covered by the study.
- These analyses of the EU level and the MS contexts were complemented by four concrete case studies focusing on the communicative aspects of: (1) the Citizenship Programme, (2) the European Social Fund (ESF), (3) the data protection regulation, and (4) European integration and challenges ahead in a broader sense. These case

⁹ Anderson C. J., Guillory C.A. (1997), Political institutions and satisfaction with democracy: A cross-national analysis of consensus and majoritarian systems, *The American Political Science Review*, 91(1), 66-81.; Clarke H. D., Dutt N., Kornberg A. (1993), The political economy of attitudes toward polity and society in Western European democracies, *Journal of Politics*, 55(4), 998-1021.

¹⁰ Rather than aiming to establish whether the communication policy analysed determined the results observed, this study aims to build a credible case for how the policies analysed contributed (as one of the key factors) towards the perceived outcomes by analysing, in qualitative terms, each potentially important causal link.

¹¹ Antonsich M. (2008), European attachment and meanings of Europe, A qualitative study in the EU-15, *Political Geography*, 27(6), 691-710.

¹² Bruter M. (2008), Legitimacy, Euroscepticism & Identity in the European Union – Problems of Measurement, Modelling & Paradoxical Patterns of Influence, *Journal of Contemporary European Research*, 4(4), 273-285.; Moes J. (2008), European identity compared: A mixed methods approach. Conference paper prepared for the ECPR Fourth Pan-European Conference on EU-Politics. <http://www.jhubc.it/ecpr-priga/virtualpaperroom/032.pdf>. Accessed September 1, 2014.

studies were developed at both EU and national level, by assessing relevant documentation and carrying out interviews.

- Lastly, the preliminary outcomes of this study were drawn together in a briefing document which was discussed at an expert meeting in Brussels. The twelve participating experts included academics, media representatives and representatives of EU institutions.

For the study as a whole, a total of 40 interviews were carried out and a wide range of sources, academic research papers and policy documents were consulted.

1.5. Structure of the study

The structure of this study continues as follows:

- Chapter 2 describes the general trends in public opinion towards different components of 'Europe'.
- Chapter 3 outlines the role of the EU institutions in communicating Europe and the communication policies, programmes and instruments in place.
- Chapter 4 discusses the role of the media communicating Europe.
- Chapter 5 outlines the role of the political sphere communicating Europe.
- Chapter 6 sets out the conclusions and recommendations resulting from the research.

Each chapter ends with a concluding section addressing the strengths and weaknesses, as well as challenges ahead for each actor involved in communicating Europe.

2. CONTEXT OF COMMUNICATING 'EUROPE'

KEY FINDINGS

- The European project has been an ongoing process since the end of the Second World War. The European Union is currently at a crossroads, debating further integration and/or enlargement, how to increase democratic legitimacy and how to guarantee more efficient decision-making at Union level.
- European cooperation can be characterised as having strong output legitimacy, as regards the added value of the EU, and a more criticised input legitimacy regarding decision-making procedures at EU level.
- The economic and financial crisis has put the output legitimacy under pressure, making it more difficult to explain the benefits of the EU.
- When one examines the contextual developments in which public opinion is shaped, this sometimes gives the impression of a 'deadlock' in the EU, resulting in low trust figures and in the Union not being considered democratic or capable of providing a solution for the current economic and political crisis.
- Experts argue over whether the EU is in a 'cycle of downward spiralling' and question whether sufficient mechanisms are in place at EU level to overcome this negative cycle (discussing, debating, repercussion and repositioning).
- A discrepancy appears to exist between the views of different socio-economic groups with regard to Europe. This spectrum of horizontal differences has unique characteristics within each Member State and should therefore be taken carefully into account in communication policies.
- Although European values are addressed in the different European Treaties, there is no consensus on what constitutes European identity, and the question is left open whether such identity can be promoted or used uncontested in the EU discourse.
- Creating emotional attachment based on socialisation processes is a far stronger, albeit long-term force, helping to 'uphold' European integration, as opposed to basing it on more utilitarian forms of support. This points to the need for a more action-based communication strategy.

2.1. Introduction

The European project has been an ongoing process since the end of the Second World War. Major turning-points in this process were the peace project, the economic integration process, the end of the cold war, the enlargement and development of a common framework of European law, and the first steps towards a political union and extension of policy domains. These affected, to a greater or lesser extent, public opinion regarding the EU across the MS¹³. The EU is currently at a crossroads, debating further integration and/or enlargement, how to increase its democratic legitimacy, and how to guarantee better decision-making at Union level. These are precisely the topics on which EU citizens are strongly divided and where the opinions of the political elite and those of EU citizens do not always coincide.

¹³ http://europa.eu/about-eu/eu-history/index_en.htm

This chapter addresses how the current state of the 'European project' is reflected in the opinion of EU citizens, making the distinction between public opinion towards the civic component of Europe and public opinion towards the cultural component, including emotional attachment (Section 2.2 and 2.3 respectively)¹⁴. It ends with a concluding assessment (Section 2.5) and sets the scene for the remaining chapters which discuss how Europe is communicated by different actors towards its citizens.

2.2. Public opinion towards the 'civic component' of Europe

When assessing the opinion of EU citizens on the 'civic component' of Europe, or in other words the European political system, a distinction should be made between opinions on the principles and results of European cooperation and integration (also called 'output legitimacy'), on the one hand, and opinions on the manner in which European decision-making occurs (also called 'input legitimacy') on the other¹⁵. Statistics clearly show that public opinion on these principles differ, being generally more critical towards the latter. Opinions also differ between countries and social groups.

2.2.1. Output legitimacy: result of EU policies

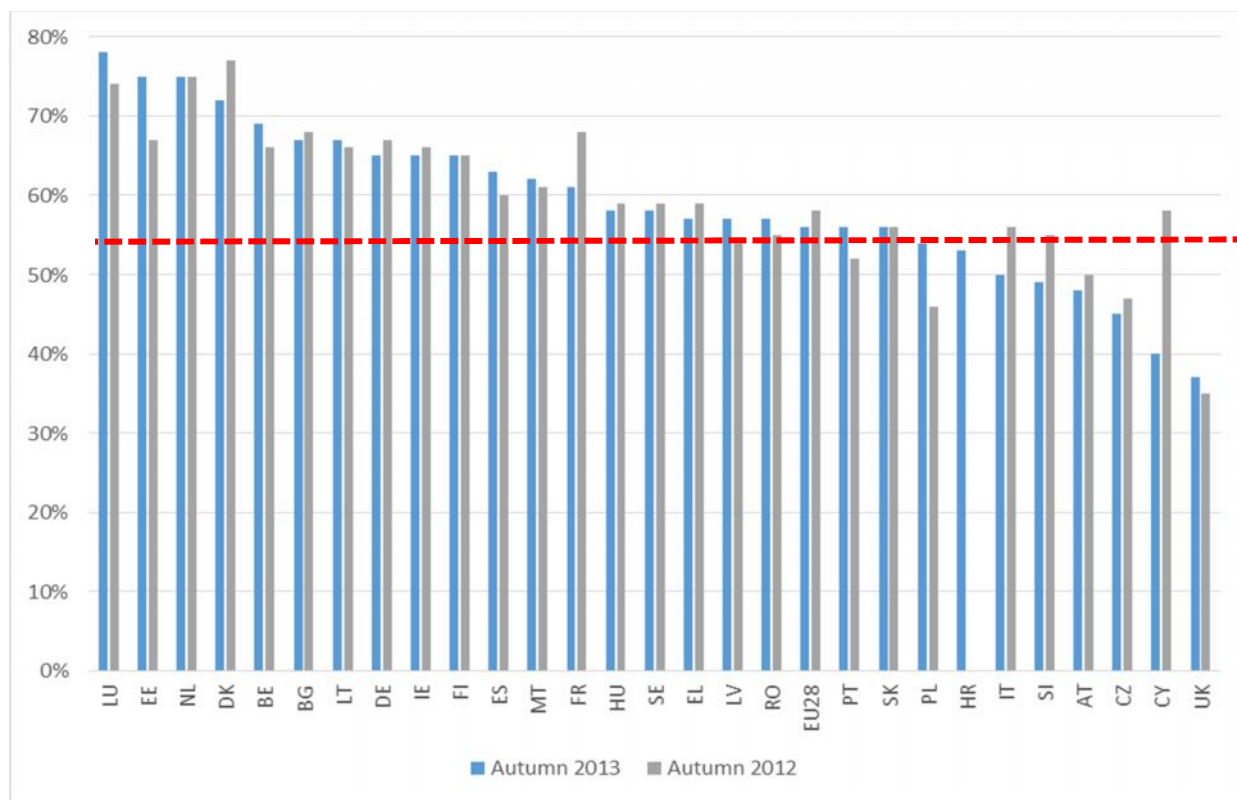
Taking into account the developments in public opinion as measured by Eurobarometer¹⁶, it can be concluded that a large majority of European citizens continue to believe that EU membership is desirable and that their MS has benefited from the EU (although there has been a slight fall in approval since the onset of the economic and financial crisis). Almost six in ten EU citizens (56 %) believe that EU membership for their country is necessary in order to face the challenges ahead (see figure 2). This idea is dominant in 26 of the 28 MS, and is even supported by an absolute majority in 23, headed by Luxembourg (78 %), Estonia (75 %), the Netherlands (75 %) and Denmark (74 %). A small group of countries are more critical (including Austria, Slovenia and the Czech Republic). Cyprus and the United Kingdom are at the other end of the spectrum, being the most critical and with a majority of their population indicating that their country could better face the future outside the EU.

¹⁴ This study closely follows the distinction made by Michael Bruter (2003, 2004). In his analyses, a useful distinction is made between a 'civic' and a 'cultural' component of European political identity. By civic identity, he understands 'the degree to which citizens feel that they are citizens of a European political system, whose rules, laws, and rights have an influence on their daily life'. Cultural identity, on the other hand, refers to the perceived level of sameness with other Europeans, which is defined as the perception of 'individuals' that fellow Europeans are closer to them than non-Europeans, regardless of the nature of the political system. Bruter also argues that, while the civic component appeals more to citizens' reason, the cultural component is driven more by collective symbols, values and images of Europe which can differ strongly across countries, regions, or even between individuals. Finally, Bruter addresses a third overarching aspect of identity, namely general or spontaneous self-assessment. This pertains to whether or not the individual 'feels' European, in a way that could relate to the civic and/or cultural components of identity. Source: Bruter M. (2003), *Winning hearts and minds for Europe: the impact of news and symbols on civic and cultural European identity*, *Comparative Political Studies*, 36(10), 1148-1179.; Bruter M. (2004), *On What Citizens Mean by Feeling 'European': Perceptions of News, Symbols and Borderless-ness*, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 30(1), 21-39.

¹⁵ Inspired by the work of Anton Hemerijck. Hemerijck A. (2003), 'Vier Kernvragen van Beleid', *Beleid en Maatschappij*, 1(1), 16-17.

¹⁶ http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/index_en.htm

Figure 2: Percentage of EU citizens who disagree with the statement that their country could better face the future outside the EU (autumn 2013 versus autumn 2012)



Source: Eurobarometer 80 (autumn 2013)

It is commonly held that when citizens feel the benefits of Europe they are more interested in and supportive of the EU. This is evidenced by the positive relationship between net financial transfers from the EU towards MS and perceived benefits¹⁷. A high proportion of citizens from countries that received more support when entering the EU, such as the new MS, expressed a positive view on the EU. Not only do these citizens perceive the benefits of EU membership, but the media in the respective countries also show a more positive tone in their coverage of the EU and its principles¹⁸.

Eurobarometer data show that the ranking of the most positive results of EU policies amongst European citizens has remained almost unchanged over the years. The free movement of people, goods and services within the EU and peace among EU MS are still perceived as the most positive results. Nevertheless, the achievement of peace is increasingly taken for granted - especially by young people, who have not been exposed to war and conflict to the same extent as the older generation¹⁹. Young people appear to be reflecting the idea, conceived by Jean Monnet and proclaimed by Robert Schuman, that mutual dependence and closer integration between European states will make war 'not merely unthinkable, but materially impossible'²⁰. The recent developments in Ukraine, too, serve to re-emphasise the importance of peace and security in Europe.

¹⁷ Karp J.A., Banducci S.A., Bowler S. (2003), To know it is to love it? Satisfaction with Democracy in the European Union, *Comparative Political Studies*, 36(3), 271-292

¹⁸ Hurrelmann A. (2008), Constructions of Multilevel Legitimacy in the European Union: A Study of German and British Media Discourse, *Comparative European Politics*, 2008, 6(2), 190-211.

¹⁹ http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/index_en.htm

²⁰ The Schuman Declaration, 9 May 1950

Citizens also increasingly designate the EU as the most suitable decision-making level for various policy areas that have expanded over the years. In general, public opinion is positive towards more EU influence on policy domains, extending the number of such domains. Sometimes support may be even more favourable towards a transfer of competences among the general public than the political elite (e.g. for a common policy in the areas of foreign affairs, terrorism and defence)²¹. However, citizens still consider developing the EU economy, boosting growth, and improving living standards the most important objectives for building Europe.

At the same time, output legitimacy is increasingly taken for granted and is also coming under greater pressure. This not only concerns the relevance of the EU as a historical construction and peace project, but also affects other domains, since citizens are becoming more aware of the personal implications of EU policies (such as the consequences of the free movement of citizens for the labour market and demographic structure). The economic crisis has also made citizens more critical towards the EU and less certain of the benefits of EU membership, particularly in countries facing pressing economic challenges or subject to more stringent austerity measures. The financial crisis has not only contributed to undermining trust in (financial) institutions, but has also given rise to the idea that long-lasting economic growth has come to an end. The validity of keeping the European social model alive has also come under scrutiny, especially when the EU is compared to competing markets in the US, the BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India and China), or Japan. Citizens expect solutions to these challenges from their governments, but also to an increasing extent from the EU²². Failure by the EU and national governments to meet these expectations is likely to have a negative effect on public opinion. In the words of the scholar Gabriel Almond, 'crises are the rare moments when even the general public starts to pay attention'²³.

The cases of Spain and Romania, as examined in this study, may serve as examples (see box below).

²¹ Maas C. (2010), *The European Union and Public Opinion*, In: de Beaufort F., van Schie P., eds., *Democracy in Europe of the People, by the People, for the People?*, 7-20, European Liberal Forum, The Hague.

²² The objectives of European integration most frequently mentioned as desirable by EU citizens are socio-economic in nature, e.g.: improving standards of living for all, developing the EU economy and boosting growth (source: http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/index_en.htm).

²³ Almond G.A. (1960), *The American People and Foreign Policy*, New York, Praeger.

The particular case of the role of the economic crisis in affecting public opinion on the EU: examples from Spain and Romania²⁴

In Spain, evidence was collected indicating that there is a distinction between pre-crisis Spain and post-crisis Spain. Before the crisis, Spain felt it had largely benefited from Europe; the infrastructure and public finances were improving. After the crisis, however, Spain felt it had to make too many changes and began to view the EU with a certain degree of trepidation. The positive associations which the Spanish people held towards the EU before the crisis have made way for disillusionment, insecurity and distrust; while the EU used to stand for quality of life and modernisation, this is no longer the case. Given the actions of the EU and the many budget cuts, which in the minds of many have hamstrung Spain's development for years to come, the EU integration project is now being questioned as well. These factors all contribute to a lack of faith in and understanding of the EU and its role in Spain, and this in turn means there is very little ground on which to communicate a positive image of Europe. The crisis has, therefore, severely damaged Spain's view of the EU. Support for economic integration dropped from 59 % in 2009 to 34 % in 2013. The prevalent discourse in Spain expresses the opinion that the EU has not handled the crisis well and that they are victims of circumstances. Despite this severe disillusionment with the EU, most Spanish citizens still ultimately feel that being part of the EU is better than being outside of it.

In Romania too, citizens' perception of the EU showed initially a high level of optimism and positive perception which has gradually decreased over time. The progressively decreasing positive perception may partly be explained in terms of the social and economic advantages once associated with the concept of the EU. For many Romanians, the EU represented social and economic ideals and a solid path towards improving quality of life and the state of the labour market. The progressive decrease in positive perception may be the result of the 2008 global financial crisis, or of other factors such as the seven-year transitional period (up to 1 January 2014) during which restrictions on employment access could still be maintained by MS.

In other countries studied, such as Germany, the Netherlands, the UK and Sweden, other feelings play a role, such as that of having to pay the price for the economic situation in less well-performing countries.

Output legitimacy is partly determined by how citizens are informed about what is done with European money and the concrete outputs of policies. Despite the availability of rich material and evidence produced by the EU on the Community Added Value (CAV) of EU policies, EU citizens are not always aware of the concrete outcomes of the European policies in place. Studies and evaluations prove that the European market has stimulated additional GDP growth and job creation, and that the costs of non-European markets tend to be much higher²⁵. The general public is often only confronted with the main ingredients of public

²⁴ The economic challenges are felt especially in countries like Spain and Romania. These countries, where the financial crisis is a dominant force in the national socio-economic situation, have been looked at in detail.

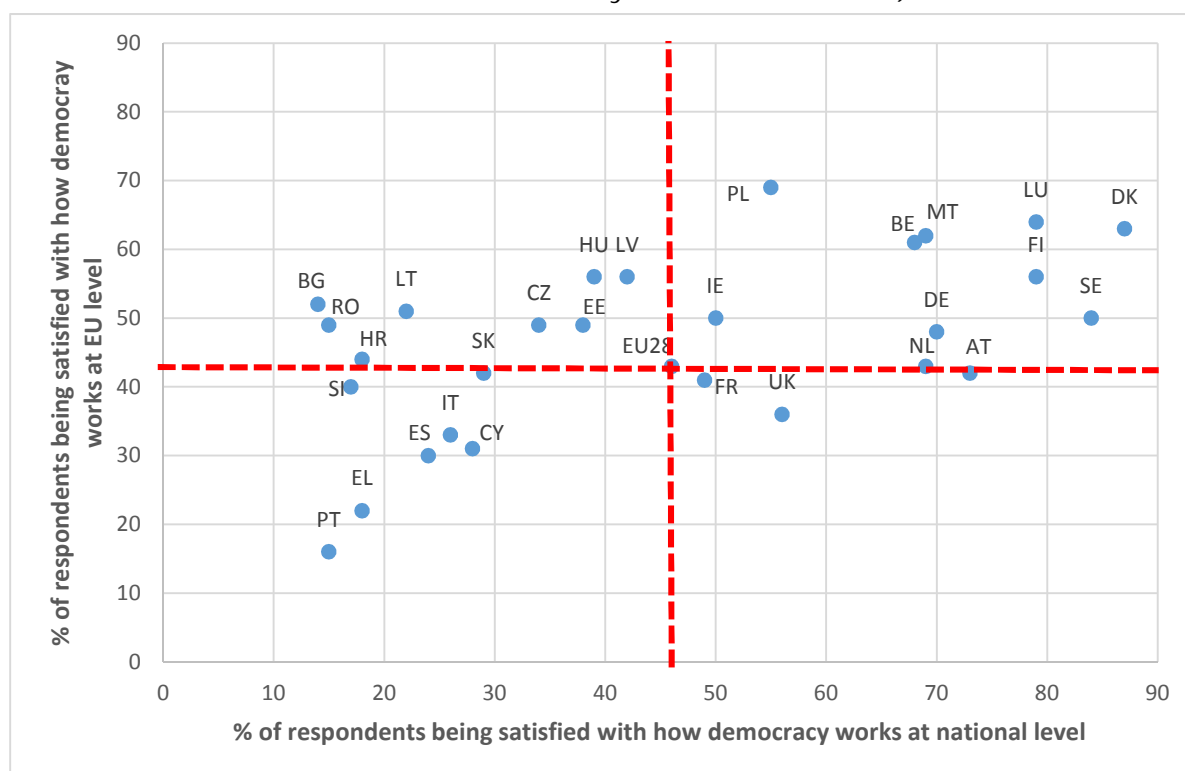
²⁵ The concept of the 'cost of non-Europe' dates from the 1980s, when the Albert-Ball (1983) and Cecchini (1988) reports – which respectively identified and sought to quantify the significant potential economic benefits of the completion of a single market in Europe – first brought the idea into mainstream political use (source: Albert M., Ball R.J. (1983), *Towards European Economic Recovery in the 1980s*, European Parliament Working Documents 1983-1984, Report presented to the European Parliament, Brussels, European Parliament; Cecchini P., Catinat M., Jacquemin A. (1988), *The Benefits of a Single Market*, Wildwood House). Examples of recent reports are: EPRS (2014), *Mapping the Cost of Non-Europe 2014-19*, Brussels, EPRS; London Economics, PWC (2014), *Study on the cost of non-Europe: the untapped potential of*

debate through the positions of leading political organisations, individuals and institutional bureaucracies. However, such positions form only the tip of the proverbial iceberg with regard to the EU's activities.

2.2.2. Input legitimacy: democratic support

When EU citizens are asked whether they are satisfied with the functioning of democracy in the EU, or in other words input legitimacy, a large number of citizens express their dissatisfaction with the functioning of democracy within the EU, although this also applies to the national level (see figure 3)²⁶.

Figure 3: Level of satisfaction of EU citizens with how democracy works at EU and national level (X axis is total % of respondents satisfied with how democracy works at national level, Y axis is % of respondents satisfied with how democracy works at EU level)



Source: Eurobarometer 80 (autumn 2013)

Figure 3 shows that four out of ten respondents are satisfied with how democracy works in the EU (43 %), while almost half of them (46 %) are dissatisfied on this matter. These findings differ strongly between countries and different social cohorts.

- In general, the MS that recently joined the EU and some southern MS (Greece, Spain, Italy and Portugal) are more satisfied with how democracy works in the EU compared to their own country, while citizens from other MS are more satisfied with their national

²⁶ the European Single Market. http://ec.europa.eu/bepa/pdf/publications_pdf/cone-report.pdf. Accessed September 1, 2014; and European Parliament (2010), The costs of non-Europe in the crisis, Brussels. Studies asserting the opposite are in the minority, although examples include two recent studies commissioned from UK institutes by the Dutch political party PVV on the benefits of withdrawing from the EU. Around 46 % of Europeans are dissatisfied with the way in which democracy works in the EU (while 43 % are satisfied), compared to 52 % who are dissatisfied with the way in which democracy works in their country (46 % being satisfied). Source: European Commission (2013), Standard Eurobarometer 80 Autumn 2013, Public opinion in the European Union, Brussels.

democracies than with democracy at EU level (especially DK, DE, NL, AT, FI, SE, and the UK). The new Eastern MS are generally more positive with regard to the EU, given their shared communist history, leading people to view Europe as a symbol of economic modernisation and democracy.

- There are also significant social divisions in opinions of how European democracy works. Those with higher education are generally more positive towards the EU²⁷. Age and socio-economic situation also impact citizens' perceptions of the EU. Respondents aged 15-24, students, and people with higher socio-economic status are predominantly satisfied with how democracy works. Dissatisfaction is predominant among those aged 55 or over, people with a lower level of education, the unemployed, manual workers, and those with a lower socio-economic status.

The relatively low level of satisfaction regarding how democracy in the EU works is also reflected in the relatively low turnouts for European Parliament (EP) elections: turnout rates steadily decreased since the first direct elections in 1979, until the period 2009-2014 showed a stabilisation²⁸. The media also tend to be more critical with regard to the EU when their news items relate to decision-making processes within specific EU institutions²⁹. A majority of citizens also consider that their voice does not count in the EU³⁰ and that the EU does not take the interests of the MS sufficiently into account³¹. Some scholars therefore argue that citizens will no longer go along with the rhetoric of an 'unavoidable Europe' in which there is nothing to choose from, nor will they stand idly by for the 'good cause' (peace, safety and stability)³².

The literature defines several causes for this dissatisfaction with the democratic functioning of the EU. A first important cause relates to problems surrounding the possibility of directly influencing the policy process. The fact that the public is very heterogeneous and fragmented, while at the same time a considerable divide exists between citizens and EU politics, poses a challenge for the tools of direct democracy (such as holding referendums), as well as for those of indirect democracy (such as strengthening the role of national parliaments). It is clear, however, that citizens want to have a say in this decision-making process. There is some evidence that in countries where referendums have been held citizens are better informed with regard to EU decision-making structures³³. Aside from the discussion on whether or not there is an actual lack of democracy in the EU, the fact remains that some MS held a referendum on the Treaty of Lisbon while others did not. This is an indication that European citizens do not always have the same means to participate in European decision-making.

A second cause concerns the fact that the EU was and still is considered by some to be a product of the political elite and that this elite does not always explain its motivations,

²⁷ Eurobarometer 80, autumn 2013

²⁸ http://www.nsd.uib.no/european_election_database

²⁹ Hurrelmann A. (2008), Constructions of Multilevel Legitimacy in the European Union: A Study of German and British Media Discourse, *Comparative European Politics*, 2008, 6(2), 190-211.

³⁰ Half of Europeans (50 %, +3 percentage points since autumn 2012) now have the impression that their voice does not count in their country, while 47 % (-3) take the opposite view (autumn 2013).

³¹ Around 40 % of Europeans have the impression that the interests of their country are well taken into account in the EU, while 53 % have the opposite view. Source: European Commission (2013), Standard Eurobarometer 80 Autumn 2013, Public opinion in the European Union, Brussels.

³² Trouw (2007), Haagse stilte over Europa doet ergste vrezen, Trouw. <http://www.trouw.nl/tr/nl/4324/Nieuws/article/detail/1321684/2007/07/16/Haagse-stilte-over-Europa-doet-het-ergste-vrezen.dhtml>. Accessed September 1, 2014.

³³ Van Schie P. (2010), Citizens and the Casting Vote. The Referendum's Place within Liberal Ideology, In: de Beaufort F., van Schie P., eds., *Democracy in Europe of the People, by the People, for the People?*, 49-67, European Liberal Forum, The Hague.

purposes and deeds in a proper way³⁴. Although this was not considered to be a major issue between the post-war period and the 1980s, the more evident and irreversible the substantive impact of European policy-making became, the more this issue came to the foreground as a political issue³⁵. An often-heard criticism is that politicians neglect people's everyday interests, problems and fears. The difficulty here is that the EU started as a project that did not originate from a strongly advocated desire of European citizens; it was initiated by a relatively small group of politicians and enthusiastic citizens and was then shaped almost exclusively from the top³⁶. From the original cooperation on coal and steel, the policy domains under the influence of European decision-makers expanded over time. This created the feeling amongst EU citizens that the decisions taken by a political elite were disconnected from their wishes and needs, and that they emerged without them being involved in the process (at times not knowing that decisions were taken partly by the representatives of their Member States and that they are represented by MEPs). These feelings were encouraged by the speed with which enlargement and integration were implemented, without any public discussion on how far exactly the integration process should go. As a result, there has been a serious loss of confidence and trust in the work and performance of the European institutions, though it must be acknowledged that these processes are taking place on the national level as well. The negative outcome of the two referenda in France and the Netherlands was interpreted as a criticism of the speed of integration and transfer of responsibilities from MS to the EU. The recent austerity measures taken (driven by the northern and western MS) are also examples of developments that have created the perception in some MS that they are being forced into certain situations irrespective of their wishes³⁷.

A third important factor explaining dissatisfaction are the complex multi-level governance structures of the EU³⁸, which might be difficult to grasp at first and make the EU seem conceptually remote in the minds of most people³⁹. Citizens tend to find it unclear as to who represents the European Parliament or the Commission, and most Europeans do not know exactly who is responsible and accountable for the various rules that affect their lives⁴⁰. As a result, the overwhelming majority of EU citizens perceive the EU as a single entity, often pejoratively termed 'Brussels', without distinguishing between the individual institutions. Not having a defined institutional identity also makes it difficult to promote a specific image and consolidate a strong reputation. Some scholars define the EU as an 'unfinished project', an 'evolving entity' or 'network of networks' characterised by multiple tiers of sovereignty and governance⁴¹. This partly echoes the ideas of Jean Monnet, who said that the European project is never finished and that each generation would have to make its own contribution to European integration.

³⁴ Joint taskforce of Századvég Foundation, Austrian Institute for European Security Policy, Constantinos Karamanlis Institute for Democracy, Free Europe Centre, and SPK-Europe (2005), *Values & Identity. A Reflection for an Indispensable Discussion*. <http://www.europeanideasnetwork.com/files/Think%20Tank%20task%20force%20paper%20on%20European%20values.pdf>. Accessed September 1, 2014.

³⁵ Koopmans R., Statham P., (eds.) (2010), *The making of a European public sphere: media discourse and political contention*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

³⁶ De Beaufort F., van Schie P. (2010), *Democracy in Europe of the People, by the People, for the People?*, European Liberal Forum, The Hague.

³⁷ Fligstein N., Polyakova A., Sandholtz W. (2011), *European Integration, Nationalism, and European Identity*, Working Paper Series, Institute for Research on Labor and Employment, UC Berkeley, California.

³⁸ http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/index_en.htm

³⁹ Bal ytien A., Vinci nien A. (2008), *Political Communication Culture with a European Touch: A View from Brussels*, *Sociologija: Mintis ir veiksmas*, 3(1), 71-85.

⁴⁰ Thiel M. (2008), *European public spheres and the EU's communication strategy: From deficits to policy fit?*, *Perspectives on European Politics and Society*, 9(3), 342-356.

⁴¹ Leonard M. (1999), *Network Europe: The New Case of Europe*, London, Foreign Policy Centre.

A fourth factor relates to the fact that the conditions under which citizens can form a well-informed and well-considered opinion are not optimal in the EU. This is where the communication aspect becomes relevant. Statham (2010) refers to two analytical dimensions that are central to creating a public sphere, namely public visibility (created primarily by the media) and the inclusiveness of European policy-making (at stake here are the channels of access between policy and citizens existing to represent and include the popular will)⁴². Building on these two dimensions, the following aspects play a major role. First of all, those who occupy themselves with European political matters form a minority of the population and tend to be the usual suspects, such as politicians, those who are involved with the EU professionally, and citizens with an above-average interest in the EU. Secondly, it has been pointed out that the EU does not have an adequate infrastructure for discussion or for facilitating a public sphere, since these are processes which tend to take place within national borders⁴³. A third aspect, partly related to the previous point, is that access to information is unequal across MS because there are hardly any cross-border media channels in the EU – with the exception of the internet and social media – and as a result information provision is demarcated along national and linguistic borders in particular (as further described in Chapter 4). A fourth aspect relates to the fact that national politicians and government services do not always explain their own role in EU decision-making, which could be a way to bolster citizens' confidence in the EU (see Chapter 5). Finally, it has been argued that there is a lack of public debate on the EU in MS and that there is nothing to choose from with regard to either EU policy or representative political parties, while conflicting opinions between politicians are missing. Moreover, the debate is often not linked to the actual issues with which citizens deal in daily life and which are considered relevant at the local level.

The fifth cause for dissatisfaction with the democratic functioning of the EU is the critical view of political attempts to ensure the proper functioning of EU institutions and to guarantee an efficient decision-making procedure to make the EU act in the interests of all 28 MS⁴⁴. This means that the EU has to maintain and improve its problem-solving capacity, since EU decision-making has often been criticised as slow, complex and producing too many 'lowest common denominator' solutions⁴⁵. Currently, European political leaders consider a 'federal leap' unavoidable for rescuing the monetary union⁴⁶ and are developing new steps towards European integration and centralisation. This contrasts the wishes of groups of citizens in favour of more democratic control, and this development could therefore lead to the creation of further distance between citizens and the EU's political processes. This could potentially further undermine public support for many decisions and encourage demands for more nationalism and national autonomy.

⁴² Statham P. (2010), *Making Europe News. Journalism and Media Performance*. In: R. Koopmans and P. Statham, eds., *The Making of a European Public Sphere: Media Discourse and Political Contention*, 125-151, Cambridge, CUP.

⁴³ Habermas defines the public sphere as a 'society engaged in critical public debate'. He argues that the conditions of the public sphere are: the formation of public opinion, universal access, unrestricted debate (based on freedom of assembly, freedom of association, freedom of expression and the free publication of opinion) on matters of general interest (implying freedom from economic and political control), and debate on the general rules governing relations. Habermas J. (1989), *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, Thomas Burger, Cambridge, Massachusetts, MIT Press.

⁴⁴ See: Joint taskforce of Századvég Foundation, Austrian Institute for European Security Policy, Constantinos Karamanlis Institute for Democracy, Free Europe Centre, and SPK-Europe (2005), *Values & Identity. A Reflection for an Indispensable Discussion*. <http://www.europeanideasnetwork.com/files/Think%20Tank%20task%20force%20paper%20on%20European%20values.pdf>. Accessed September 1, 2014.

⁴⁵ Centre of European Policy Studies (2009), *Achievement, challenges and proposals for reform*, Brussels, CEPS.

⁴⁶ Cuperus R. (2013). *Column on back to the European Community!*, Social Europe Journal. <http://www.social-europe.eu/2013/09/back-to-the-european-community>, accessed September 1, 2014.

The experts consulted in the course of this study noted that these negative evaluations of the functioning of European democracy are not always equivalent to Euroscepticism. In many cases, better-performing EU institutions or a better form of integration are demanded, which is a form of critical-constructive Europeanism. They argue that increasing criticism and contestation is a sign of political maturity that results from an increased visibility of the EU⁴⁷. Moreover, it is important to state that this dissatisfaction is also part of a general trend across public institutions taking place at the national level as well. In a large group of countries, citizens even have more trust in the European institutions than in their national counterparts.

2.3. Public opinion towards the 'cultural component' of Europe

Public opinion can be partly explained by the role of EU institutions and policy outputs. However, as indicated, there is also a cultural component to Europe. This refers to perceptions of belonging to a European 'human' community (beliefs in shared European values or heritage, of having a common history or ideals, or relative closeness to fellow Europeans vis-à-vis non-Europeans). This section discusses to what extent these perceptions of belonging are emerging across Europe.

2.3.1. Cross-border interaction and 'European sense of belonging'

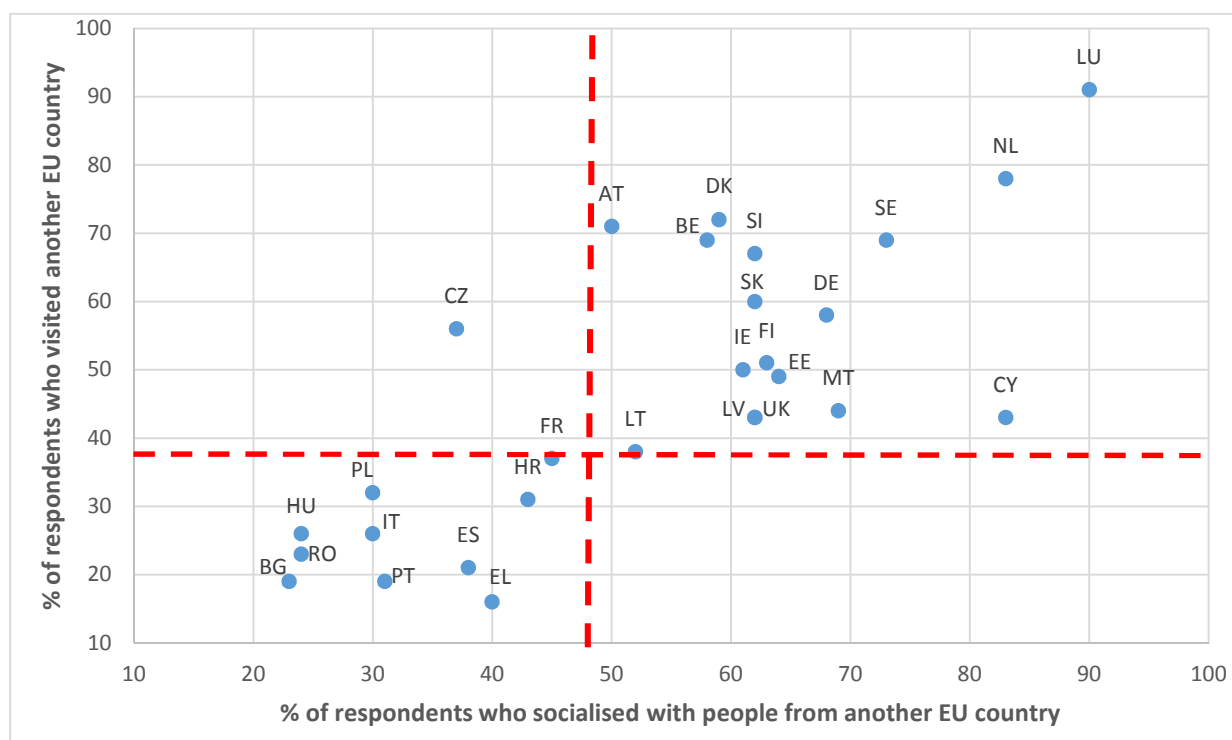
Europe is a unity made up of many cultures, and a sense of belonging can be largely facilitated if Europeans know their neighbours. This claim is supported by research showing that those who participate in 'Europe' (engage in social action) are more likely to develop a European identity, while those whose economic and social horizons are essentially local are more likely to assert national(ist) identities⁴⁸.

In order to assess how EU citizens interact with their EU 'neighbours', Eurobarometer includes some proxies, namely the percentage of respondents who socialised with people from another country and the percentage of people who visited another EU country.

⁴⁷ Koopmans R., Statham P., (eds.) (2010), *The making of a European public sphere: media discourse and political contention*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

⁴⁸ Risse T. (2010), *A Community of Europeans? Transnational Identities and Public Spheres*, Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press.

Figure 4: Social interaction of EU citizens (X axis is total % of respondents who socialised with people from another EU country, Y axis is % of respondents who visited another EU country)⁴⁹



Source: Eurobarometer 80 (autumn 2013)

Figure 4 clearly shows that MS differ in the extent to which citizens socially interact with citizens from other MS and travel abroad. These figures clearly show that a higher percentage of citizens from most of the North Western and Central European countries interact socially across borders, compared to most of the newer MS and Southern countries (like Spain, Italy, Greece). Fligstein et al. provide some interesting insights in the group that has the opportunity and the interest to interact with their counterparts across Europe⁵⁰. They suggest that this group come mainly from the highest socio-economic groups in society, including:

- The owners of businesses, managers, professionals and other white-collar workers. These are people who are involved in various aspects of business and government, travel frequently within Europe and may in some cases live in other European countries for a period of time. They engage in long-term social relationships with their counterparts from other countries who either work for their firm, or are their suppliers, customers, or, in the case of people who work for governments, their colleagues in other governments. These people often speak second or third languages for work.
- Young people who travel across borders for educational reasons, tourism and jobs (often for a few years after college).

It is concluded that if these are the people who are most likely to interact in European-wide economic, social and political arenas, then their opposites, including those who have lower

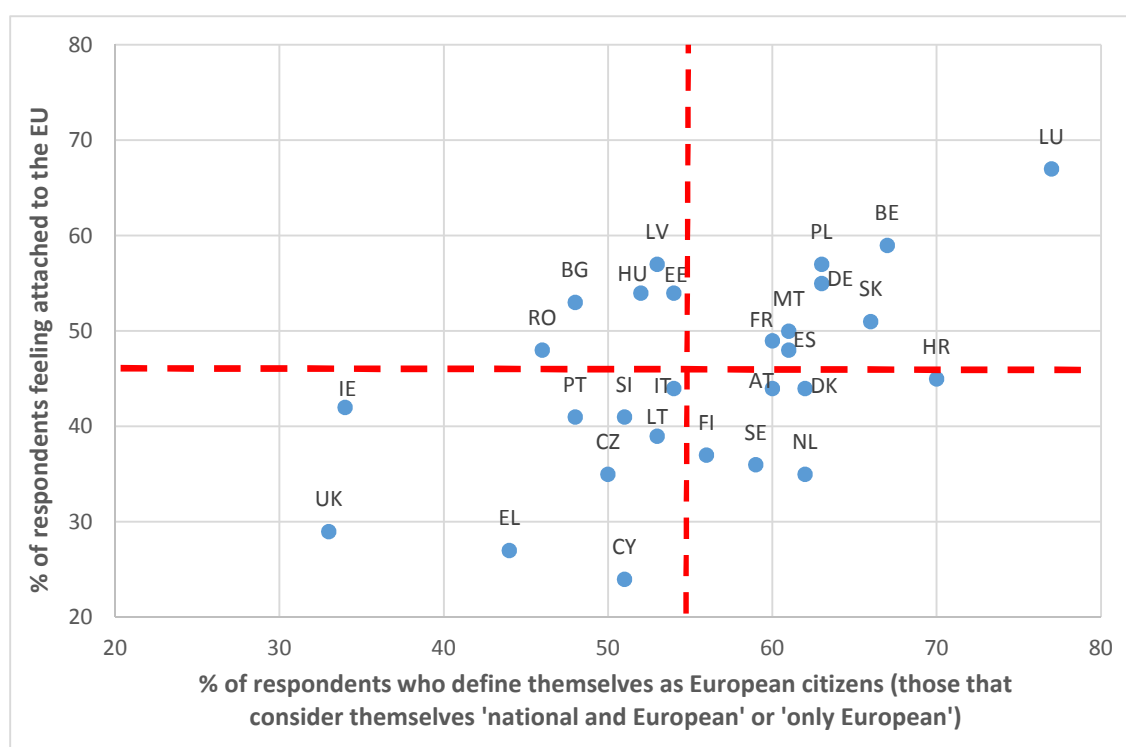
⁴⁹ European Commission (2013a), Standard Eurobarometer 80, Autumn 2013. European Citizenship Report, Brussels.

⁵⁰ Fligstein N. (2008), *Euroclash: The EU, European Identity, and the Future of Europe*. Oxford, Oxford University Press; Risse T. (2005), *European Institutions and identity change: What have we learned?*, In: Hermann R. Brewer, T. and Risse, T., eds., *Transnational Identities: Becoming European in the EU*, Lanham, Maryland, Rowman and Littlefield.

levels of education or who come from more deprived social or economic backgrounds, most likely lack either the opportunity or the interest to interact with their counterparts across Europe⁵¹.

Social interaction might contribute to higher percentages of feelings of attachment and being a European citizen. Figure 5 provides an overview of relevant Eurobarometer data on this matter. It indicates that citizens have different feelings of attachment to the EU and Europe, with 46 % of Europeans feeling 'attached' to the European Union, versus 52 % feeling 'not attached'. The proportion of Europeans feeling 'very much attached' to the EU (9 %) is even lower than the proportion feeling 'not at all attached' (16 %). Regarding the sense of European citizenship compared with national citizenship, a majority of Europeans continue to define themselves as European citizens (54 %), compared with 42 % who define themselves solely by their nationality. Most respondents who see themselves as European citizens define themselves first by their nationality and then as Europeans (47 %), 5 % of respondents see themselves as Europeans and citizens of their country, and only 2 % see themselves as 'Europeans only'. This outcome provides an argument that the feeling of being a European citizen goes hand in hand with the feeling of being a national citizen. European integration has established a new context that people can identify with and, therefore, opens up the possibility of multiple identities. European identity therefore complements but does not displace national and regional identities.

Figure 5: Citizens' feelings of attachment to the EU and being a European citizen (X axis is total % of respondents who define themselves as European citizens, Y axis is % of respondents feeling attached to the EU)⁵²



Source: Eurobarometer 80 (autumn 2013)

⁵¹ Fligstein N. (2008), *Euroclash: The EU, European Identity, and the Future of Europe*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

⁵² European Commission (2013a), *Standard Eurobarometer 80, Autumn 2013. European Citizenship Report*, Brussels.

A closer look at the countries in figure 5 shows large differences in how attached citizens are to the EU and the degree to which they consider themselves to be European citizens. A distinction can be made between countries that score above average on both indicators (LU, BE, PL, DE, SK, MT, FR, ES), those that score below average on both indicators (UK, EL, CY, CZ, LT, SI, PT, IT and IE), and those that score above average on one of the two indicators (the other countries).

These variations in attachment between MS often depend on cultural and historical factors, which lay the foundations for a set of shared norms and values within a country. Europe is characterised as a bundle of countries with very different cultural and historical backgrounds. In particular, the 2004 enlargement, bringing in Eastern European countries with a very different cultural-historical background from the older MS has had an impact on European culture and (presumably) on European identity as well⁵³. Depending on these factors, citizens have different feelings of belonging and form different expectations of how life should be. Instances of where the national, cultural and historical identity of a country has a stronger, more visible impact on citizen perception of the EU can be seen, for example, in Spain and the United Kingdom. The imperial history of the UK, coupled with other factors such as its cultural distance from mainland Europe and its historical relationship with the USA (culturally and economically), results in low feelings of attachment to the EU or being a European citizen. In Spain, on the other hand, national identity has been coloured more recently by the period of Franco's fascist dictatorship. This authoritarian history also means that Spanish people have come to look on Europe as a symbol of economic modernisation and democracy according to which Spain could rebuild itself. As such, Spanish identity is also felt to be inextricably linked to Europe. Spain, therefore, has a classically pro-European stance with no policy debates on the value of EU membership, but instead on how best to move forward within Europe. The financial crisis and consequent austerity measures which Spain has been forced to implement have caused a break in the classically high levels of support for Europe within the country. In countries such as the Netherlands and Sweden, national cultural and historical identities are more nuanced towards Europe. Both nations have a history as imperial powers with territories in Europe, during the 15th and 16th centuries for Sweden and during the 17th century for the Netherlands. Since the fall of their empires, both nations have maintained strong trade relations encompassing Europe.

Feelings of attachment also greatly differ between social groups. The experts consulted in this study suggest that a broad spectrum of different social, educational and cultural segments within each MS have considerable bearing on the views and attitudes of citizens concerning Europe and their roles as European citizens. These differences are unique within each country.

2.3.2. European values and symbols

The cultural component of Europe is also driven by collective symbols, values and images of Europe which can differ strongly across countries and regions, or even between individuals. Although the concept of European values is addressed in the different treaties⁵⁴, there is no consensus as to what those values actually are⁵⁵.

⁵³ Bader V. (2007), Building European institutions: beyond strong ties and weak commitments, In: Benhabib S., Shapiro I., Petranovic D., eds., *Identities, Affiliations and Allegiances*, 113-135, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

⁵⁴ European values are addressed in the different European treaties, where it is stated that the EU is based on a community of values, including respect for human dignity, rights including the rights of communities and families, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law. Moreover, the EU constitutes a European civil society with a common culture, history, rules (verbal and non-verbal, communicated and non-communicated), laws and communities of interests, moral attitudes and values and institutions – the unreflected structural preconditions of a sustainable politically-based solidarity. Furthermore, the EU is a community with relationships between the Union, MS and European citizens, with rights and obligations and respect for the principle of subsidiarity. In addition, it is based on diversity and solidarity between MS as one of its building blocks. However, it is also stated that these principles are something that must be discussed by European people and institutions. As a result, European identity and values are not a static and final

Looking more closely at the values citizens attribute to the EU, the empirical literature shows that people who identify themselves as being European are in favour of peace, tolerance, democracy and cultural diversity⁵⁶. The researcher Michael Bruter found that citizens expressed an image of Europe emanating peacefulness, prosperity, cooperation and harmony and characterised by educational and cultural initiatives⁵⁷. These outcomes are more or less reflected in the Eurobarometer surveys of the values Europeans associate with the EU. The foremost value which Europeans associate with the EU is still peace (mentioned by 37 %); it is followed by human rights (34 %), democracy (30 %), the rule of law (18 %), individual freedom (18 %), respect for human life (16 %), respect for other cultures (16 %), solidarity (14 %), equality (11 %) and tolerance (10 %). Behind the above come self-fulfilment and religion, and around 6 % of respondents do not associate any of the values mentioned with the EU.⁵⁸

Next to values, symbols play an important role determining the cultural component of Europe. In the context of European integration, it is clear that the institutions at the centre have made strong efforts to try to provide the European political community with a set of proper symbols (more or less imitating traditional states). These include a flag, an anthem, a Europe day, a deliberately 'European-only' design for the euro banknotes, and so forth. The implicit rationale of these efforts of the European institutions is to provide the European Union with a comprehensive set of symbols to reinforce citizens' sense of belonging to their new political community. The visibility of EU symbols has increased over the years (including flags, driving licences, passports, coins, the anthem and more), and as a result awareness of symbols has grown as well. Nevertheless, there is no indication whether this has resulted in citizens being more in favour of the EU. The 2012 Eurobarometer included a number of questions on the perceptions of European citizens regarding the European flag. These statistics show that awareness of the European flag has grown over time. When asked for their views on the flag, the vast majority of Europeans consider that it is a good symbol for Europe (83 %) and that it 'stands for something good' (73 %). Respondents from the new MS are slightly more likely to say that the European flag stands for something good than those from older MS.

2.3.3. Creating emotional attachment

In political science literature, identification with a political system is often regarded as a necessary precondition for its stability and legitimacy⁵⁹. Identification reflects the emotional attachment that a citizen develops and possesses towards a political system. This emotional attachment, which is closely related to the cultural component of European identity, is the outcome of a process of trust, a socialisation process in which norms and values are communicated. Distinct from this emotional attachment is a form of utilitarian

situation, but a task, a dynamic, open process in which members of European society agree on common perceptions of themselves and others. Source: Treaty on European Union (TEU; Maastricht Treaty, effective since 1993); Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU; Treaty of Rome, effective since 1958); Joint taskforce of Századvég Foundation, Austrian Institute for European Security Policy, Constantinos Karamanlis Institute for Democracy, Free Europe Centre, and SPK-EuropeEuropean (2005), *Values & Identity. A Reflection for an Indispensable Discussion*. <http://www.europeanideasnetwork.com/files/Think%20Tank%20task%20force%20paper%20on%20European%20values.pdf>. Accessed September 1, 2014.

⁵⁵ The German presidency which took office on 1 January 2007 stressed the importance of a common European base of values to further deepen and widen the EU. Chancellor Angela Merkel actively contributed to the debate on a European community of values. The Berlin Declaration, drafted by the German presidency and published on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome on 25 March 2007, is in particular meant to symbolise the principles on which the EU is built and strengthen citizens' empathy for the Union.

⁵⁶ Risse T. (2010), *A Community of Europeans? Transnational Identities and Public Spheres*, Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press.

⁵⁷ Bruter M. (2004), On What Citizens Mean by Feeling 'European': Perceptions of News, Symbols and Borderless-ness, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 30(1), 21-39.

⁵⁸ It might be important to mention, however, that the recorded values are preselected by the survey, which reflects a biased set of values that the respondents can choose from.

⁵⁹ Lutz W., Kritzinger S., Skirbekk V., (2006), The Demography of Growing European Identity, *Science*, 314(5798), 425-425.

support that is closely related to the civic component of European identity, which focuses more on short-term outputs and benefits obtained from the political system. Concrete examples are the receipt of European funding or EU intervention creating the conditions for security or individual rights⁶⁰. This support often lasts as long as a clear benefit is perceived.

Research shows that emotional attachment due to socialisation processes is a far stronger force than utilitarian support in helping to 'uphold' European integration⁶¹. This opens up the question as to how to create this emotional attachment, going beyond the utilitarian forms of support. Despite the policies established by the EU with the aim of strengthening ties with its citizens through what may be called the construction of European identity (see chapter 3), there is little evidence to either confirm or deny whether these policies effectively construct European identities. In general, only limited research has been done on discourse and how citizens make 'Europe' part of their social reality⁶².

2.4. Concluding assessment of the context of communicating Europe

This chapter sets the scene for describing the context of cooperation and integration at EU level and how this connects with how citizens perceive Europe and the EU institutions, as well as what they expect from them. On the evidence set out in this chapter, various strengths, weaknesses and challenges can be identified, providing input for further reflection on the explanations for decreasing levels of public support and on what communication officers should take into consideration when developing their communication policies.

- The European project has been an ongoing process since the end of the Second World War. The EU has established among its goals those relating to ensuring security, the common market, the euro, and increasing 'Europeanisation' in different policy domains. The EU is currently at a crossroads, debating further integration and/or enlargement, how to deal with global challenges, how to increase its democratic legitimacy and how to guarantee efficient decision-making within the EU. Communicating a system in flux is difficult, so there should be a clear idea of where the EU is heading. Respondents indicate that Europe currently lacks a convincing vision for the future on how to deal with global challenges.
- European cooperation can be characterised as having strong output legitimacy, on the principle of the added value of cooperation; regarding input legitimacy, however, the manner in which European decision-making occurs is more liable to criticism. However, the emergence of the economic and financial crisis has put this output legitimacy under pressure, making it more difficult to explain the benefits of the EU. This involves a number of challenges relating to improvement of the systems of checks and balances in the EU: such improvement would give people a stronger sense/feeling of influence and transparency with regard to the EU. Neglecting outcomes of democratic processes could influence processes rejecting further EU integration. Continued efforts should also be directed at explaining the impact of EU policies affecting individual citizens and how EU decision-making works, since research shows that citizens are not always aware of

⁶⁰ Other scholars refer to the difference between rationalist and constructivist approaches.

⁶¹ Reeskens T., Hooghe E. (2010), Beyond the civic–ethnic dichotomy: investigating the structure of citizenship concepts across thirty-three countries, *Nations and Nationalism*, 16(4), 579–597.

⁶² The recent developments in Ukraine shed interesting light on the notion of emotional attachment. The philosopher Volodimir Jermolenko suggests that there are two kinds of Europe: there is the Europe that presents a more or less emotionless face of rules and regulations, while the other Europe is spontaneous and emotional, the Europe of faith: 'for us Europe is emotion, it is an ideal we believe in, a goddess we would like to connect to and not a set of rules'. Source: <http://www.trouw.nl/tr/nl/12484/Stevo-Akkerman/article/detail/3605775/2014/03/01/Godin-Europa-staat-in-Oekraïne-tegenover-diepe-Sovjet-angsten.dhtml>

the outcomes of European policies or of how these affect their own social, economic and cultural life.

- There seems to be a discrepancy between what different social groups think with regard to Europe, influenced by a broad spectrum of different social, educational and cultural segments that exist within each MS. This spectrum of horizontal differences is unique within each country and should therefore be carefully considered in communication policies. The anti-European sentiments within some groups cannot be pushed aside by the usual kinds of communication measures (brochures, internet presentations, speeches etc.). Existing insights into the functioning of social and public communication suggest that the chances of containment of such sentiments should first be explored before entering into the planning of communication strategies.
- Countries differ in the attitude of public opinion to the EU, depending on their historical, socio-economic, media and political context. Depending on these factors, citizens have different feelings of belonging and delegate power to different political units to make decisions and also form different expectations of how life should be. This understandably leads to different expectations of a political or governing body such as the EU. When these expectations are not met, the perception of the EU changes. Communication policies should deal with these differences accordingly.
- Although European values are addressed in the different European Treaties, there is no consensus on what constitutes European identity. This makes it difficult to communicate European values. These European values are also not communicated to the broader public in a consistent way and do not play a central role in communication policies.
- Academic literature indicates that creating emotional attachment based on socialisation processes is a far stronger, albeit long-term force, helping to 'uphold' European integration as opposed to basing it on utilitarian forms of support. Activities involving citizens travelling, connecting or working across borders are more effective for changing behaviour and attitudes than other types of action which focus on short-term outputs or on the benefits obtained from the political system. This should be taken into account when developing further 'action-based' communication policies.

All the contextual issues described above have implications as to how Europe should be communicated to its citizens by the EU, MS, the media, politicians and interest groups. This will be explored further in the next chapters.

3. ROLE OF EU INSTITUTIONS IN COMMUNICATING EUROPE

KEY FINDINGS

- The relevance of strategic communication documents at EU level, addressing the importance of starting up a dialogue, going local, empowering citizens, developing a European public sphere, and communicating in partnership, is still very much alive. Nevertheless, EU communication strategy can be quite ambiguous and introduces too many unspecified suggestions.
- The EU has a wide range and sophisticated type of communication services and instruments in place for communicating Europe, allocating a substantial budget to its communication activities. In general, these efforts could be categorised into actions contributing to better informing and engaging citizens.
- Monitoring data and evaluations of communication policies show positive assessments, but provide limited information regarding whether citizens are ultimately better informed and engaged. These evaluations state that most services reach the usual suspects but not the general public, let alone those who are not interested in the EU or have a negative opinion about it. This raises some important questions about the cost-effectiveness of these services and instruments for communicating Europe.
- The study identifies some important challenges for communicating the EU, regarding the content, tone and channels of communication. Nevertheless most of these challenges were already identified by scholars and evaluators in the early seventies: no fundamental changes in communication policies resulted, and this is therefore now an even more important challenge to work on.
- The study indicates that ‘action-based’ communication strategies such as the Citizenship Programme and the Erasmus+ programme are considered more effective since they enable citizens to witness the added value of Europe.
- Management partnerships with Member States are generally positively evaluated. MS deploy additional, often formal communication activities, above what has been done by the Commission representations and European Parliament information offices.

3.1. Introduction

Like all public organisations, the EU institutions communicate their activities and their image⁶³. This communication may be either internal or external to the organisation and is aimed at providing information, raising awareness, and influencing the attitudes of their public or even its behaviour vis-à-vis specific issues and policies⁶⁴. In this vein, as indicated in Chapter 1, a clear distinction should be made between the two types of communication efforts described below:

- 1) To inform and promote the work of the EU institutions and the related policy outputs and European values with a wider public. Traditionally, EU institutions play a role in informing citizens, enterprises, and civil society on their policies and policy outputs and on how democracy works at Union level. To do so, they have specially designated services and communication instruments. Promoting the EU, however, is something that is traditionally done by political actors, such as national and

⁶³ Communication policy is not governed by specific provisions in the Treaties, but stems naturally from the EU's obligation to explain its functioning and policies, as well as ‘European integration’ more generally, to the public. The need for effective communication has a legal basis in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, which guarantees the right of all citizens to be informed about European issues. Source: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/aboutparliament/en/displayFtu.html?ftuid=FTU_5.13.8.html#_ftn12

⁶⁴ Valentini C., Nesti G. (2010), Public communication in the European Union. History, perspectives and challenges, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK, Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

European politicians who are accountable to their voters and who promote their ideas on European integration (as further described in Chapter 5). Nevertheless, the boundaries between informing and promoting are sometimes difficult to demarcate, since the materials produced by EU institutions can sometimes be considered traditional promotional materials, 'selling' the achievements and specific results of the EU. Some critics even argue that this is close to propaganda⁶⁵.

- 2) To engage citizens in constructing an ever-closer Europe, thus further developing a sense of European citizenship. Citizens (individually or collectively) engage with Europe in different ways, working, living and travelling across borders and interacting with other cultures and individuals. The EU finances a number of programmes and initiatives stimulating European citizenship, such as 'Your Voice Europe' (launched in 2001), the Citizens' Initiative, and the Citizenship Programme 2007-2013 'Europe for Citizens', under the guidance of the Commission's Directorate-General for Communication (DG COMM). Other relevant programmes to mention are the Culture and Media programme (now merged in Creative Europe) and the Lifelong Learning Programme (now Erasmus+), both managed by the Directorate-General for Education and Culture (DG EAC). The first contributes to the protection and promotion of cultural diversity and the cultural heritage in Europe and to the development and distribution of films and festivals, while the second contributes to European citizenship by financing mobility of students and teaching staff across Europe.

This chapter first explores the evolving policy context of communicating Europe (in Section 3.2), and then further describes the role of EU institutions and communication services in informing and promoting Europe, including the role of EC's DG COMM in coordinating communication policies across EU institutions (Section 3.3). Subsequently, it discusses the role of EU programmes in stimulating processes of engaging citizens, including the provision of relevant information ahead of the EP elections (Section 3.4). Thereafter, the role of MS policies in communicating Europe is examined, including the role of schools (Section 3.5). The chapter ends with an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the EU institutions in communicating Europe (Section 3.6).

3.2. Evolving policy context: changing paradigms

This section explores how the communication policies of EU institutions, and predominantly those of the Commission as the main actor of EU communication, have evolved over time (before and after the year 2000).

3.2.1. Before 2000

On the basis of the work carried out by Stankova, it is possible to identify the different periods that preceded the communication policies put in place after 2000 which form the focus of this study, as follows⁶⁶:

- 1950-1970: in the early years of European cooperation, communication was mainly focused on the elite, such as the opinion leaders from the social and political worlds, who acted as multipliers of information. No specific media strategies were developed, with journalists preferably being kept at a distance.

⁶⁵ Open Europe (2008), *The hard sell: EU communication policy and the campaign for hearts and minds*, London, Open Europe.

⁶⁶ Stankova A. (2012), *The effectiveness of the European Commission's communication during the EU sovereign debt crisis*, Master thesis, Nice, European Institute. Terra A. (2010), *From information to communication policy: first steps towards reaching European citizens in the 1970 and 1980s*, In: Valentini C., Nesti G., eds., *Public Communication in the European Union. History, Perspectives and Challenges*, 49-66, Newcastle upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

- 1970-1980: the first information campaigns were launched, focusing on citizens from MS due to the increasing number of policy areas in which the EU was acquiring competences. Those policy areas which directly concerned citizens in the MS, as well as enlargement and the economic crisis, all impacted on citizens' expectations of the European Community. In 1973, the European Council adopted a Declaration on European Identity⁶⁷. The communication approach emphasised the dissemination of information, with the aim of informing audiences. Communication plans were also drawn up in the context of the first direct elections to the European Parliament in 1979, for which the EP decided that it should, together with the Commission, launch special information programmes in order to counter widespread public unawareness of and apathy towards the world's first supranational elections. These initial programmes aimed to: (1) increase public interest in voting, (2) provide the public with non-partisan information about the European Community, its institutions, accomplishments, policies and prospects, (3) portray the elections as a Community event rather than a series of isolated national events, and (4) emphasise the EP's role and the importance of the elections in its reinforcement.
- 1990s and post-Santer: Influenced by the ratification of the Treaty of Maastricht on the EU and the resignation of the Santer Commission following accusations of corruption, communication policies were reconsidered. Different reports were produced by MEPs from Parliament's Committee on Culture, Youth, Education and the Media. One, produced by Arie Oostlander in 1993, stressed the need to speak of communication rather than information, reflecting the need for the European Community to engage in discussions with mature, politically responsible citizens and their social organisations⁶⁸. A second proposal emanated from the same committee in the shape of the report by Willy De Clercq, prepared in cooperation with a group of marketing and advertising practitioners, which recommended 'selling' Europe⁶⁹. This report included a number of proposals for better promoting the advantages of the EU to different target groups, according to their particular interests and in a simple and attractive way. This last report received some critical feedback from journalists and officials as being too 'commercial' in its approach, but ultimately stimulated the debate on communicating Europe, once again addressing the importance of dialogue with citizens. The resignation of the Santer Commission also encouraged the subsequent Prodi Commission to undertake better internal planning and coordination, and to promote openness and transparency in relation to the press. Different documents were drawn up which indicated that people should be provided with more information, stressed the need to encourage transnational debate, and, again, emphasised the need for a dialogue with citizens. However, some scholars argue that this still referred to dialogue taking place subsequently to the decisions being made⁷⁰. These challenges were taken up later on by the Barroso Commission.

3.2.2. From 2000 onwards

In June 2001, the Commission adopted a communication for a new framework on activities concerning the information and communication policy of the EU. This called on the other EU institutions and MS governments to contribute to such an approach⁷¹. It was followed by the publication of an information and communication strategy for the EU in October of the

⁶⁷ European Communities (1973), Bulletin of the European Communities No 12. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities. 'Declaration on European Identity', 118-122.

⁶⁸ Oostlander A. (1993), Report of the Committee on Culture, Youth, Education and the Media on the information policy of the European Community, European Parliament. Session Documents, A3-0238/93, 14 July, European Parliament Document.

⁶⁹ De Clercq W. (1993), Reflection on information and communication policy of the European Community, Report by the Group of Experts chaired by Willy De Clercq, Member of the European Parliament, Brussels.

⁷⁰ Bruggemann M. (2010), Public relations between propaganda and the public sphere: the information policy of the European Commission, In: Valentini C., Nesti G., eds., Public Communication in the European Union. History, Perspectives and Challenges, 67-92, Newcastle upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

⁷¹ European Commission (2001), Communication on a new framework for cooperation on the information and communication policy of the European Union, Brussels.

same year⁷². These documents emphasised 'the need for a fresh approach' and 'genuine dialogue'. The referendums on the proposed European Constitution and the resultant 'no' votes in France and the Netherlands sparked off a period of reflection among EU policymakers⁷³. This period of reflection was initiated at the insistence of national governments and policymakers and was meant to also help discover what the true needs and expectations of citizens were with regard to the EU. It was felt that there was a need to improve dialogue and interaction with citizens, so that their views could reach national and European policymakers. Although such a communication strategy has been implicit in EU communication and information policy since the start of European integration, this was the first time that this policy became an institutional priority and a policy area in its own right. A number of key documents have played a role in further shaping the European communication strategy.

- An Action Plan was established in 2005 which overhauled the Commission's communication resources for the long term, with the principal objective of promoting effective communication to its citizens⁷⁴. This document recognised a number of lessons which had been learned on the matter of the EU's communication to its citizens. It thus drew attention to the fragmented nature of communication activities and the communicative focus on political priorities, as opposed to citizens' needs and expectations. Within the general aim of effective communication towards citizens, three strategic goals were seen as guiding the communication activities to be implemented. These goals were: better listening (this entails forming a dialogue with citizens), communicating (this involves communicating EU policies and activities and their impact on citizens' daily lives) and connecting with citizens.
- In 2005, the Action Plan was complemented by 'Plan-D' for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate⁷⁵, which sought to create and institutionalise interaction with citizens. This strategy focused on citizen debate and expectations, the need to target audiences, restoring public confidence in the EU, and involvement with citizens beyond merely listening. As a result, the main objectives were to assist in national debates, to stimulate wider public debate, to promote citizen involvement in the democratic process, and to generate a real dialogue on EU policies. The Action Plan and Plan-D were seen as two aspects of achieving the important objective of more effective communication.
- These two documents, along with the White Paper on a European communication policy in 2006⁷⁶, formed the three core policy documents relating to the new EU strategy on communication. The White Paper pointed to the need for a more local communication approach by collaborating with, among other bodies, institutions in the Member States, thus shifting the emphasis from Brussels-based initiatives to initiatives at the local level.

⁷² European Commission (2002), Communication on an Information and Communication Strategy, Brussels.

⁷³ Discussions had already taken place and plans had been made prior to the referendums, following Cecilia Wallström's appointment as Commissioner for communication policies in 2004.

⁷⁴ European Commission (2005), Communication to the Commission, Action plan to improve communicating Europe by the Commission, Brussels.

⁷⁵ European Commission (2005a), Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee, and the Committee of the Regions, The Commission's contribution to the period of reflection and beyond: Plan-D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate, Brussels

⁷⁶ European Commission (2006), White Paper on a European Communication Policy, Brussels.

- The 2007 document 'Communicating Europe in Partnership' is the most recent communication strategy presented by the EU⁷⁷. This document was built on the objectives captured in the previous strategic policies for an improved communication policy for the EU, with the overall objective of 'strengthening the coherence and synergies between the activities undertaken by the different EU institutions and by Member States'. This translated into four areas of focus, namely: a coherent and integrated manner of communication, empowering citizens, developing a European public sphere, and reinforcing partnership between the EU and MS. In practice, this document encompasses a broad range of sub-objectives and activities to be implemented. One of the main additions, however, is the inclusion of an official focus on MS collaboration in communication to citizens. No new strategic documents have been produced since 2007.

Taking all these documents into account, it can be concluded that there has been a clear move towards the construction of a discourse geared towards discussion with citizens on EU policy and the future direction of European integration (from monologue to dialogue). This development is in line with what scholars consider to be the most effective approach in communication/public relations. Scholars argue that establishing a true dialogue between senders and receivers is far more effective than merely sending information⁷⁸. This strategy also considers that organisations do not exist on their own and are largely dependent on their audiences. It also acknowledges the fact that people do not like being persuaded and prefer to be personally involved in the decision-making process and to feel they have a certain degree of ownership of the process.

3.2.3. Lack of systematic evaluation of communication strategies

The aforementioned policy documents and strategies have never been (externally) evaluated on a meta-level, with the exception of the citizens' consultation projects which were launched in the context of 'Plan-D / Debate Europe'. Nevertheless, some reflections on these strategies can be derived from the academic literature. The literature argues that seeking out dialogue is a necessity, but claims that the EU's communication strategy is still quite ambiguous, introducing too many unspecified suggestions and operating largely at the level of rhetoric. Although the 'Communicating Europe in Partnership' communication went further in making more concrete proposals regarding the role of EU institutions and MS governments, there is still a lack of clarity among the experts regarding what is understood by the concepts of going local, setting up a dialogue, and promoting engagement; consequently, it is not always clear what actions should follow or which public groups should be involved, and how⁷⁹. There are also concerns about the practical implementation of the strategy as well as whether the creation of a European public sphere is a realistic goal. Some of these points are also more concretely reflected in the aforementioned evaluation of 'Plan-D / Debate Europe', indicating that the field of EU issues was defined too vaguely and that the funded projects therefore failed to have any measurable influence within the European public sphere. Nevertheless, positive assessments were made regarding activities aimed at increasing the knowledge and interest of participants in EU- and Europe-related issues⁸⁰.

⁷⁷ European Commission (2007), Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - Communicating Europe in Partnership, COM(2007) 569 final, Official Journal. Brussels.

⁷⁸ Gruning J., Hunt T. (1984), Managing Public Relations. Fort Worth, Texas, Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

⁷⁹ Thiel M. (2008), European public spheres and the EU's communication strategy: From deficits to policy fit?, Perspectives on European Politics and Society, 9(3), 342-356.

⁸⁰ Ramboll, Matrix, Eureval (2009), Evaluation of the Plan D / Debate Europe citizen consultation projects, Brussels, Ramboll.

3.3. Role of the EU institutions in informing and promoting Europe to a broader public

The three main EU decision-making institutions, the EC, the EP and the Council of the European Union (hereinafter the Council), have their own communication apparatus, as well as sub-units at the political group and national levels. Each unit and sub-unit coordinates its external communications to the general public and to specific public groups, such as journalists and interest groups.

- The EC can be considered as the main actor on the European communication scene, through its function of driving the integration process, its (almost monopolistic) influence over legislative proposals, its role of overseeing the implementation of EU law and policies, its representation of the common and supranational interests, and its responsibility to inform and communicate⁸¹. DG COMM identifies three concrete objectives. The first objective is to make citizens more aware of EU policies by delivering policy messages through the media and opinion leaders, as well as EC representations thereof. Moreover, DG COMM aims to be informed about trends in public opinion, the media landscape and political developments in MS in order to provide feedback to Brussels. Furthermore, DG COMM aims to develop a sense of ownership amongst European citizens with regard to European integration and European identity and to enable civic participation in the EU context. These objectives reflect more or less the distinction made at the beginning of this chapter regarding informing/promoting the EU and engaging citizens in the European project.
- The EP attempts to convey information about itself, its activities and its relevance to people's everyday lives via a number of channels organised by its own press and information service (such as its website, press briefings, national and regional representations, visitor programmes, audiovisual activities, facilitation of EU broadcast media, and the PR and representational functions undertaken by MEPs and their political groups). MEPs, in particular, play a crucial role as primary communicators with their respective constituencies. Information campaigns have been a mainstay for elections since the first EP elections in 1979⁸². The EP Bureau has endorsed an Action Plan for the implementation of Parliament's updated communication strategy for 2011-2014, including 21 concrete actions focused on the core business of the Parliament's DG Communication. This includes provision of 'impartial, accurate information about the European Parliament's role and activities to a wide audience, reflecting the institution's political nature and increased powers, with the aim of bringing EU policies and politics closer to the citizen'⁸³.
- The Council's core communication activities are largely decided upon at the discretion of the incumbent EU presidency⁸⁴. As a result, the different countries running the presidency use different standards and techniques in their presidency communication. This discontinuity does little to advance coherent or professional communication efforts⁸⁵.

⁸¹ Foret F. (2004), Advertising Europe: The production of public information by the Commission. In: Smith A., eds., Politics and the European Commission: Actors, interdependence, legitimacy, 156-169, London, Routledge.

⁸² Lodge J., Herman V. (1980), Direct Election to the European Parliament: A supranational perspective, European Journal of Political Research, 8(1), 45-62.

⁸³ European Parliament, DG Communication (2012), Annual Activity Report.

⁸⁴ Valentini C., Nesti G. (2010), Public communication in the European Union. History, perspectives and challenges, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK, Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

⁸⁵ De Vreese C. (2003), Communicating Europe: sixth output from the 'Next Generation Democracy: Legitimacy in Network Europe' project, Brussels. <http://fpc.org.uk/fsblob/89.pdf>. Accessed September 1, 2014.

The EC appears to have a proactive communication approach which is captured in yearly management plans. The EP and the Council, on the other hand, seem to undertake institutional communications in an apolitical, non-aligned and reactive manner, since politicians and MS are key actors in communication, leaving the EP and Council to play more of a facilitating role⁸⁶. The following sections will outline the role of the EC, the EP and individual DGs in communicating 'Europe'.

3.3.1. Communication services provided by the EC and the EP

The EC and the EP (both by means of their respective DG COMMs) communicate with the media, stakeholders and citizens about issues of European interest, including EU policies and actions, by providing different information services (see Table 1).

Table 1: Overview of communication services

Service	Objectives
	Centralised services
Spokespersons' Service (SPP), European Commission	The SPP has the objective of communicating EC news to the media and, in so doing, to the public. This is the official voice of the EC towards the media, working under the authority of the President. The service is in charge of political communication, providing EC news to print and audiovisual media.
European Parliament Press Service	The European Parliament's Press Service comprises a team of press officers whose job it is to assist journalists and provide them with information on what is going on in Parliament. Each press officer specialises in a particular area, official language or Member State, so as to ensure comprehensive coverage of all of Parliament's activities and to provide information to journalists from all Member States.
Communication instruments and tools of the EC	TV channels (Europe by Satellite and Euronews), the radio channel (Euranet Plus), website EUROPA, pressEurope, press releases/events, audiovisual material on the EU, information events for journalists, financing radio and TV programmes presenting EU developments, grants for websites bearing EU content. The main aims of these instruments and tools are to 'contribute to a greater and more sustainable coverage of EU affairs' via existing audiovisual channels and to encourage network building among European broadcasters.
Communication instruments and tools of the EP	Europarl website (for the general public and children), EuroparlTV, audiovisual media, Euroscola (Youth gateway to the European Parliament), Visitors' Centre in Brussels (Parlamentarium), Visitor Kit, events and exhibitions, publications, House of European History, visitor programme, seminars for journalists, social media, multiannual grants programme (for television, radio, web-based projects or specific events).

⁸⁶ Laursen B., Valentini C. (2013), Media relations in the Council of the European Union: Insights into Council press officers' professional practices, *Journal of Public Affairs*, 13(3), 230-238.

	Decentralised services
EC Representations	These are the official representations of the EC in the MS. Information can be found on new initiatives and decisions at the EU level, as well as on upcoming events. The main aim is to promote dialogue with citizens. This is done mainly by informing citizens of EU developments and (local) activities on the relevant websites and organising events and seminars to stimulate public debate.
European Direct Contact Centres (EDCC)	The EDCC network aims to answer citizens' questions and to provide coherent information to citizens on the EU and its policies. It is an information service which answers factual questions about the EU and its policies in all official EU languages. Where necessary, it guides citizens to the appropriate sources of information.
European Direct Information Centres (EDIC)	The EDIC network aims to help build an informed and active European citizenship by informing citizens, raising awareness, and promoting debate among the general public. Its main role is to ensure local information provision on the EU and its policies at the national level. This is done in synergy with other EC networks.
EP Information Offices	These Information Offices aim to inform citizens about the EP's activities. These offices, located in each MS, provide information on EP activities and developments.
European Public Spaces, situated in the Houses of Europe	These spaces, situated in every MS, provide a forum for citizens and organisations to meet and discuss EU-related topics.

The table above shows that different actions are taken at EU level (centralised approach) and MS level (decentralised approach). The underlying logic of many of these services is that the better citizens are informed, the more they know and understand about the EU and its activities. Furthermore, knowing more about the EU is thought to empower citizens and encourage greater participation in European processes, while helping European identity to flourish⁸⁷. This line of reasoning is supported by the theory of social learning which assumes that those who are exposed to a variety of social, psychological, and cognitive influences are typically more supportive of the dominant values, expectations, and institutions of a political community⁸⁸. As far as recent research is concerned, a study by Hartevelde et al. concludes that the more citizens know about the EU, the more they rationally evaluate it on its own (perceived) merits⁸⁹. By contrast, another study, by Karp et al., suggests that there can also be a negative effect: using Eurobarometer data from 1992, these researchers demonstrate that trust in EU democracy is lower among high-knowledge citizens than among low-knowledge citizens⁹⁰.

In the subsections below, a number of communication services are discussed in greater detail.

⁸⁷ European Commission (2008), Ex-ante evaluation. Communicating Europe through audio-visual media, Brussels.

⁸⁸ McClosky H., Zaller J. (1984), *The American ethos: Public attitudes toward capitalism and democracy*, Cambridge, Mass, Harvard University Press.

⁸⁹ Hartevelde E., van der Meer T., De Vries C.E. (2013), In Europe we trust? Exploring three logics of trust in the European Union, *European Union Politics*, 14(4), 542-565.

⁹⁰ Karp J.A., Banducci S.A., Bowler S. (2003), To know it is to love it? Satisfaction with Democracy in the European Union, *Comparative Political Studies*, 36(3), 271-292.

3.3.1.1. Centralised services

Spokespersons' Service (SPP) and European Parliament's Press Service

The Spokespersons' Service (SPP) and the European Parliament's Press Service are the official voices towards the media. Although no evaluations are available of these services, a research consortium (AIM) study shows some insights into the functioning of the EC SPP, illustrating how this type of service works⁹¹. EC spokespersons are the intermediaries between the EC and the media (and in a general sense the citizens of the European Union). They mainly deal with the press corps in Brussels, as journalists in MS are considered to be too far away. As part of their daily routines, spokespersons follow the agenda of the EC and plan events and communication. Their job involves much weighing, balancing and the reduction of many voices into one singular voice. Spokespersons control the distribution of news and seek to spread a coherent message. They plan what to communicate, to whom they give the right to communicate from within the DGs, and when to provide 'low' or no communication at all. In this process, according to spokespersons, the difficulties of decision-making are reflected in the bureaucratic and difficult to understand language of communication. Spokespersons must be selective in their communication with the media. Therefore, they have preferred journalists and media companies (e.g. news agencies, the Financial Times) with whom they communicate more regularly. In general, spokespersons have a positive view adapting messages to national contexts, but also point out that they are bound by the rules of providing objective information and speaking on the record.

Communication instruments and tools

There is a vast pool of smaller, everyday communication instruments and tools embedded within larger policy strategies. These include TV channels dedicated to the EU (like Europe by Satellite, Euronews, and EuroparlTV), the radio channel Euranet Plus, the general website of the EU (EUROPA), the Europarl website, Presseurop (a multilingual news portal with press articles on EU/European affairs which was, however, closed at the end of 2013), press releases/events, the production of audiovisual materials on the EU, information events for journalists, financing of radio and TV programmes presenting EU developments, and grants for websites with EU content. The overall aim of these instruments and tools is to 'contribute to a greater and more sustainable coverage of EU affairs' by existing audiovisual channels and to encourage network-building among European broadcasters⁹².

It would be beyond the scope of this study to evaluate every instrument and tool in detail, but a number of these communication tools are externally evaluated and worth reporting on, such as the EUROPA website and Presseurop. Here it becomes clear that users of these communication tools mainly constitute the 'usual suspects' and not the difficult-to-reach target groups.

An evaluation of the EUROPA website carried out in 2008 shows, for example, that it is mainly used by students and employees, especially those working in public administration and education), and that more than 60 % of visitors are frequent weekly users⁹³. Similar remarks have been made in evaluations of the Europarl site, stating that it tends to be the preserve of specialist minorities and those within adequately resourced and enlightened

⁹¹ Based on: AIM Research Consortium (ed.) (2007): Understanding the Logic of EU Reporting from Brussels. Analysis of interviews with EU correspondents and spokespersons. Adequate Information Management in Europe (AIM) - Working Papers, 2007/3. Bochum/Freiburg: Projekt Verlag - excerpt: Spokespeople report.

⁹² European Commission (2008), Ex-ante evaluation. Communicating Europe through audio-visual media, Brussels.

⁹³ Ernst & Young (2008), Evaluation of the EUROPA Website, Brussels. Ernst & Young.

educational institutions⁹⁴. Although the site is generally positively assessed, experts state that its stories seem to be written for EU insiders (often with an excess of jargon, acronyms and impersonal language), and suggest that it should include more visually appealing content. However, since the assessment in question dates from 2004, these conclusions should be treated with caution; the site has undergone further development in the meantime, taking most of the above-mentioned comments into account.

Evaluation of the recently closed PressEurop news portal shows that the audience comprised people primarily in the 21-30 and 51-60 age groups⁹⁵. They were well-educated and spoke foreign languages, were active in a range of occupations, though primarily in the private sector, and also included students and academics. These people were interested in accessing 'quality', unbiased articles, reading online news and looking for information on EU/European affairs, as well as information from other Member States. The evaluation provided arguments that the instrument contributed to its readers' processes of forming opinions on Europe-related issues of interest. Hard evidence for this is, however, lacking.

Use of social media in EU communication

Social media have grown rapidly in importance as forums for political activism in its different forms. Social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube provide new ways to stimulate citizen engagement in political life where elections and electoral campaigns have a central role. Since more and more EU citizens are active on social networks, the EC and EP also use these platforms to reach out and connect with citizens and stakeholders. They do so in addition to the communication which takes place via more traditional channels such as the press, broadcasting and EU publications and websites. Within the EC, this social media communication is the responsibility of a designated group of officials, the Social Media Network. This network of mandated staff within the DGs and Representations works closely together with the SPP. The purposes of this type of communication include informing citizens, sharing experiences, promoting policies or campaigns, and engaging with stakeholders. EC employees who are active users of social media in their personal capacity are asked to state in their profiles that any statements they make and any opinions they express are personal and do not represent the official position of the EC (in the event that they mention where they work in their profile). Participation by Commission officials in social media is subject to the EU Staff Regulations and the Commission's Code of Good Administrative Behaviour. DG COMM and DG Human Resources and Security have also drawn up specific guidelines for all staff on the use of social media⁹⁶.

In order to assess the power of a digital communication strategy for communicating EU policies, we now refer to the case of how the proposal of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) of 2012 was communicated by DG Justice, making intensive use of social media⁹⁷.

⁹⁴ Anderson P. J., McLeod A (2004), The Great Non-Communicator? The Mass Communication Deficit of the European Parliament and its Press Directorate, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 42(5), 897-917.

⁹⁵ Deloitte (2012), Interim Evaluation of PressEurop, Diegem, Deloitte. http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/communication/about/evaluation/documents/2012-interim-evaluation-presseurop_en.pdf. Accessed September 1, 2014.

⁹⁶ http://ec.europa.eu/ipg/go_live/web2_0/index_en.htm

⁹⁷ The proposal for a regulation was published on 25 January 2012. Subsequently, numerous amendments have been proposed in Parliament and the Council. The European Council aims for adoption in late 2014, and the regulation is planned to come into effect after a transition period of two years. Source: <http://ec.europa.eu/justice/data-protection/>.

Communication of the GDPR proposal by DG Justice

The GDPR was the first proposal for a regulation to benefit from an integrated communication strategy, using both traditional and new media and to a large extent including social media. The campaigning around the programme has been considered effective, in no small part due to the integrated use of social media platforms in which EU officials can discuss and connect with interested groups. Viviane Reding, former Commission Vice-President and Commissioner for Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship, for instance, played an active role in communicating on the subject of the GDPR. This gave the regulation a more personal touch. Additionally, Reding used a more open, interactive and informal channel of communication, namely social media, such as Twitter. Social media constituted a particularly suitable channel in the case of this regulation, since the GDPR concerns online activity: it can be assumed that those interested in such a regulation will also be those who are more active online and who use such social media.

Furthermore, the content and tone of the Data Protection website⁹⁸ are easy to grasp for citizens, and various documents are available, such as some shorter factsheets and studies entitled: 'Why do we need an EU data protection reform?' and 'How does the data reform strengthen citizens' rights?' The documents range in length from a few pages to more detailed consultation reports. The tone of language in these factsheets is also more informal, addressing the reader as 'you' and thus creating a more personal feel, as well as offering examples of everyday situations where data protection is relevant.

This website contains a large amount of information and is visited frequently, the GDPR pages receiving 300 000 visits a year⁹⁹. The DG Justice data protection unit also has roughly 10 000 'likes' on Facebook, and some citizens communicate directly via the platform with questions and issues¹⁰⁰. The DG Justice Twitter account has around 7 000 followers, and the Data Protection Unit is also an active Twitter user and has created the hashtag '#EUDaP'. This is now being frequently used in connection with numerous lectures, debates or conferences on data protection, and has become the official hashtag for news or information on the data protection issue.

Additionally, the Online Protection department/area receives numerous requests for information on this subject.

Social media have also been increasingly used by MEPs since the 2009 EP election campaign. Through the use of different websites and social media, MEPs have tried to better connect with their potential electorates, offering more information about their work and opinions and endeavouring to mobilise their supporters.

No systematic evaluation has been carried out on the use of social media, apart from some research on the use of social media specifically by MEPs (for more information on the role of politicians in communicating Europe, see Chapter 5). Nonetheless, research indicates that the potential of social media should not be overestimated since the public concerned often consists of people with an established interest and 'insiders'. Additionally, true dialogues tend not to take place within social media, since everyone is busy sending messages. Moreover, some contest the reliability of this kind of source, and research shows that social media are still not the most widely used channel for finding information during elections¹⁰¹.

⁹⁸ http://ec.europa.eu/justice/newsroom/data-protection/index_en.htm

⁹⁹ According to the interviewee.

¹⁰⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralDataProtectionRegulation>

¹⁰¹ TNS NIPO (2014), Spiegelonderzoek onder raadsleden en kiezers, Amsterdam, TNS NIPO.

3.3.1.2. Decentralised services

The EC and EP also support a number of nationally located services which exist to inform citizens on the EU's activities, such as the European Direct Information Centres (EDIC) and European Direct Contact Centres (EDCC), and also the EC Representations and EP Information Offices (the latter falling under the responsibility of the EP).

The EDICs and EDCCs

The EDIC and EDCC networks are dedicated to providing information to citizens who visit their services looking for answers to specific, objective questions in relation to the EU, though the EDIC also aims to promote debate. Unlike the EDCC network, which only offers information by phone and email, the EDIC network covers physical locations where information is provided on EU-related matters. Additionally, events and activities are organised by the EDIC for citizens and stakeholders, and citizen feedback is gathered and conveyed to the EC.

Both the EDCC and EDIC networks have been evaluated by outside experts¹⁰². It is clear from these evaluations that both services achieve their objectives of informing citizens on specific issues and increasing awareness of EU issues and citizens' rights and opportunities. For the EDCC, citizens can phone in their questions or make use of the online chat and email services. The use of these services is monitored and has increased annually, although it should be taken into account that the figures are still relatively low, considering that all EU citizens are potential users of the service. Evaluations by EDCC users show that they are on average quite satisfied, indicating that the service is relatively well implemented despite its limited reach. It is interesting to note, however, that there is no specific strategy to promote the EDCCs, and as such they have a low profile and receive little media coverage. From the EDIC evaluation, it is clear that the objectives and activities of this network are more broadly defined than those of the EDCCs, making it more difficult to monitor and evaluate the progress of the centres. The evaluation also concluded that the reach of the EDIC service is not great compared to the number of potential users, namely all EU citizens. Despite the lesser reach of the service, its objectives are considered to be achieved. Furthermore, the evaluation indicates that the events organised by the EDIC network (though these vary across the centres between MS) were deemed to be the most effective form of engaging citizens and interacting with them on EU issues. As a final noteworthy point regarding coverage, there is more variation in the interaction with the media across the EDIC network than with the EDCC. Some 64 % of the EDICs interacted 'regularly' with traditional media, while 36 % did so occasionally, rarely or never. The use of social media is also said to be rising in importance within the EDIC network.

EC Representations and EP Information Offices

Other examples of local EU presence are the official EC Representations which exist in all 28 MS. The websites of these Representations often feature links taking visitors to other related EU or governmental websites. Through the EP Information Offices, each MS provides information on the EU and how policies affect the country in question. The information provided by these organisations and services varies from country to country (the Dutch Representation website is, for instance, less rich in other external web links and EU updates than the British Representation website) but the underlying aim is information provision. In so doing, the Representations contribute to creating awareness and, in some cases, debate among citizens regarding the EU's activities. The ACT.REACT.IMPACT campaign was implemented in 2013 by the EP Information Offices in the various Member States in order to inform people about the topics surrounding the upcoming elections. No external evaluation has been carried out of the EC Representations or the EP Information

¹⁰² EPEC (2010), Evaluation of the Europe Direct Contact Centre, Brussels, EPEC. http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/communication/about/evaluation/documents/2010-europedirect-contactcentre_en.pdf. Accessed September 1, 2014; Technopolis Group, GHK (2012), Mid-term evaluation of Europe Direct Information Centres (2009-2012), Brussels, GHK.

Offices. However, interviews conducted indicate that the Representations are not currently very active in terms of reaching a broad group of stakeholders at national level, since their budgets are under pressure: this limits their capacity to undertake communication activities and do more to inform citizens, or to be more active and present in policy debates.

3.3.2. Communicating Europe: role of individual DGs and implementing bodies

The EU also communicates itself through its general activities in other policy areas. This is mainly done by the relevant thematic DGs, departments and (European) agencies.

Communication policies of individual Commission DGs

Some Commission DGs have evaluated their own communication policies over the last years: these include the Directorate-General for Regional Policy (DG REGIO)¹⁰³ and the Directorate-General for Trade (DG TRADE)¹⁰⁴. These evaluations provide six important conclusions regarding the communication policies the DGs concerned have in place.

- First of all, it was concluded that communication is not very well integrated into the organisation as a whole and that it receives insufficient attention. Most of the external communication is still done by the Commissioner and his or her spokesperson, while officials from the more operational units are generally more hesitant to be involved in these kinds of activities and often lack the competence to do so.
- Secondly, it was indicated that cooperation and coordination with other DGs should be improved when focusing on the general public as a target audience. According to the evaluators, the public has an awareness of the EC, but there is no need to establish distinct DG identities in the minds of the general public. It was also indicated that better cooperation should be sought with delegations, Representations, Europe Direct Relays and other types of organisation, so as to assist them with information and tools for communicating their DG's policies.
- Thirdly, it was concluded that the communication instruments are appropriate, but that there is a lack of integrated digital strategy (and also a heavy reliance on traditional tools such as publications).
- Fourthly, it was concluded that the messages produced by DGs are often considered by stakeholders to be rather impersonal and distant: the information and messages received are seen as being fragmented (as in the case of DG REGIO). Stakeholders involved in the evaluation of DG TRADE indicated that messages reporting on delivered results tend to be more attractive and increase trust, as opposed to messages expressing good intentions. Some external stakeholders – in particular journalists and respondents working in international organisations – even claimed that the messages produced are all very positive and that this tends to erode their credibility with external audiences. Stakeholders working in NGOs or think tanks went further and even admitted to being cynical, arguing that there is a gap between what the EC says and what it does¹⁰⁵. The evaluations also indicated the existence of some challenges in passing the message to media and public. It was recommended that individual DGs should establish a group of 'ambassadors' who are able to speak fluently and with authority at briefings and similar events at European and national level.
- Fifthly, especially within the context of the evaluation of DG REGIO, evaluators noticed that there is a general lack of interest, in the media and the general public, in DG REGIO, due to the fact that the information available on the topic is typically complex, excessive, and fragmented. Additionally, it was mentioned that the growing levels of Euroscepticism (exacerbated by the economic crisis), declining media coverage of

¹⁰³ The Evaluation Partnership (2013), Evaluation study on good practices in EU Regional Policy communication 2007-2013 and beyond, Richmond, The Evaluation Partnership Limited (TEP).

¹⁰⁴ The Evaluation Partnership (2008), Evaluation of DG Trade's communication policy, strategy and activities. Final Report to the European Commission, DG Trade, Richmond, The Evaluation Partnership Limited (TEP).

¹⁰⁵ It is not clear whether respondents have the same views on the functioning of their own national governments, since it could be assumed that similar mechanisms play a role there as well.

regional policy (as a result of more urgent priorities), and diminishing resources at national level are likely to negatively impact people's perceptions of the contribution of the EU with respect to regional policy.

- Finally, it was also indicated that there is a lack of a monitoring and evaluation culture which could capture the effects of communication policies.

Communication policies within individual funding programmes

As well as through DGs, policies are also communicated through the implementing bodies of European funding programmes on the national level in a wide range of policy areas (through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF), the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP, followed-up by the Erasmus+ Programme since 2014) and many others). These programmes are obliged to develop communication plans in order to promote their activities among potential beneficiaries, and to spread the outcomes of EU-funded projects among the wider public. In their communication efforts, they should also make use of EU symbols (like the EU logo on documents or billboards at sites acknowledging the source of funding).

Some recent evaluations of the communication policies of ERDF¹⁰⁶ and ESF¹⁰⁷ programmes conclude the following:

- Programmes face difficulties communicating the complexity of activities (including different priorities and interventions) and the nature of projects. In general, the receptiveness of the general public to details about the EU and its policies and instruments is limited (the subject being considered too technical).
- Programmes are challenged to overcome the perceived widespread lack of interest among the public and the media. This seems to derive mainly from the lack of truly 'newsworthy' stories and materials which go beyond specific projects capturing people's attention (and the billboards at sites displaying the EU flag to show that the project is EU-funded). It was also pointed out that the technical jargon of EU policies hinders this.
- The economic and financial crisis is considered to have led to a deterioration of public opinion as regards the EU, making people (and the media) even less receptive to positive messages about regional policy. It was concluded that MS such as Italy or Spain, but also France or Germany, are increasingly facing a more hostile environment.
- Communication is hampered by the internal organisation of the multitude of types of actors involved in implementation and communication. The fact that funding programmes are managed and implemented through a variety of operational programmes and by a range of different (national) authorities makes implementing a single, coordinated, strategic approach to communication difficult. Different actors tend to have their own priorities, styles, logos, etc. To a certain extent, they also have different agendas and incentives in order to retain a degree of protagonism and recognition for themselves (rather than emphasising the EU's contribution).
- Programme actors often do not only suffer from a shortage of communication experience and expertise, but also from a lack of resources to carry out potentially effective communication activities.
- Finally, limited evidence is available about the effectiveness of the communication activities in place. Nevertheless, recent Eurobarometer data report an increasing percentage of citizens who are aware of different funding programmes.

¹⁰⁶ The Evaluation Partnership (2013), Evaluation study on good practices in EU Regional Policy communication 2007-2013 and beyond, Richmond, The Evaluation Partnership Limited (TEP).

¹⁰⁷ The Evaluation Partnership (2007), Evaluation of ESF Information and Communication Activities, Richmond, The Evaluation Partnership Limited (TEP).

Despite these critical remarks, the evaluations pointed out good practices and emphasised the importance of:

- A 'human face' (the single most salient feature that defines and sets apart the ESF from other funds);
- Bringing projects from the realm of the abstract to the concrete by communicating through projects and implicating them in communication efforts;
- Coupling project-focused communication with clear communication of the key values of the programmes through appropriate and consistent messages, slogans and images; and
- Exploiting the interest that exists at the local and regional levels in the types of news and stories which programmes can deliver.

Experts consulted in the course of this study emphasise the need to make better use of programme beneficiaries and target persons in promoting the EU, since this could help concretely explain the added value of EU funding for people's daily lives to a broader public. Better cooperation between funding programmes communicating Europe was also suggested, since they often have similar target groups. At the EU level, suggestions also concerned increasing the efforts already being made and sharing experiences between different European programmes and Managing Authorities in order to learn from each other¹⁰⁸.

3.3.3. Role of the EC's DG COMM in coordinating communication policies across EU institutions and internal departments

The 2007 document 'Communicating Europe in Partnership' focused on strengthening the coherence and synergies between the activities undertaken by different EU institutions. Some recent studies, however, conclude that the interaction between EU institutions in communicating Europe is not as developed as it should be¹⁰⁹. Despite the goal of closer interinstitutional collaboration, these studies demonstrate the lack of coordination between institutions, and some of these studies even make reference to rivalry within and between institutions in their efforts to attract media attention¹¹⁰. Although an Interinstitutional Group on Information (IGI) was created in 2001, consisting of the EC, the EP and the Council, in order to agree on an EU communication strategy and select common communication priorities for EU institutions and MS¹¹¹, the literature indicates that EU communication is still often fragmented and disjointed¹¹². EU staff appears to be more concerned about outlining what their own tasks are, as opposed to those of other services and institutions¹¹³. An important explanation for this is that the three main decision-making

¹⁰⁸ In light of this recommendation, it is important to mention that the EC recently organised a conference 'Telling the Story – Communicating European Structural and Investment Funds 2014-2020', held in December 2013 with the aim of boosting collaboration between the EU and the national and regional officials involved in communicating awareness of the European Structural and Investment Funds. See: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/conferences/telling-the-story/index_en.cfm

¹⁰⁹ Thiel M. (2008), European public spheres and the EU's communication strategy: From deficits to policy fit?, *Perspectives on European Politics and Society*, 9(3), 342-356.

¹¹⁰ Anderson P. J., McLeod A (2004), The Great Non-Communicator? The Mass Communication Deficit of the European Parliament and its Press Directorate, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 42(5), 897-917.

¹¹¹ European Commission (2007), Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - Communicating Europe in Partnership, COM(2007) 569 final, Official Journal. Brussels.

¹¹² Meyer C. (1999), Political legitimacy and the invisibility of politics: Exploring the European Union's communication deficit, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 37(4), 617-639; Martins A.I., Lecheler S., de Vreese C.H. (2012), Information flow and communication deficit: Perceptions of Brussels-based correspondents and EU officials, *Journal of European Integration*, 34(4), 305-322.

¹¹³ Laursen B., Valentini C. (2013), Media relations in the Council of the European Union: Insights into Council press officers' professional practices, *Journal of Public Affairs*, 13(3), 230-238.

institutions have different political interests in communicating their role per se, even within their own institutional settings¹¹⁴ and specific political agendas.

3.4. Programmes engaging citizens

3.4.1. EU-funded programmes engaging citizens

In addition to the services promoting and communicating Europe mentioned above, the EU is also responsible for a number of other activities under its policy programmes and initiatives. These aim for the most part to promote greater awareness, involvement and interaction with citizens.

Table 2: Overview of funding programmes

Programme	Objectives
'Your Voice in Europe' (launched 2001)	To make policy-making interactive by involving citizens using new technologies. This is part of a broader Interactive Policy-Making (IPM) initiative. 'Your Voice in Europe' is the EC's 'single access point' for a wide variety of consultations, discussions and other tools which enable citizens to play an active role in the European policy-making process ¹¹⁵ .
Citizens' Initiative	To encourage participation by citizens in making the EU more accessible ¹¹⁶ . This programme is designed to promote interaction with citizens by providing a channel for discussion on EU issues and the possibility of proposing new ideas for the policy agenda ¹¹⁷ .
Citizenship Programme 2007-2013 - 'Europe for Citizens'	Giving citizens the opportunity to interact and participate in constructing an ever-closer Europe, thus developing citizenship of the EU.

The aim of these types of programmes and initiatives is to promote discussion and dialogue on EU matters. This is evidenced by the fact that these programmes are connected to the 'Empowering Citizens' objective of the Communicating Europe in Partnership strategy. Such discussions not only inform people of ongoing activities within Europe, but also raise awareness and a sense of involvement among citizens who are reached by the activities.

The Citizenship Programme 2007-2013 set out a number of specific objectives designed to promote awareness and interaction on the part of citizens across MS borders. The interim evaluation of this programme shows that an estimated 2.8 million citizens (around 0.5 % of the total EU population) took part in funded activities between 2007 and 2009¹¹⁸.

Other programmes which do not fall under the heading of communication policies, but have relevance in developing a sense of belonging towards Europe, include the student mobility actions in the Lifelong Learning Programme 2007-2013 (now Erasmus+), providing the opportunity to work and study in other MS, and the Culture and the Media Programme (now joint in the Creative Europe Programme), which offers opportunities to implement

¹¹⁴ Laursen B., Valentini C. (2013), Media relations in the Council of the European Union: Insights into Council press officers' professional practices, *Journal of Public Affairs*, 13(3), 230-238.

¹¹⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/yourvoice/index_en.htm

¹¹⁶ Regulation (EU) No 211/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the European citizens' initiative, OJ L 65, 11.3.2011, p. 1.

¹¹⁷ <http://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/basic-facts>

¹¹⁸ Ecorys (2010), Interim Evaluation of the Europe for Citizens Programme 2007-13. Final Report, Birmingham, Ecorys. http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/pdf/doc1227_en.pdf. Accessed September 1, 2014.

cultural projects across borders and make and distribute films, as well as proposing training activities, festivals and promotion projects throughout Europe. There is evidence in the literature indicating that Erasmus participants tend to identify themselves as European. The logic behind this is that Erasmus students "use their time abroad to engage in meaningful contact with other Europeans, becoming more aware of and interested in Europe and other Europeans as a result, and ultimately identifying themselves as European"¹¹⁹.

3.4.2. Information campaigns for EP elections

The information campaigns ahead of the EP elections, which take place every five years, may be considered a distinctive programme to encourage citizens to actively engage in EU politics. This section will briefly examine the experience of implementing these campaigns since the first elections in 1979.

For the first elections in 1979, the EP decided that it should, together with the Commission, establish special information programmes under the auspices of their national press and information bureaux and relevant DGs, in order to counter widespread public ignorance of and apathy towards the world's first supranational elections. An article by Lodge and Herman (1980) provides a good overview of the implementation of this information programme¹²⁰. In this article, the authors indicate that during the preparation of the first information campaign ahead of the 1979 EP elections, the institutions realised that they could not become involved in a campaign reaching out to the broader public, as not only might this compromise their positions vis-à-vis the MS but – without special help – they lacked the expertise, technical facilities and financial resources to do so. A major problem facing them was how to simultaneously direct their campaigns at both specific target audiences – which they saw as the key to any in-depth information campaign – and the general public. The limited finances available meant that both could not be reached, and that individual projects aimed directly at voters had to be ruled out. Budgetary constraints meant that the campaigns had to aim not at the public but at the media and 'opinion-makers' likely to have a 'multiplier' effect in MS. Moreover, it was indicated that the programmes should provide non-partisan information about the Commission and the EP, stressing the elections' supranational character in order to avoid them being overshadowed by national considerations and the plethora of local, regional, and parliamentary elections in the MS, and should also stimulate public interest in the elections by highlighting the relevance and importance of the Union's activities to the daily lives of citizens. Furthermore, a decision was made to adapt the content and approach of the programmes to MS' different needs and interests, and to follow a multimedia approach (buying advertising space on billboards and in the press along with radio and television spots in order to attract voter attention). Because the institutions lacked the expertise, resources and personnel to plan and run such campaigns, in June 1978, the 'Organe de Contact', a body comprising members of the EP and EC and Parliament officials set up to monitor the information programmes' implementation, decided to entrust their preparation to specialised external agencies.¹²¹

From the beginning in 1979, the elections were already criticised for the way these information programmes were organised and the context in which such a campaign was implemented. After the 1979 elections, Lodge and Herman concluded the following¹²²:

¹¹⁹ Mitchell K. (2012), Student mobility and European Identity: Erasmus Study as a civic experience?, *Journal of Contemporary European Research* 8(4), 490-518.

¹²⁰ Lodge J., Herman V. (1980), Direct Election to the European Parliament: A supranational perspective, *European Journal of Political Research*, 8(1), 45-62.

¹²¹ Lodge J., Herman V. (1980), Direct Election to the European Parliament: A supranational perspective, *European Journal of Political Research*, 8(1), 45-62.

¹²² Lodge J., Herman V. (1980), Direct Election to the European Parliament: A supranational perspective, *European Journal of Political Research*, 8(1), 45-62.

- National factors (national governments, the European institutions' role in running the information campaign, and the attitudes of national parties towards the transnational party organisations) had the effect of 'nationalising' what was supposed to be a supranational election.
- Voter expectations of what the directly elected Parliament and its members could be expected to achieve on their behalf were kept within bounds by the information campaigns and the parties.
- The protected nature of the information campaign, its neutral tone and avoidance of controversial (and hence eye-catching) issues, and its apparent lack of relationship with the political parties' campaigns dissipated any excitement about the elections that might have existed.
- It was difficult to differentiate the transnational parties (apart from degrees of supranationalism) from one another on policy issues. Their programmes were devised as policy documents to assist the member parties, and not as electoral platforms aimed at voters directly. As such, not only did they have limited appeal, but the member parties were free to make as much or as little reference to and use of them as they wished. This issue was also addressed in a study by Pridham and Pridham on European transnational party cooperation, which concluded that national political parties, political groups within the EP, and, finally, European party federations did not have a very high degree of cohesiveness¹²³.

Since 2004, the Bureau of the European Parliament has on each occasion mandated the competent EP services to implement an information campaign to raise awareness among EU citizens of the impending European elections. Since then, each election campaign has drawn attention to particular specific aspects:

- The 2004 information campaign focused on drawing attention to the fact that the elections were taking place and the relevant date in each MS. On top of that, a promotional film was used across Europe emphasising the crucial element of choice, and the notion of electors choosing between alternatives at the ballot box.
- The 2009 information campaign was centred on the notion of choice in a number of identified areas, encouraging voters to see the election as an opportunity to make policy choices for the future. The 2009 campaign also saw new online communication techniques enter the mix: the EP's strong presence in social media dates from this period (see Chapter 5). It was concluded that these techniques permitted the campaign to reach a much wider public than would otherwise have been possible within the constraints of a limited budget, and opened the door to much greater interactivity.
- The 2014 information campaign indicated in particular the need to emphasise the political nature of the EP, the impact of its actions on the lives of EU citizens, and the new powers it enjoyed following the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty. It was foreseen that the 2014 campaign would be different from previous programmes, since political parties were now expected to run genuine pan-European campaigns, with several of them putting forward a candidate for the presidency of the EC. This was an important shift, taking into account earlier electoral experiences where political campaigns were predominantly captured by national parties on the national level. The institutional information campaign therefore observed certain ground rules. First of all, it reflected the political nature of the process and the political stakes inherent in the outcome. At the same time, it remained scrupulously neutral and impartial vis-à-vis all

¹²³ Pridham G. and Pridham P. (1981), *Transnational Party Co-operation and European Integration: The Process Towards Direct Elections*, Boston, George Allen & Unwin.

the political forces contesting the elections¹²⁴. Four distinct phases were foreseen, namely: kick-off phase, thematic phase, pre-vote phase, and post-vote phase. The visual identity and baseline were considered important. The campaign also addressed landmark moments in the political life of the EP and the wider world. In addition, it linked itself as much as possible to subsequent events, providing a platform for campaign activities. Different communication tools were implemented, such as video clips, radio spots, audiovisual operations, use of social media, a specially-created election website, online tools (mobile applications), print and electronic material, a press toolkit, events/debates, outdoor advertising such as posters and billboards, promotional items, and media space. All core communication material was produced in the full range of official languages. EP information offices produced toolkit material and organised communication activities locally in accordance with local needs, sensitivity and circumstances. Social media monitoring was also reinforced at the local level in order to provide the information offices with a greater capacity to respond to local concerns. Given the limited nature of the resources available relative to the challenges of undertaking a communication campaign, partnerships were sought with the media, political actors, other EU institutions and public authorities.

Although no final evaluation has been carried out of the most recent information campaign regarding the EP elections in 2014, some reflection has been provided by different stakeholders, such as think tanks, the media and opinion leaders, on the implementation of the information campaign. Some of them argue that national politics remained at the forefront of the campaigns in most MS (due to overlap with national elections, the fact that the EP elections coincided with a domestic political crisis or simple lack of interest in or knowledge of European affairs). Nevertheless, there are some signs of change. It has been argued that the EU is becoming a more prominent topic of debate within MS in national elections, although discussed from a national angle. Topics included economic issues such as austerity and unemployment, the crisis in Ukraine and relations with Russia and their implications, and free movement of people. Another EU-wide concern was the rise of anti-EU or extremist parties, both in Member States where such parties are popular and in those where this is not (yet) the case¹²⁵.

3.5. Role of MS in communicating Europe

In addition to the formal activities undertaken by EU institutions in the MS, national authorities also deploy their own activities in informing and engaging their citizens.

Management Partnerships play an important role in the communication of Europe at the national level. These partnerships are generally based on joint communication plans and help to adapt communication activities to local circumstances and link them to national political agendas. Management Partnerships have thus far been evaluated in 14 Member States, two of which are within the country scope of this study. A brief overview is therefore provided of the evaluations of Management Partnerships in Germany and Sweden, in order to offer some insight into the outcomes of these EU/MS collaborations. In the case of Germany, the objectives were to improve the perceptions of the EU and its legitimacy by making the EU better known to citizens, and to increase citizen understanding of the Union's structure, activities and achievements¹²⁶. The evaluation indicates that the

¹²⁴ Secretary-General of the European Parliament (2013), note to the Bureau, on 28 March 2013: This time it's different – A concept for an institutional communication campaign on the 2014 elections. Brussels. http://www.asktheeu.org/en/request/act_react_impact_campaign_for_th. Accessed September 1, 2014.

¹²⁵ Van den Berge M. (2014), Tepsa Report. The 2014 EP Election Campaign in the Member States: National Debates, European Elections. Brussels, TEPsA.

¹²⁶ Institut für Kommunikations-Analyse & Evaluation (2009), Evaluation of the work of the Management Partnership 'aktion europa' between the Federal Government and the European Commission. http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/communication/about/evaluation/documents/2009-partnership-ec-deutschland_en.pdf. Accessed September 1, 2014.

activities undertaken upheld and pursued the stated objectives. In particular, those activities and events which were more 'action-oriented' and interactive did well in achieving the Partnership aim. Though the reach was considered good in the evaluation, the topics covered by the activities organised under the Management Partnership were also viewed as being more geared to citizens with an established interest in politics and the EU. As such, the recommendation was that harder-to-reach people should be targeted by specific means. In the Swedish Management Partnership (between the national government, the EC and the EP), the emphasis of the activities appears to have been strongly on education and on means of improving communication and awareness of the EU in schools. The overall evaluation of the activities was very positive, as they were all seen as being well executed and adhering to the objectives of the Partnership¹²⁷. However, the Swedish evaluation does not provide the same depth of reflection as the German one. The evaluations of the other Management Partnerships generally report that these partnerships create added value for the communication activities performed in the MS so far, by setting up communication frameworks and implementing projects, and stimulate cooperation between stakeholders (such as national ministries, EC Representations and EP Information Offices). Nevertheless, the evaluations also generally indicate that project aims, messages, and target audiences are often formulated too broadly and need to be better defined. Moreover, it was concluded that only limited monitoring data were available, and limited performance indicators set, for the purposes of assessing the effectiveness of the projects funded.

For this aspect of our study, the Member States in our selection are examined in turn in order to establish the different formal communication activities in place at the national level.

- In Romania, the government makes efforts to inform citizens about the EU through a specified platform on the Romanian parliament's website where issues surrounding EU integration can be read about and discussed. At school level, efforts have also increased to teach students early on about the history and structure of the EU. Currently, initiatives are also in the making to implement mock EU debates for children to understand the EU decision-making process better. While a vast amount of online discussions are carried out on news websites (as reactions to news posts) or in the form of comments to posts made on social media sites, there appears to be a lack of specialised fora dedicated solely to the purpose of facilitating discussion on the policies and affairs of the EU. Only a few blogs show a (rather weak) attempt to promote materials that facilitate citizens' understanding of EU policies.¹²⁸ The website EurActiv.ro¹²⁹ is part of a network of portals dedicated to EU affairs and policy debates. This portal allows Romanian actors to participate in EU debates, especially with respect to the business sector. EurActiv.ro has declared its mission as that of guaranteeing neutrality and objectivity, and has pledged to provide accurate and balanced information to Romanians on EU affairs. With respect to national initiatives, there does not seem to be a formal policy to promote better communication of the EU. This may be for numerous reasons, for instance the broad range of general information channels. As a consequence, there appear to be numerous initiatives and projects at both national and regional levels that aim to raise awareness of the EU and to better communicate sector-specific information on EU legislation and policies.
- In Sweden, the parliament has established a dedicated website – Eu-upplysningen.se – for information on the EU. This site aims to provide unbiased information about how the EU functions, Sweden's role in the EU, how the EU affects Swedish citizens, EU

¹²⁷ Ernst & Young (2012), Evaluation: Partnership between the Swedish Government, the European Commission and the European Parliament. http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/communication/about/evaluation/documents/2012-partnership-ec-ep-sweden_en.pdf. Accessed September 1, 2014.

¹²⁸ CPESC, E-Publicații: Să înțelegem politicile Uniunii Europene [Understanding EU Politics], available at: <http://cpescmdlib.blogspot.nl/2013/08/e-publicatii-sa-intelegem-politicile.html>

¹²⁹ EurActiv.ro, available at: www.euractiv.ro (last accessed 24 February 2014).

news and more. In Sweden there are various other online information sources affiliated with governmental sites for purposes of informing the public. There is also a website specially dedicated to the Swedish Commissioner. Moreover, Sweden has had a dedicated minister responsible for relations with the EU since 1991. This suggests, together with the involvement of the authorities in informing citizens, that the EU is a more integrated part of the governance landscape in Sweden. Beyond this, there are also instances of collaborative efforts between the Swedish authorities and EU level initiatives at the MS level. The EC, through its representation in Sweden, has held several citizen debates on EU policies. In 2012 there was a major public debate in which the Swedish Commissioner at the time, Cecilia Malmström, played a key part. In 2013 two further large-scale public debates were held in Sweden. One, called the 'citizens' dialogue', brought together former Commission Vice-President Viviane Reding, MEP Olle Ludvigsson and Swedish EU Minister Birgitta Ohlsson; the other was a major public debate held in Umeå. The 'citizens' dialogue' was the culmination of many smaller debates held all over Sweden on the same policy issues, namely the situation in the labour market, the financial crisis, asylum and immigration policies, and further European integration. The turnout at these debates has been described as very mixed, with people from all over the country participating. The Swedish Government also arranges citizen dialogue meetings where EU policies and issues are discussed as a measure to create more awareness about the EU before EP elections. There are several unions and NGOs providing information about the EU in Sweden, though they mostly have their own agendas. For instance, there are several NGOs providing information about the EU relating to business and trade. There are also four relatively well-known Swedish NGOs which provide information about the EU from a viewpoint that is critical, or even hostile, with regard to it.

- In the Netherlands, there is a strong emphasis on online information provision. There are a number of websites aimed at providing neutral and unbiased information about the EU, such as www.europaendefeiten.nl, and 'Europe and the facts', which provides information for SMEs on how the EU actually affects them. The Clingendael Institute, dedicated to discussion of EU matters, hosts the EUForum, a platform for debate, on its website. The 'Europa Now' website, affiliated with the University of Leiden, is another independent site where news and current EU topics can be followed. In addition to this, the government website also provides information on EU matters, such as the ESF, through its agency 'Agentschap SZW'. It should be noted that the Netherlands is a country with relatively high internet and technological penetration, and has one of the highest internet use rates in Europe. That said, it should also be borne in mind that it is difficult to establish just how much such information sources are used and it is quite likely that the sites concerned are visited only by individuals who are already interested in the subject or by people who need the information for their work or studies. The degree to which these information sources create fresh interest and awareness is unclear, but seems unlikely to be high.
- The United Kingdom represents the opposite tendency as regards efforts made to formally communicate Europe. Our research indicates that most communication and EU experts were not aware of any particular policies or activities that might aim to inform UK citizens about Europe. While the government does have web pages on the subject, the main information source on Europe comes from the Commission Representation. In the UK in particular, there is not much emphasis on further informing citizens about ongoing EU activities from a governmental or institutional perspective. In addition to this, education regarding the EU in schools is quite poor, though at university level, by contrast, it is quite advanced.

- In Germany, education on the EU is mandatory in schools, demonstrating a governmental commitment to informing people about the Union's activities. In addition to this, German citizens rely to a large extent on the media for information regarding the EU. Germany also appears to rely more on EU-initiated projects to inform people, such as the EDCC network in Germany and the Commission Representation. It also makes use of the Citizenship Programme in promoting Europe, using the project to support some 63 citizen debates and four different town-twinning projects.
- In Spain, according to expert sources, people are mainly informed about EU affairs through the media and specifically through the internet and television. Print news is also important, though the media are quite politicised. The experts also find that national policies and projects to encourage awareness of and interest in the EU barely exist. Even projects from the EU implemented at the national level in Spain (such as the Citizenship Programme projects) do not seem to have noticeable effects on how aware people are of the EU.

The evidence from the above Member States shows that national governments have in some cases launched different websites, providing platforms for information and discussion on Europe. However, in some countries, like the UK, hardly any government initiatives for promoting the EU appear to be in place, the task thus falling to diverse NGOs. Germany and Spain also appear to rely more on EU-initiated projects to inform people.

Role of schools in communicating Europe

As mentioned earlier, some countries include Europe as a topic in the school curriculum. The communication on 'Communicating Europe in Partnership' already indicated the importance of education and training for active citizenship. A recent report by the Eurydice Network provides some interesting information, examining how several European dimensions (see Table 3 below) are taken up in national curricula on International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) 1, 2 and 3 levels (in line with primary and secondary education)¹³⁰. The results of this study clearly show that Europe is included in the curriculum almost everywhere except Croatia. Nevertheless, in some countries some European dimensions or ISCED levels are not covered, as is indicated with a dark blue coloured box in Table 3 (e.g. the UK, Turkey, Lithuania, Belgium, Germany, Ireland, Liechtenstein, and Norway). For instance, in Germany and the UK (England), the themes related to the European and international dimension are no longer included in the curriculum after ISCED level 2. Examining all the countries, however, it can be concluded that by the end of secondary education, students in nearly all European countries have addressed different topics concerning the EU in their curriculum.

¹³⁰ Eurydice (2012), *Citizenship Education in Europe*, Brussels.

Table 3: European dimension in school curricula on different ISCED levels
(X = embedded; 0 = not embedded)

	European identity and belonging			European history, culture and literature			European dimension: main economic/political/social issues			Functioning of institutions and perspectives of the European Union		
	ISCED 1	ISCED 2	ISCED 3	ISCED 1	ISCED 2	ISCED 3	ISCED 1	ISCED 2	ISCED 3	ISCED 1	ISCED 2	ISCED 3
BE fr	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
BE de	X	X	X	O	O	X	O	O	X	O	O	O
BE nl	O	X	X	O	X	X	O	X	X	O	X	X
BG	X	X	X	O	X	X	O	X	X	O	X	X
CZ	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
DK	O	X	X	O	X	X	O	X	X	O	X	X
DE	X	X	X	O	X	O	O	X	O	O	X	O
EE	O	X	X	O	X	X	O	X	X	O	X	X
IE	X	X	O	X	X	O	O	X	O	O	X	O
EL	X	X	X	O	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
ES	O	X	O	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
FR	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
IT	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
CY	X	X	X	O	X	X	O	X	X	O	X	X
LV	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
LT	X	X	X	O	X	X	O	X	X	O	X	X
LU	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	O	O	X
HU	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
MT	X	X	X	X	X	X	O	X	X	O	X	X
NL	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	O	X	X
AT	X	X	X	X	X	X	O	X	X	O	X	X
PL	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
PT	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
RO	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	O	X	X
SI	X	X	X	X	X	X	O	X	X	O	X	X
SK	O	X	X	O	X	X	O	X	X	O	X	X
FI	X	X	X	X	X	X	O	X	X	O	X	X
SE	X	O	O	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
UK-ENG	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	X	X	O	X	O
UK-WLS	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	X	X	O	X	X
UK-NIR	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	X	X	O	X	X
UK-SCT	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
IS	O	X	X	O	X	X	O	O	X	O	X	X
LI	O	O	O	X	X	X	O	O	O	O	O	O
NO	O	O	X	O	X	X	O	O	X	O	X	X
HR	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
TR	O	X	O	O	O	X	O	X	O	O	X	O

Source: based on Eurydice (2012), Citizenship Education in Europe, Brussels.

Having a curriculum in place is one thing, but teachers should be trained in European topics as well. No information is available on whether Europe is sufficiently covered in the training curricula of teachers. However, a survey carried out in 2009 found that a significant proportion of teachers (77-80 %) felt 'confident' with respect to four specified EU-related topics (namely 'the global community and international organisations', 'the European Union', 'the constitution and political systems', and 'emigration and immigration'), indicating that generally among this group there is no deficit of knowledge and competences concerning the EU¹³¹.

¹³¹ These data are drawn from the teacher survey of the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study, and correspond to 23 of the education systems in the Eurydice network. Source: IEA (2010), ICCS 2009 European Report. Civic Knowledge, attitudes, and engagement among lower secondary students in 24 European countries, Amsterdam, IEA.

3.6. Concluding assessment on the role of EU institutions in communicating Europe

Drawing together the findings from this chapter, some strengths and weaknesses concerning the role of the EU institutions in communicating Europe can be identified.

- With regard to the overarching communication strategy, it can be concluded that a positive assessment can be given regarding the relevance and intention of the communication strategy that has emerged since 2004, namely searching for a dialogue, involving citizens in decision-making, making EU issues more relevant to citizens' daily lives, promoting engagement, and communicating in partnership. These address actual needs as identified in this study as well. However, experts state that the EU communication strategy is still quite ambiguous and introduces too many unspecified suggestions: there is still no clarity surrounding what is really meant by going local, setting up a dialogue and promoting engagement, what actions should follow, which public groups should be involved or how they should be involved in pursuing the communication objectives. There are concerns about the practical implementation of the strategy and whether there is truly a European public sphere.
- The EU is communicated by a wide variety of communication services and instruments. All these activities are generally well monitored and evaluated. Monitoring data and evaluations generally show positive assessments, though limited information is provided as to whether citizens are ultimately better informed and engaged. These evaluations also state that most information services reach the usual suspects who are already informed about the EU, but not the general public, and in particular do not reach those who are not interested or have a negative opinion with regard to the EU. This points to the need for a serious discussion on the cost-effectiveness of these services and instruments. Experts consulted agree that the solution is not more budget for these kinds of communication activities, but, rather, a careful assessment of the outreach of the services and instruments implemented. If they all serve the same 'elite' audience, careful reconsideration should be given to the added value of several more traditional communication instruments (e.g. funding of the much debated EU-wide TV and radio channels, though it must be remembered that this is an expensive category). The emergence of the internet and social media could lead to cost savings in the communication budget.
- This study shows that, while the EU institutions are investing sufficiently in their EU communication activities, they need to reflect critically on the style of the EU's communication towards its public. The content and tone of a message and the channel through which it is sent all affect how people react to that message and, by extension, to the EU which initially transmitted the message. Criticism points to the currently impersonal, technical, and dry style of EU communication, often concerned with issues which are not relevant to the majority of EU citizens. The EU communication style is not considered to be creating relevance or a connection with EU citizens, and this reinforces citizens' feelings of distance towards the European project. This has been a recurrent issue in the literature assessing the EU institutions' communication policies since the 1970s, and apparently has yet to be resolved. Nevertheless, experience at EU level suggests that using the EU's reputation of being more 'technocratic' can at the same time help offer a more balanced account of issues and thus help diffuse highly sensitive debates so that the issues can be discussed more rationally¹³².

¹³² A good example in this respect is the Commission's position on the UK debate on Bulgarian and Polish migrants in the UK and so-called 'welfare tourism'. The UK Prime Minister, David Cameron, made comments that this might prove to be a problem for Britain, after which the Commission submitted a study showing that this was not the case and that, in fact, Bulgarian and Polish incoming migrants often contribute more to the

- Another aspect criticised is that the EU embraces too many messages, ranging from European values, institutional set-up and democratic processes, enlargement, overarching strategies such as Europe 2020, and expanded policy domains. This sometimes leads to an overabundance of messages¹³³. When these messages are deemed too complacent, they are received with scepticism, generating resistance, particularly amongst stakeholders such as journalists and NGOs. The lion's share of attention goes to communicating overarching and sectoral policies along with the policy decisions taken, while limited attention is paid to the European values on which the policies are based¹³⁴. One reason for this is that there is still no consensus on how European values and identity are characterised.
- The EU institutions use a wide diversity of channels for communicating their policies. An overview of these channels might suggest that the channels are currently insufficiently targeted to their audiences. Moreover, across various EU communication activities, the outreach is often not enough to engage and interest citizens who are not already interested in the EU. Experts take the view that the EU must communicate on the level where it is possible to be concrete and instrumental in the plans and goals presented to citizens (going local), and that it should make better use of national channels or sources as intermediary organisations passing the message on. Using non-disgraced politicians, stakeholders or more neutral media representatives could carry more weight in such discussions. Using trusted national-level actors to convey the EU's messages might be the best way to get round the distrust felt by many citizens. It is very important to keep confronting the problems and to find the right venues, actors and messages for communicating facts and views on policy issues at the national level. This also applies to European and national politicians passing the message on and acting as ambassadors. Moreover, better use can be made of the internet and social media.
- Taking an overview of the evaluations of a number of programmes, it can be concluded, as argued in chapter 2, that activities involving citizens directly, travelling, connecting and working across borders, are more effective in changing behaviour and attitudes than other actions which focus on short-term outputs and on the benefits obtained from the political system. This should be taken into account when developing further 'action-based' communication. The strategic dimension and long-term effectiveness of non-verbal cultural communication have thus far not entered into concerted strategic communication planning.

welfare system than they cost. This situation is a good example of EU communication playing upon its strengths of rationality and distance; this injects a certain amount of balance into the debate. These findings were, however, shouted down in the UK press by louder media voices. This also illustrates another challenge, namely that the legitimacy of the EU has gone down so that in some cases people do not want to listen to what the EU has to say on a matter. Nevertheless, the EU has monitoring systems and resources at its disposal, as well as an image as a rational entity, and these factors may work in its favour on emotional issues to provide more balanced and factual accounts and to explain the background of the issues under discussion. The EU can, therefore, help to lower the temperature of such debates. Moreover, national governments always require the Commission to be neutral and objective in its communication.

¹³³ This encompasses the various economic sectors, a customs union, a single market in which goods, people, and capital move freely, a common trade policy, a common agricultural policy, numerous aspects of social and environmental policy, and a common currency (the euro). Since the mid-1990s, EU MS have also taken significant steps towards political integration, with decisions to develop a Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and efforts to promote cooperation in the area of Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) with a view to forging common internal security measures.

¹³⁴ An example of this is that the communication of European values is not taken up as a concrete objective in the Management Plan of the Commission's DG COMM.

To sum up, the EU's communication style can affect how a given message is received by citizens. The underlying mechanism here is that a connection must be made with citizens and that this can be either achieved or undermined by the tone, content and channel used to transmit information. It is interesting to note that critical remarks regarding how EU institutions pass on their messages echo the outcomes of evaluations and reports produced since 1970 onwards. An evaluative article on the first EP information campaign ahead of the EP elections in 1979 already addressed the drawbacks of the neutral tone of EU institutions, tending to avoid any controversial issues and thus making the elections less exciting¹³⁵. The key question is to what extent those recommendations have been included in EU communication.

¹³⁵ Lodge J., Herman V. (1980), Direct Election to the European Parliament: A supranational perspective, *European Journal of Political Research*, 8(1), 45–62.

4. ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN COMMUNICATING EUROPE

KEY FINDINGS

- The media play an important role and impact on public opinion in the EU, since information on the EU is mainly provided by national and local media (particularly television).
- There is still no pan-European public sphere in existence and the fact that national media systems differ from country to country means that EU citizens are also differently informed about the Union.
- The coverage of EU news is cyclic in nature, with 'priority peaks' after which such news disappears from the agenda. Moreover, the EU is considered to be largely faceless in the news and coverage of it is neutral or slightly negative, as is the case with political news in general. In addition, the subject is lacking in links to national/local levels: in other words, it lacks the kind of storytelling that gains the interest of the media.
- The more often EU news is framed in terms of EU membership benefits, the higher the proportion of people who perceive their country's EU membership as beneficial.
- Studies indicate that European news-making is restricted firstly by low public readership demand for European news, and secondly by the limited and national-focused sources of information that journalists receive from the political system. Moreover, the EU institutions make only limited efforts to act as 'sources' of information.
- Increasingly, younger audience segments do not turn to traditional media, including television, for information purposes.
- If the EU institutions wish to influence the media to a greater extent, then they need to take better account of political communication and news framing. Balance should be found, e.g., by providing neutral and authoritative information, while maintaining a connection to people's daily lives.
- Additional findings concerning the media show that national journalists are, on average, inadequately educated in how Europe works. This contributes to the lack of coverage on EU matters. It also relates more generally to the state of the media industry; the EU is often not a top editorial priority and media makers are reluctant to invest precious time and financial resources in understanding and covering Europe.

4.1. Introduction

In order to explore the role of the media in communicating Europe, this chapter further analyses the media channels used by citizens to obtain information on Europe (see Section 4.2), the way Europe is communicated in the media (see Section 4.3), the factors influencing the appearance of Europe within the media (see Section 4.4), the interaction that takes place between politics and the media (see Section 4.5). Lastly, it offers a concluding assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the role of the media in communicating Europe and the challenges ahead (Section 4.6).

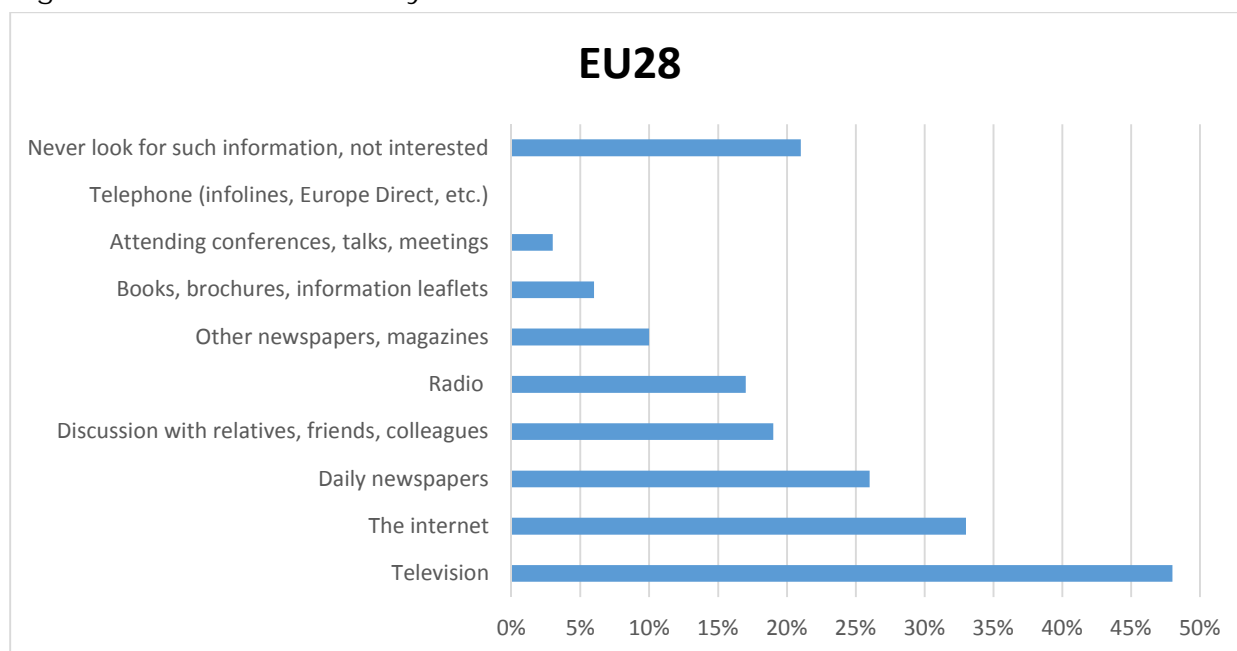
4.2. Media channels used to obtain information on Europe

The media play an important role in shaping citizens' perception of the EU, since they often represent their sole source of information about the Union. This is different from the national level where most citizens have direct or even indirect contact with national institutions, and are therefore less dependent on what the media report about those institutions¹³⁶.

¹³⁶ De Vreese C. H., Boomgaarden H. G. (2006), Media effects on public opinion about the about the enlargement of the European Union, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 44(2), 419-436.

To explore by which means citizens are informed about the EU, Eurobarometer provides useful information by monitoring, on a yearly basis, the sources citizens use to obtain information about the Union (see Figure 6). It becomes clear that television is generally considered the most important source, followed by the internet and newspapers.

Figure 6: Sources used by citizens to find out information about the EU



Source: Eurobarometer, Autumn 2013

When taking a closer look at different countries (not shown in the figure above), Eurobarometer reveals that in most countries television is the preferred medium, with the exception of Sweden, the Netherlands, Finland, Denmark, Estonia and Latvia, where the internet tops the list of preferred sources. A socio-demographic analysis shows remarkable differences between different groups. Regarding the value of the communicative channel used, it should be noted here that certain channels target certain audience groups more easily than others. Quality programmes, broadsheet newspapers such as the Financial Times and publications such as The Economist tend to attract more highly educated professionals, while the popular press and popular programmes reach a broader audience. The internet, and specifically social media, lend themselves well to personalised communication (targeting individuals directly) and to providing more first-hand news and experiences of people, thus reducing the screening role of the news media concerning new stories. Audience studies all over Europe show a steep decline in younger-generation audiences for traditional media: younger people do not turn to such media (and this also applies to television) for information purposes. The younger these segments are, the more this trend is evident. In this respect and in practice, the coverage of European affairs through traditional media will increasingly serve an ageing audience¹³⁷.

As already indicated in the previous chapters, there is no pan-European media system in the EU, despite the attempts of the Commission to finance European-wide radio and TV programmes to present EU developments, or newspapers such as 'The European', the Euronews channel, or other media targeting specific markets and segments. As a result, the bulk of communication on Europe is overwhelmingly organised along firm national lines, although this is changing over the years thanks to the rise of the internet, transcending the geographical boundaries of traditional media systems¹³⁸. National media systems

¹³⁷ http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/index_en.htm

¹³⁸ Mahoney C. (2008), Brussels vs. the Beltway: Advocacy in the United States and the European Union, Washington, D.C., Georgetown University Press.

consequently still play a major role in filtering EU information that will be presented to a national public¹³⁹. The public, in turn, also interprets media messages through nation-specific frames of reference. Ultimately, this means that the EU institutions have less influence over how their messages are communicated to European citizens.

Few studies exist that specifically look at the role and impact of European integration on domestic news coverage¹⁴⁰. An article by C.H. de Vreese and H.G. Boomgaarden points to low to moderate visibility of EU issues, with EU news being reported predominantly from a national perspective and slightly negatively in tone: this analysis, however, was published in 2002 and is thus based on older data¹⁴¹. Later scholars argue that European policies are becoming more publicly visible over time¹⁴². Empirical findings report an increase in articles in which EU policymaking is the main topic, though often only in relation to a given policy field in which the EU has decision-making powers and not across the board¹⁴³. This has made some scholars conclude that the media – print and internet – can be seen as performing adequately in terms of providing public transparency at EU level in those areas where the Union has real power and is most important. Thus, P. Statham argues that, whatever the basis of the perceived democratic deficit in the EU, it is no longer primarily caused by a lack of communication¹⁴⁴. Increasing attention to the EU is a result of emerging European public politics, with European policy debate becoming more and more publicly visible, but not very inclusive as regards reaching out to those who are not yet involved. The heightened publicity is explained by the growing role the EU plays in the daily lives of its citizens (due to the increasing dominance of Union legislation and policies over national domains). EU policies have entered the domain of the individual, and this is further highlighted in times of economic crisis.

4.3. How the EU is communicated in the media

Since the media play an important role in forming citizens' attitudes towards Europe, it is important to know how the EU is covered in the media, to whom the EU is communicated, the type of message included (content, tone or language style), and how this affects public opinion¹⁴⁵. This is sometimes also referred to as 'message framing', i.e. explaining an event within a specific narrative.

A study conducted on the appearance of EU news in the media, stretching over 17 years in seven countries, shows that the more often EU news was framed in terms of benefits of EU membership, the higher the proportion of people in a country who perceived their country's

¹³⁹ Bal ytien A., Vinci nien A. (2008), Political Communication Culture with a European Touch: A View from Brussels, *Sociologija: Mintis ir veiksmas*, 3(1), 71-85.

¹⁴⁰ There are a few early studies evaluating EU correspondents on British newspapers (Morgan, 1995), EU communication performance (Meyer, 1999; Tumber 1995), and research on journalism and Europe (AIM Research Consortium, 2007; Baisnee, 2002; Gleissner and de Vreese, 2005; and Huber, 2007). However, these studies often focus on a couple of countries, do not provide an EU-wide overview and are a little outdated.

¹⁴¹ De Vreese C. H., Boomgaarden H. G. (2006), Media effects on public opinion about the about the enlargement of the European Union, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 44(2), 419-436.

¹⁴² Koopmans R., Statham P., (eds.) (2010), *The making of a European public sphere: media discourse and political contention*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press; Risse T. (2010), *A Community of Europeans? Transnational Identities and Public Spheres*, Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press; Schuck A., Xezonakis G., Elenbaas M. (2011), Party contestation and Europe on the news agenda: The 2009 European Parliamentary Elections, *Electoral Studies* 30(1), 41-52; Secretary-General of the European Parliament (2013), note to the Bureau, on 28 March 2013: This time it's different – A concept for an institutional communication campaign on the 2014 elections. Brussels. http://www.asktheeu.org/en/request/act_react_impact_campaign_for_th. Accessed September 1, 2014.

¹⁴³ Sifft S., Bruggemann M., Kleinen-von Koningslow K., Peters B., Wimmel A. (2007), Segmented Europeanization: Exploring the Legitimacy of the European Union from a Public Discourse Perspective, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 45(1), 127-155.

¹⁴⁴ Koopmans R., Statham P., (eds.) (2010), *The making of a European public sphere: media discourse and political contention*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

¹⁴⁵ De Vreese C. H., Boomgaarden H. G. (2006), Media effects on public opinion about the about the enlargement of the European Union, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 44(2), 419-436.

EU membership as beneficial¹⁴⁶. This effect is less strong for general support for the EU. Additionally, no negative effects were found for the framing of EU news in terms of disadvantages¹⁴⁷. The same study also concluded that framing EU news in terms of conflict caused a decrease in support for the EU and perceptions of it as beneficial, as news of conflict accentuates disagreement and the potential inability of the EU to operate efficiently. On the basis of this research, the overall conclusion is that positively framed EU news create public support for the EU.

The question remains, however, whether EU news is actually positively framed in the media. A variety of studies in the last decade have identified distinct characteristics in the presentation of the EU in the media. The findings can be summarised as EU news being reported predominantly from a national perspective and in a somewhat negative tone¹⁴⁸. From the country studies that have been carried out, it can be concluded that media coverage of the EU varies greatly across Member States (MS), as do the debate thereon and its tone.

In a number of countries, limited attention is paid to the EU in the news, as is the case in Romania. The EU appears in the Romanian media as a 'faceless' and far-removed entity that is capable of (eagerly) controlling the everyday lives of its citizens. Furthermore, the EU is sometimes described as an entity that represents, for many, either a 'saviour' or a 'punisher'¹⁴⁹. Romanian coverage of EU news has been considered by some to be profoundly different from Western European media coverage. While EU events such as summits, conferences, or EP elections are highly visible in Western European media, they are much less visible in the Romanian media. More specifically, studies show that the visibility of EU news in the Romanian media amounted to just 3-4 % of total news broadcasts in neutral periods in 2011, and 15 % in periods of prominent EU events (e.g. EP elections) on the three most-viewed Romanian TV channels (i.e. TVR 1, ProTV, and Antena 1)¹⁵⁰. These results are amongst the lowest in the ranking of EU news broadcasts. The top-ranking elements are social news (30 %) and soft news (28 %). With regard to the framing of messages in the Romanian news, a small study relating to the Schengen case will now be examined as being useful.

¹⁴⁶ Vliegenthart R., Schuck A., Boomgaarden H. G., de Vreese C. H. (2009), News coverage and support for European integration 1990-2006. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 20(4), 415-439.

¹⁴⁷ Vliegenthart R., Schuck A., Boomgaarden H. G., de Vreese C. H. (2009), News coverage and support for European integration 1990-2006. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 20(4), 415-439.

¹⁴⁸ De Vreese C. H., Boomgaarden H. G. (2006), Media effects on public opinion about the about the enlargement of the European Union, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 44(2), 419-436.

¹⁴⁹ Corbu N., Botan M., Bărg oanu A., Negrea E. (2011), *Framing European Issues in Romanian Media*, Centre for Research in Communication, Bucharest, Center for Research in Communication Bucharest.

¹⁵⁰ Corbu N., Botan M., Bărg oanu A., Negrea E. (2011), *Framing European Issues in Romanian Media*, Centre for Research in Communication, Bucharest, Center for Research in Communication Bucharest.

The Schengen case and the Romanian media

The Schengen case as referred to here denotes Romanian media coverage of the debates surrounding Romania's accession to the Schengen area, immediately after Germany and France announced their request for postponement of Romania's and Bulgaria's accession thereto in 2010¹⁵¹. An empirical study carried out on this topic showed a number of interesting results. Firstly, the TV news broadcasts emphasised the political conflict and the general powerlessness of Romanians and Romanian officials in particular¹⁵²; online news broadcasts, however, showed a more moderate desire to take up the scandals and dramas depicted by the TV news. Secondly, the Romanian media portrayed the Schengen case as an example of imbalance between Romania and other EU actors. Some argue that this 'might be explicable by Romania's status of emergent democracy and by the people's own perceptions of their own status as European citizens'. Another pressing problem is the Romanian media's emphasis on stories that centre on conflicts and (political) scandals. TV news channels show a high interest in such stories, while neglecting less sensational news items. A more balanced approach should be adopted in order to better promote the EU in the eyes of its Romanian citizens.

In other Member States (such as the Netherlands, Spain and Sweden), attention is paid to the EU in the media, but not in a structured manner and only when European issues touch on national topics; the tone tends to be neutral. A concrete example is the Netherlands, where the media generally turn their focus towards the EU when there is a concrete need for doing so. Since the beginning of 2014, there has been extensive focus on the European cooperation between the Dutch Populist Party PVV and the French Front National and on the Euro-critical stance of UK Prime Minister David Cameron. Moreover, considerable information has been provided on rescue packages for the euro and the recurring discussion on the costs of EU membership. The EU is presented in the media as a European collaborative enterprise that cannot be ignored; however, it still appears as too far removed from national citizens, albeit depending on the topical aspects of European policy that are being communicated. In Spain, EU issues are not discussed often for their own sake, but only when there is a relevance to Spain as a country. Spanish MEPs say it is almost impossible to be reported on in the Spanish media: an issue has to be national for the Spanish press to take notice, so MEPs commenting on national issues from a European perspective tend to receive more media attention. The framing of the EU is mixed with national politics. The frame is becoming more negative as well, due to the economic problems facing Spain. The political sphere only reports bad news from Brussels: 'more cuts' are needed, the employment situation is bad, wages must be reduced, etc. People feel the crisis as a result of EU policies and, therefore, a negative framing and perception of Europe arises. This has never been the case before in Spain, where in the past the EU did not play an important role in political debate as it was simply seen as a positive entity. In Sweden, the EU is reported in a relatively neutral and balanced manner. It features as story material in both popular broadcasting channels and the press. There have been articles in Swedish newspapers concerning the lack of coverage of EU topics by Swedish news media. The two most-viewed TV channels in Sweden are Sveriges Television (Svt) and Tv4, the two most popular news programmes being Rapport (hosted by Svt) and Nyheterna (hosted by Tv4)¹⁵³. Svt claims to dedicate a whole news programme every

¹⁵¹ This case study is based on the research and findings of Corbu N, Botan M., Bărgăoanu A., Negrea E. (2011), Framing European Issues in Romanian Media, Centre for Research in Communication, Bucharest, Center for Research in Communication Bucharest.

¹⁵² Corbu N, Botan M., Bărgăoanu A., Negrea E. (2011), Framing European Issues in Romanian Media, Centre for Research in Communication, Bucharest, Center for Research in Communication Bucharest.

¹⁵³ MMS (Swedish Media Monitoring Group), Yearly Report 2013, available at: <http://www.mms.se/wp-content/uploads/_dokument/rapporter/tv-tittande/ar/%C3%85srapporter/%C3%85srapport%202013.pdf>

Friday to EU topics and to provide two-minute reports from Brussels several times a week, also being responsible for hosting a broadcast on the 2014 European Parliament elections. However, Svt also indicates that in general public interest in these programmes is very low. Some Member States report more extensively on the EU in the media with a diversity of tone, an example being Germany. In Germany EU affairs are covered by a whole range of media, such as TV, radio, press and internet. The way the EU is depicted in the national media in Germany varies significantly. The EU and its policies are presented from a variety of angles, including positive as well as critical reflections. Additionally, differences can be found in the degree of sophistication of the programme/website/newspaper, which tends to influence the take on certain EU issues.

Finally, the UK is a country characterised by limited media interest in the EU, where European issues are only covered in extraordinary circumstances and often in a negative manner. In the UK, in keeping with politicians' and citizens' attitudes towards the EU, the representation tends to be somewhat negative¹⁵⁴. Given that the attitude towards Europe is relatively constant, with pro-EU groups being more marginal on average, there is not much diversity in the opinions on Europe expressed in the news or the political debates on the subject. If the Eurobarometer studies are used as a reference point, it appears that citizens recognise that the way the EU is represented is at times overly negative¹⁵⁵. The experts consulted in this study also show that there are a few recurring ways in which the UK media represent Europe. The EU is usually discussed in the media using two main frames: 1) the EU as a foreign power inside the UK; and 2) the EU as a forum for bargaining, where UK politicians either do or do not get their way. For instance, during the Maastricht Treaty negotiations, the media reported on the UK's political activity in terms of 'game, set and match', providing a win-or-lose frame to the EU/UK relationship. However, the degrees of these tendencies vary.

Generally, it seems that the press attributes higher salience to Europe in those countries that are involved in all major integration projects and that have actually driven the political process of integration for many years¹⁵⁶. In this study, no distinction was made between publicly and privately funded media, nor was it taken into account which sources are found most trustworthy amongst citizens. Some of the experts consulted claimed that publicly funded radio and television tend to be more trusted, on the grounds that privately funded media have products to sell and advertisers to please and are thus less well positioned to offer unbiased news coverage. Other experts claim that publicly owned or financed media could be vulnerable to political parties playing too great a role in influencing the news, thus undermining objectivity and trust in the media. The situation is different in each country, depending on the political and media culture in place.

4.4. Factors influencing the presentation of Europe in the media

A number of studies have been carried out regarding factors that result in the publication of European news in the media. These include:

- demand for EU-related information;
- the provision of information by EU institutions, which influences news coverage;
- the role of journalists in deciding what to produce¹⁵⁷.

These aspects are further discussed in the subsections below.

¹⁵⁴ Menéndez Alarcón A.V. (2010), Media Representation of the European Union: Comparing Newspaper Coverage in France, Spain, and the United Kingdom, *International Journal of Communication*, 4(1), 398-415.

¹⁵⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/index_en.htm.

¹⁵⁶ Koopmans R., Statham P., eds. (2010), *The making of a European public sphere: media discourse and political contention*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

¹⁵⁷ QKoopmans R., Statham P., eds. (2010), *The making of a European public sphere: media discourse and political contention*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

4.4.1. Demand for EU-related information

A first factor to consider when discussing the appearance of EU news in the media is journalists' perception of readers' demand for (political) information on Europe. Where public interest in European affairs is low, as borne out by opinion polls, there are fewer incentives for journalists to report on such issues. This is also the case when readers' knowledge about European politics is low.

Research, by Koopmans and Statham (2010) amongst others, shows that journalists on national and regional newspapers consider their readership to be less interested in European politics than in politics in general and that readers have little understanding of the workings of European politics¹⁵⁸. This is illustrated by comments that readers are more interested in national politics, in which frontiers are clearer-cut, conflicts are more controversial, the actors are better known and the impact on their own lives is perceived to be bigger. EU news is considered to be too complex and too far removed from the reader. As a result, journalists have little incentive to write about Europe. This, however, does not hold true for journalists working for newspapers with a broad coverage of national and international issues: these feel that their readership has a greater interest in politics and, more specifically, European politics. Their audience generally has a better understanding of how EU politics work. They believe their readers have an interest in an international outlook, specialist knowledge and a desire to keep up to date on global political affairs. Newspapers are commercial enterprises and there is a need to establish loyalty in a readership that identifies with the newspaper.

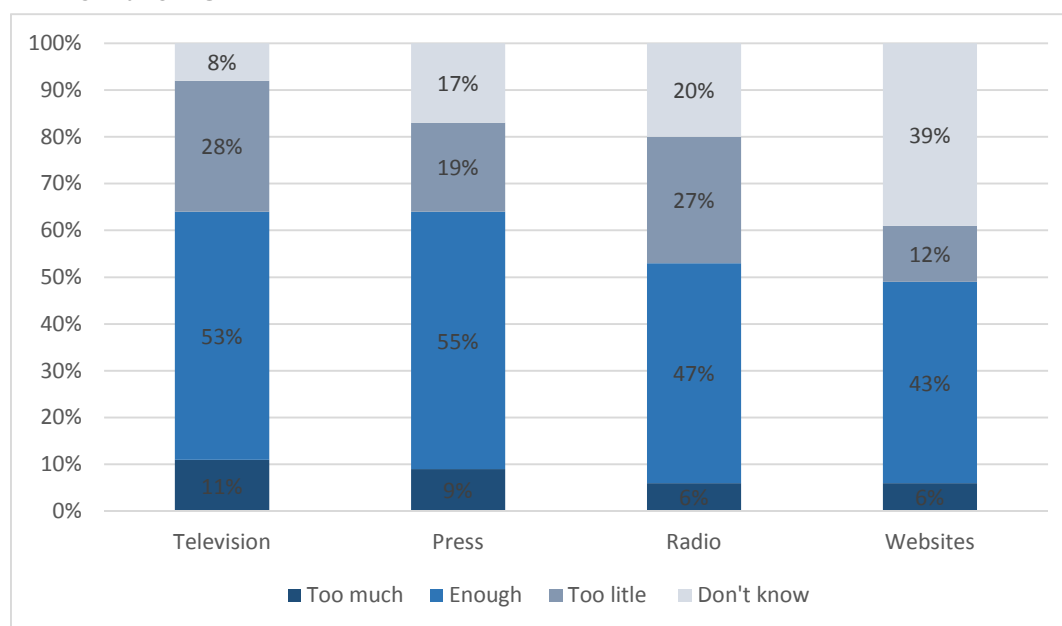
Research on the state of play of the newspaper publishing industry shows declining newspaper readership: however, at the same time the demand for news has never been higher¹⁵⁹. Newspapers have become major internet players. These days most newspapers have websites which offer a number of additional services to their readers. On the internet, newspaper publishers have to compete with broadcasters, citizen journalists and online-only news providers, and have lost some of their readers and advertising revenues to such 'new' providers. The websites of renowned broadcasters and newspapers are often amongst the most visited news sites, but aggregators such as Google News, Yahoo News and other online news providers are attracting increasing numbers of readers.

Although there is a lack of exact data on the demand for EU information, Eurobarometer provides some interesting insights that are worth reporting. It indicates that more than a quarter of respondents think television and radio report too little about the EU, while more than half of the respondents consider that Television and Press offer sufficient coverage of the EU (see figure 7 below).

¹⁵⁸ Koopmans R., Statham P., eds. (2010), *The making of a European public sphere: media discourse and political contention*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

¹⁵⁹ Leurdijk A., Slot M., Nieuwenhuis O. (2012), *The Newspaper Publishing Industry*, Luxembourg, Joint Research Centre.

Figure 7: EU citizens' view on the extent to which different types of media report on the EU



Source: Eurobarometer, Autumn 2013

Closer examination of the Eurobarometer data for each country (not reflected in the figure above) shows that Finland is the country where most people indicate that their national media report on the EU 'enough', followed by Estonia and Slovakia. Respondents are, on average, more likely to say that their media reports too little on the EU in France, the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark and Croatia. In Croatia, however, this feeling has declined sharply since the country's accession to the EU. Respondents are, on average, more likely to say that the media reports too much on the EU in Spain, Cyprus and Romania. Europeans who are most educated and have a strong interest in politics are, on average, more likely to say that their media report 'too little' on the EU, implying that they would like to see more information on the EU in the media. However, within these and other categories, the majority nevertheless believes that national media coverage of the EU is sufficient.

4.4.2. Provision of information by EU institutions and other stakeholders

The media system depends on the input of information from the political system. This is supplied by political actors from EU institutions, social and economic interest groups, NGOs and social movements.

Focusing on the role of EU institutions feeding the media with information, research shows that they make relatively little effort to penetrate the information resource pools of national and regional journalists. EU institutions target EU correspondents considerably more often, indicating that the EU directs its communication at specialists dealing with EU affairs. As a result, information flows from the EU mainly target newspapers with a clear international focus, and, to a limited extent, specialist European correspondents on national and regional newspapers¹⁶⁰.

In addition to the direction of EU information flows, it is also important that journalists should receive newsworthy information to report. Martins et al. (2012) show that there are

¹⁶⁰ Statham P. (2010), Making Europe News. Journalism and Media Performance. In: R. Koopmans and P. Statham, eds., The Making of a European Public Sphere: Media Discourse and Political Contention, 125-151, Cambridge, CUP; Technopolis Group, GHK (2012), Mid-term evaluation

three major features of communication by EU institutions, making it challenging for journalists to process information and make it newsworthy¹⁶¹.

- Firstly, one of the most widely recognised challenges in communication lies in the complexity of the information provided by the EU institutions, which mostly make use of highly technical press materials that are not always easy to understand. This is an increasing problem along with the growth in scope of the EU's competence to include a vast number of policy areas. The EU's work concerns abstract terms and concepts, such as directives, regulations, integration of markets, interconnectivity of networks, security, etc. As a result, an ever-increasing degree of specialisation is required from Brussels correspondents.
- Secondly, the EU institutions produce a constant flow of information which undermines the newsworthiness of European daily politics and increases journalists' workload. Moreover, the length and complexity of decision-making within the EU makes items less newsworthy. Two or three years may pass between the moment when the legislation has been adopted by the EU and the moment when the citizen is affected by it. Although this is not a special feature of European policymaking and also applies at the national level, it is seen as a major issue by journalists.
- Thirdly, information regarding the EU is scattered. This is mainly caused by the existence of a tripartite institutional model (the EP, the Commission and the Council), with the institutions often communicating independently of each other, sometimes sending out mixed messages, and by the phenomenon of competition between EU institutions. Although this is a consequence of how democracy works, having a parliament and government, scholars argue that EU media relations activities are not integrated or consistent¹⁶².

The above conclusions are supported by the findings of expert consultations. The experts consider that in overall terms, the press information provided by the EU institutions is not sufficiently newsworthy and lacks 'juicy' topics, given the culture of striving for consensus. Nevertheless, a certain distinction should be made between how the Commission and Parliament respectively deal with the press. Research shows that the Commission produces more technical and consensus-based information, while the EP has a more political and event-oriented mindset, making it more interesting for journalists¹⁶³. Moreover, the EP has divided its press activity into country sectors, thus allowing its press officers to work more effectively to satisfy the media's requirements in terms of items of national relevance; this is different to practice at the Commission, where press releases are translated into several languages and have to conform to a specific template.

¹⁶¹ Martins A.I., Lecheler S., de Vreese C.H. (2012), Information flow and communication deficit: Perceptions of Brussels-based correspondents and EU officials, *Journal of European Integration*, 34(4), 305-322.

¹⁶² Valentini C., Laursen B. (2012), The mass media: A privileged channel for the EU's. In: Morganti L., Bekemans L., eds., *The European Public Sphere - From critical thinking to responsible action*, 129-146, Brussels, Peter Lang.

¹⁶³ Valentini C., Laursen B. (2012), The mass media: A privileged channel for the EU's. In: Morganti L., Bekemans L., eds., *The European Public Sphere - From critical thinking to responsible action*, 129-146, Brussels, Peter Lang.

Daily practice of a spokesperson¹⁶⁴

The Spokespersons' Service of the European Commission operates on different levels. The first is the level of the official press statement. At this level, it is not possible to frame news. The second is the level of background information for groups and individual journalists, including detailed and neutral information in terms of the procedures behind certain decisions. The third level is rather 'hidden'. At this level, certain journalists are provided with material to enable them to have a scoop on certain issues. Confidence on both sides is paramount. This means that only quite long-lasting relationships allow for this type of confidence. In reality, this type of relationship only occurs with very privileged media organs and/or journalists. The Financial Times is an example of one such organ which relies on this type of information processing.

Some experts argue that if the EU wishes to improve its presence in the media, effective news framing should be considered, even if framing may also be viewed critically. Even though this will increase the news coverage of the EU in a negative as well as positive way, this type of political communication is, in the experts' view, the only mechanism capable of fostering opinions of EU policies which will nonetheless be better-informed and more intelligent, and thus preferable to the present voter apathy¹⁶⁵. Other experts argue that this idea runs explicitly contrary to the existing daily procedures of European politics and decision-making, given that the EU institutions play a role of seeking compromises between governments and interest groups whose positions diverge. To maintain this political practice successfully, the full scope of diplomatic language is required. The experts argue that steps could be taken to make press releases less bureaucratic and technical, using a different kind of language, and, more importantly, better targeting information on different audiences and Member States while not undermining the objective role of the EU institutions. Better framing of EU stories requires competent communications officers. Although earlier studies of the Parliament's Press and Information Directorate¹⁶⁶ and the Commission's media communication activities¹⁶⁷ portrayed EU press officers as 'amateurs' in media relations, communication to journalists has become increasingly professionalised over the last decade, and the EU institutions have developed better media products together with facilities and tools for providing more useful information¹⁶⁸.

With regard to the information provision by EU institutions to journalists, the experts consulted in this study indicate that this is not always effective and organised. Journalists state that they have to struggle to detect elementary information (material, documents, working papers, etc.) within the 'EU machinery', and that is not always easy given the large amount of information available on the internet. Despite improvements being made, such as further developing EU institutions' websites and making them more user-friendly, some journalists claim that it is not always easy to find the most recent policy document in a particular policy domain. Besides websites, information provision is also dependent on ad hoc contact with officials or press officers working for the EU institutions, which is not very much different to common practice at the national level. However, it was indicated that at the national level journalists tend to have their individual sources within government agencies enabling them to retrieve, check and verify official information. This process tends to be more difficult within the arena of the EU institutions for the many EU correspondents.

¹⁶⁴ This information is based on expert statements made during an interview.

¹⁶⁵ Thiel M. (2008), European public spheres and the EU's communication strategy: From deficits to policy fit?, *Perspectives on European Politics and Society*, 9(3), 342-356.

¹⁶⁶ Anderson P. J., McLeod A (2004), The Great Non-Communicator? The Mass Communication Deficit of the European Parliament and its Press Directorate, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 42(5), 897-917.

¹⁶⁷ Meyer C. (1999), Political legitimacy and the invisibility of politics: Exploring the European Union's communication deficit, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 37(4), 617-639.

¹⁶⁸ Valentini C., Nesti G. (2010), *Public communication in the European Union. History, perspectives and challenges*, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK, Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Other actors besides the EU institutions also seem to play an important role in providing information to journalists on developments at the European level. Here, reference is made to the impact of a specific mixture of consulting agencies, together with lobbying organisations or PR agencies. Very often, these organisations enter the stage before the actual decision-making within the European policy-making arena (especially in relation to European regulatory phenomena such as market regulations or economic policy issues). These interest groups, as well as their adversaries, tend to communicate strategically, and this includes their use of the media and journalists. Thus, there is always a decisive element of communicative exchange and public communication preceding the political decision-making at institutional level. Topics and conflicts geared to shape public debate are very often constructed through these channels. It is frequently the case that the media get involved in these types of information battles prior to institutional decision-making at European level without actually realising that they are being used for particular purposes.

4.4.3. Role of journalists

Besides the role of EU institutions and other (lobby) organisations, journalists themselves play an important role in commenting on European issues. Studies on journalism point to a number of barriers hampering effective coverage of European governance, namely¹⁶⁹:

- Resource limitations affecting media organisations' ability to engage in news gathering and research or simply to be present in Brussels;
- Journalists having poor links to EU institutions, affecting their access to official documents, experts, public figures and politicians;
- Difficulties in fitting EU stories in with existing new values and formats;
- Editors giving low priority to European stories;
- Journalists having poor language skills and knowledge deficits about how the EU works;
- Overuse of national interpretative frameworks.

When discussing these barriers, one cannot ignore the current economic situation of the media industry, specifically decreasing budgets and cost-cutting. This is affecting the standards of political journalism. In the cases of both Germany and France, for instance, the number of Brussels correspondents has declined over the years, so that there are fewer correspondents to cover the range of policy areas. At times, only one individual journalist covers Brussels for an outlet and this is not enough, since one person cannot cover everything.

Experts consulted in this study indicate that the pool of journalists in Brussels is declining. This is illustrated by the fact that the European Journalism Centre organises journalistic seminars (with around 800 attendees in the past) but attendance has been steadily declining over the years, as there is reluctance among the media to send representatives to these kinds of EU-focused activities. Strikingly, the largest group of journalists in Brussels is the Chinese. The experts state that Brussels is no longer a place for correspondents and that journalists are increasingly relying on Brussels-based media agencies without getting first-hand information. It has also been indicated that journalists now tend to be younger and less experienced in Brussels affairs. Experts consulted for this study also report decreasing knowledge about how the EU institutions work and the policies in place, and point to the need for training to improving the quality of journalists' work.

¹⁶⁹ These points are based on the findings in Statham P. (2010), *Making Europe News. Journalism and Media Performance*. In: R. Koopmans and P. Statham, eds., *The Making of a European Public Sphere: Media Discourse and Political Contention*, 125-151, Cambridge, CUP.

The experts indicate that the way media organisations and journalists function is also changing. Journalists have become highly autonomous and independent, working from home, rewriting information from other news sources, and framing news in a national context. In addition, they are becoming increasingly dependent on information provided by interest groups and think tanks, due to the limited resources permitting them to come up with news stories about the EU. Interest groups and think tanks are now often asked to provide expertise on developments in given policy areas, thereby influencing the news by providing positions on certain topics. An example here is the UK, where think tanks are doing more and more communication work. According to some of the experts consulted, this is putting the quality of delivery and the status of journalism under pressure.

The question then is how the media will adapt to this situation. In fact, the EU is making efforts towards this, by improving the online streaming capacities of its own outlets, and by hosting seminars for journalists and making greater use of social and newer media.

4.5. Interaction between politics and the media

The way the media report on politics is highly dependent on the relationship between the two. Countries differ in the way politics and the media interact, ranging from those where there is strict separation (with the media in a political watchdog role) to those where the two are closely bound up and mutually dependent. This interaction is an important factor in how the EU and the influence of national politicians are framed in the national media.

Amongst the Member States examined in greater depth in this study, we see that in countries like the UK, Germany and the Netherlands the media have a cooperative but independent role in relation to politicians. In the UK, the relationship between the media and UK politicians is close but based on mutual independence. This may seem paradoxical at first, but the UK media wield a large degree of influence over British politics, often taking on the role of a rather critical watchdog. Nevertheless, British newspapers tend to make their political affiliations known during election time, thereby demonstrating a connection to the political sphere, if not to specific politicians. Additionally, anecdotal evidence points to the existence of a relatively informal relationship between media professionals and politicians. Therefore, the British media appear to be quite liberal in nature yet openly political as well. The respondents consulted also confirmed that the UK media is able to criticise politicians; however, there is also collusion at times (take for instance the 'Murdoch case'). The UK media can be quite antagonistic towards the political sphere, but can also lobby alongside politicians at times for other purposes (for instance, David Cameron said, commenting on the recent phone-hacking scandal in the UK, that 'politicians are too close to the media'). Newspapers in Germany are generally independent of political parties. Traditionally, however, their political orientations have usually been in line with at least one of the parties, and publishers and newspapers have been known to support particular parties¹⁷⁰. This has changed over the last ten years, with newspapers tending to give the public the impression that they are not reliant on or oriented towards a political party. The public radio and TV stations, on the other hand, are known to be indirectly controlled by members of political parties, and this phenomenon even gave rise recently to a case brought before the German Constitutional Court in which it was affirmed that parties exercise undue influence¹⁷¹. In general, the ideologies of the media are not clear, nor are they made obvious¹⁷². In the Netherlands, the relationship between the media and politics

¹⁷⁰ <http://www.goethe.de/wis/med/pnt/zuz/de8418130.htm>

¹⁷¹ <http://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article121573618/Wenn-die-Politik-das-Fernsehen-macht.html>;
<http://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article119708432/Staatsnahe-Rundfunkraete-sind-eher-die-Regel.html>

¹⁷² There are a few exceptions relating to the more marginal left-wing parties, but generally the ideologies of the media are not clear. There are nonetheless atypical cases such as the newspaper 'Die Zeit'.

is an open one. Each gives the other space, and both know they are mutually dependent. One reason for this is that freedom of the press is considered a major value and is rooted in the history and culture of the Netherlands.

Other countries have traditions of the political sphere having a closer relationship with the media. These include Romania and Spain. In Romania, the media are often used for purposes of exerting political influence on the population¹⁷³. Financial considerations also play a role. The Romanian media claim to remain independent, but owing to financial difficulties (and especially the financial crisis) have become vulnerable to economic control by political parties and influential business figures¹⁷⁴. In Spain, the media, and in particular television channels, are relatively politicised. However, the exact relationship between politics and the media system is unclear. It emerges from the findings of experts that there are media actors that are quite pro-government and others that are quite anti-government; the division is not so much between left and right as between for or against the government in power. Relations with the media are, therefore, not so strong where the media outlet is anti-government, and the opposite also holds true.

If there is a close relationship between the media and politicians, and national politicians also tend to take a critical stance towards the EU or provide inaccurate messages about the EU (see Chapter 5), these factors, combined with a lack of knowledge of the EU on the part of national or regional journalists, mean that it is very likely that the EU will also be negatively framed in the media, with a certain impact on public opinion.

4.6. Concluding assessment of the role of the media in communicating Europe

The media play an important role in shaping public opinion among EU citizens, since citizens are informed about EU activities mainly by national and local media (particularly television). In this study, some strengths and weaknesses of the role of the media are identified.

- Research shows that countries differ in the way that the EU is covered in the national and regional media, since no pan-European public sphere yet exists (with the exception of EC-financed broadcasts). Generally, the coverage of EU news is cyclical in its nature, with 'priority peaks' after which the news vanishes from the agenda. Moreover, the EU is considered as largely faceless in the news, and coverage of it is often expressed in neutral or slightly negative terms, as is the case with political news in general. Nevertheless, experts argue that attention paid to the EU in the news has increased over recent years. Research on media data, however, shows that the more often EU news was framed in terms of EU membership benefits, the higher the proportion of people who perceived their country's EU membership to be beneficial.
- The limited coverage in the news is explained by several interrelated factors that determine the nature of news on Europe, namely:
 - Journalists on national and regional newspapers consider their readership to be less interested in European politics than in politics in general and that readers have a low understanding of the workings of European politics. As a result, these journalists have few incentives to write about Europe.
 - The EU institutions make relatively little effort to penetrate the information resource pools of national and regional journalists. Various aspects of the dissemination of information can prove challenging for journalists in terms of the

¹⁷³ Preoteasa M. (2005), *Televiziunea in Europa [Television in Europe]*, EU Monitoring and Advocacy Program, Budapest, Open Society Institute.

¹⁷⁴ Lazar, M., Paun, M. (2014), *Understanding the Logic of EU Reporting in Mass Media: the Case of Romania*. http://www.aim-project.net/uploads/media/Romania_01.pdf. Accessed September 1, 2014.

need to process information to make it newsworthy (focus on EU correspondents/topical specialists, highly technical press material, heavy flow of information, scattered nature of information on the EU owing to the Union's institutional model).

- Since journalists/media organisations generally look for (conflicting) stories and as communication of the EU is often neutral, positive, or free of debate, EU matters are not always reported in the news. Even though the media constitute an independent actor, they are at the same time highly responsive to the supply of news. Studies on journalism point to the existence of barriers to the effective coverage of European news, namely limited resources, insufficient links to EU institutions, low priority given to European stories, insufficient language skills, and insufficient knowledge of how the EU works. When these barriers are discussed, the role of the economic situation of the media industry, with special reference to decreasing budgets and cost reductions, cannot be ignored.
- Younger audience segments to an increasing extent do not turn to traditional media, television included, for information purposes. In this respect and in practice, the coverage of European affairs through traditional media will increasingly serve an ageing audience.
- If the EU institutions wish to influence the media to a greater extent, they need to redesign their communication strategy to take account of political communication and news framing, by maintaining a balance of neutral and authoritative news, which at the same time connect to people's daily lives and allow constructive debate.

5. ROLE OF THE POLITICAL SPHERE IN COMMUNICATING EUROPE

KEY FINDINGS

- Political factors play an important role in impacting the general opinion of the EU. National politicians set the policy agenda in a country and, in so doing, influence the nature of national policy debates.
- On average, EU citizens tend to trust the European Parliament more than their own national parliaments. Declining trust in political institutions can be seen as a general phenomenon crossing borders, although the processes in which it manifests itself are more pressing on a national level.
- The established parties in the countries studied are pro-European, with an exception for the situation in the UK. Nevertheless, public debate and dialogue on the EU are often missing at the national level. The European institutions are very often used by political decision-makers at Member State level as scapegoats to camouflage controversial political moves at national level.
- Members of the European Parliament are not always visible in national debates, given that more and more work is devoted to their legislator role, leaving less time for their representative role or constituency work.
- Personal contact and media coverage are viewed by MEPs as by far the most effective communication tools. Social media are becoming increasingly important and more frequently used by MEPs. Nevertheless, there are some concerns regarding the outreach and effectiveness of this medium.
- The European Commission places a great emphasis on interest groups to act as a communication channel between citizens and policymakers. Although their contribution to improving the 'input and output legitimacy' of the EU is increasingly recognised, it is largely under-researched and under-theorised.
- Little is known about whether public consultations end up achieving their goals in practice or not.

5.1. Introduction

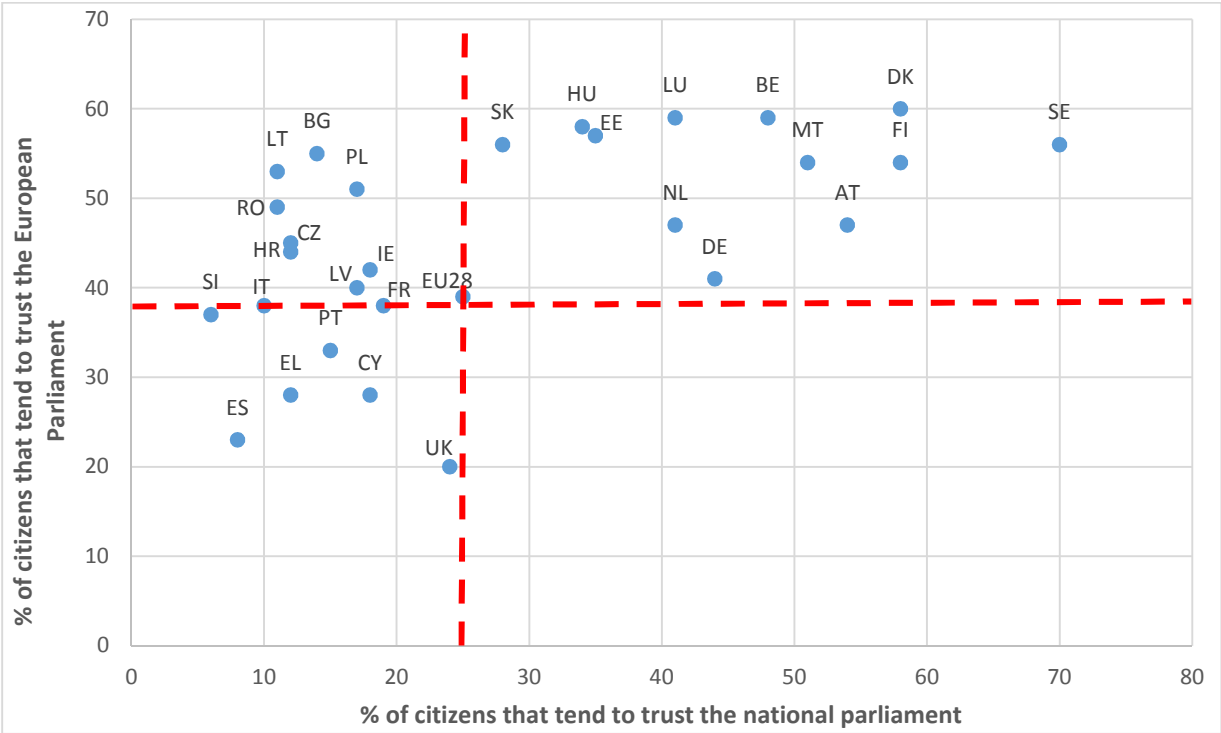
The role of the political sphere in forming public perception has already been referred to in the previous chapters, but the subject will be discussed in greater detail in this chapter, with a view to achieving a full understanding of the political mechanisms involved. The political sphere can impact public perception towards Europe in two main ways: firstly, by upholding faith in politics and political systems, and secondly, by helping to establish the policy agenda, influencing what are perceived as pressing issues for a society. This in turn frames the nature of the policy debates occurring within a country, including the perception of the EU among national citizens. It should be borne in mind here as well that cultural history and social and economic forces in a country affect how citizens view national as well as European politics. This in turn affects the policy agenda and the rhetoric which politicians use.

Section 5.2 of this chapter describes levels of trust in politicians and the political system. Subsequently, Section 5.3 discusses the policy agenda at national level and the framing of national policy debate on Europe, while Section 5.4 discusses the role of MEPs in communicating Europe. Section 5.5 discusses the role of civil society and stakeholder consultation. Finally, Section 5.6 concludes with an assessment of the main strengths and weaknesses and the challenges ahead.

5.2. Trust in politicians and the political system

Statistics show that faith in politics has been steadily declining over the years. This decline in confidence applies to both national politics and EU politics (as presented in Figure 8).

Figure 8: Percentage of citizens tending to trust their national parliament (X axis) versus percentage tending to trust the EP (Y axis). The red line is the EU average.¹⁷⁵



Source: Standard Eurobarometer 80, Autumn 2013.

Figure 8 above shows that, on average, EU citizens tend to trust the EP more than their own national parliaments (25% versus 39%, as presented by the red line). There are only five Member States where a higher percentage of citizens indicate that they tend to trust national parliaments more than the EP (namely Sweden, Finland, Germany, Austria, and the UK). Sweden, in particular, reports high figures for its citizens' level of trust in their own national parliament. Regarding the other Member States, many are characterised by higher percentages of trust in the EP than in the national parliament. This is the case with Lithuania, Bulgaria, Romania, Poland, the Czech Republic, Croatia, Slovenia, Italy, Slovakia, Hungary, Ireland and Latvia (all scoring a 20% higher percentage of trust in the EP versus the national parliament). These results show that the declining and low figures for levels of trust in political institutions can be seen as a general phenomenon that crosses borders, although the processes of declining trust are more pressing at a national level. Research shows that there is a strong correlation between how national citizens assess national politicians and European politicians.¹⁷⁶

In the country studies implemented within the context of this study, mechanisms were further explored explaining this declining and low level of trust in the national parliaments, and, to a lesser extent, the EP.

¹⁷⁵ Standard Eurobarometer 80, Autumn 2013.

¹⁷⁶ Hartevelde E., van der Meer T., De Vries C.E. (2013), In Europe we trust? Exploring three logics of trust in the European Union, European Union Politics, 14(4), 542-565.

- In Spain, trust in the national democratic system itself seems to be relatively high but there is great disillusionment with the Spanish politicians running the system. Spanish citizens feel remote and disengaged from politicians, seeing them as estranged from the needs of the public, corrupt and governing in the interests of the elite¹⁷⁷. Considerable amounts of information in this respect have been circulating since the financial crisis, and scandals have flared up in political parties.
- In Germany, there are various reasons for the declining level of trust in politicians. According to one poll, more and more citizens generally question the credibility of politicians and believe that they lead a life disconnected from reality. In addition, many citizens feel that election campaign promises have not been kept and that they were therefore betrayed, or else criticise clientelist policies¹⁷⁸.
- In the UK, reasons that may explain the sharp fall in the level of trust in politicians include the parliamentary expenses scandal of 2010, the phone-hacking scandal involving the media (the media being seen as in some cases as decidedly close to the political sphere), and the resultant inquiries into both scandals, which have damaged British people's trust in their politicians.
- In Romania, a sharp decline in trust in political institutions has been reported over the last few years¹⁷⁹. Many factors may play a role in this process and it may be difficult to determine the exact reasons. However, one contributing factor in the case of Romania may well be the political conflict of 2012 between President Traian Băsescu and Prime Minister Victor Ponta, which started as a disagreement between the two about Romania's representation in the European Council but escalated into a parliamentary vote impeaching President Băsescu in July 2012 and a referendum being called on 29 July 2012 on that impeachment. The referendum resulted in an overwhelming majority supporting the dismissal of the President. Nonetheless, on 21 August 2012, the Constitutional Court (by a vote of 6 to 3) decided that the impeachment referendum was invalid, and that President Băsescu could return to his position as head of state. The Court based its decision on evidence showing that the results of the referendum were based on false data. The conflict ended with an agreement between Băsescu and Ponta in December 2012. This political conflict could explain the Romanian population's decreasing levels of trust in political institutions. There are currently conflicts with street protests and (often violent) demonstrations in various parts of the country.

This declining trust in national politicians also has its effect on trust in politicians in general, and therefore also in the EP, since MEPs also represent their own national political parties. Respondents in this study expressed their concerns regarding the quality of MEPs and the status they have in their home countries. It was argued that in some countries being an MEP is seen as a prestigious job and the best and brightest go to Brussels, while in other countries the reputation of MEPs is less favourable and politicians follow this career path when they cannot make it in national politics.

¹⁷⁷ Prieto J. (2012), Spain discovers Euroscepticism amid economic gloom, The Guardian, January 26. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/jan/26/spain-discovers-euroscepticism-crisis-eu>. Accessed September 1, 2014.

¹⁷⁸ <http://www.merkur-online.de/aktuelles/politik/umfrage-deutsche-vertrauen-politikernweniger-2626964.html>

¹⁷⁹ Mesagerul, Sondaj INSCOP Research: Increderea în partidele politice a ajuns la 14,8 % [Trust in political parties has reached the level of 14.8 %] (10 October 2013), available at: <http://www.mesagerul.ro/2013/10/10/sondaj-inscop-research-increderea-partidele-politice-ajuns-la-148> (last accessed 14 February 2014); see also INSCOP Research, Increderea Românilor în Instituțiile Publice [Romanians' Trust in Public Institutions], available at: <http://www.inscop.ro/martie-2013-increderea-romanilor-in-institutiile-publice/> (last accessed 14 February 2014), and Adevarul, Adevărul despre România [The truth about Romania], (13 May 2013), available at: http://adevarul.ro/news/politica/adevarul-despre-romania-politistii-mai-incredere-decat-jurnalistii-1_518fc167053c7dd83f90e2e7/index.html (last accessed 14 February 2014).

5.3. Setting the policy agenda at national level and framing the national policy debate

The second mechanism through which the political sphere can influence public perception of Europe is by providing the public with cues as to which issues are important to the national society. National politics can thus set the policy agenda and, in so doing, influence the national policy debate. Politicians are also opinion-makers to a certain extent, as citizens rely on them for information concerning what policy issues are important, at national level as well as within the EU as a whole.

An illustration of what issues play a role in national policy debates in the six Member States studied is provided hereunder.

Overview of political discourse on Europe in the six studied MS

In the Netherlands, the PVV (the Dutch Party for Freedom) takes the view that it would be better for the country to leave the EU. Although, this view is not shared by the mainstream and the governing parties, the PVV has had the effect of putting the issue of Europe on the national policy agenda. In practice, political parties tend to strongly favour European integration. More surprising was the outcome of the referendum on the European Constitution in 2005, in which 62% voted 'no'. An explanation for this 'no' vote may be found in various developments at level national (e.g. rising prices and the performance of the incumbent government) about which the Dutch wanted to express their discontent. Nevertheless, the political climate is changing. Support for further European integration is no longer obvious. Traditionally pro-European parties make more comments on certain developments within the EU, while other parties, such as the SGP and SP – as well as the PVV – are fiercely critical. Debates regarding the EU centre on aspects such as banking, fiscal, economic and political union, although different parties have their own areas of concern. The D66 (Liberal Democratic Party) emphasises issues such as transparency and control, the CDA (the Christian Democratic Party) emphasises prosperity, security and peace, the PVDA (Labour Party) emphasises the need for a stable European banking system and the VVD (People's Party for Freedom and Democracy) emphasises economic growth and prosperity. The parties are against the interference of the EU in policy domains relating to the health system, pensions, housing, taxes and social security. In the Netherlands, however, it is mostly only the PVV that opposes the euro and further European integration. This party is gaining a lot of attention in the media, due to its emotive and discursive statements, and is regularly the driver of news regarding Europe. The stability of the political environment that typified the Netherlands for years no longer exists. It can be seen that the PVV has helped to bring Europe into the public debate and keep it there, and has generated attention to and interest in the EU among the public in the Netherlands.

The two main political parties in Spain are the Spanish Workers' Socialist Party (PSOE) and the conservative People's Party (PP). While the two are at different ends of the ideological spectrum and have different ideas on how to improve the situation in Spain, both are implicitly pro-European¹⁸⁰. Prior to the financial crisis, Spain was characterised by relatively high levels of confidence, identification and appreciation regarding the EU. This is rooted in its specific history, namely being under the Franco dictatorship until the mid-1970s. As a result, there is unease amongst the Spanish regarding the country's national symbols and culture. Additionally, this background of dictatorship in the culture of Spain might explain the high value which the Spanish place on values such as human rights and respect for

¹⁸⁰ Molina I., Toygür I. (2012), Future of Spain, Future of Europe: A Dream or a Nightmare? http://eu.boell.org/sites/default/files/uploads/2013/12/europe_from_a_spanish_perspective-final_version.pdf. Accessed September 1, 2014.

human life, the main values that they tend to associate with Europe. In a similar vein, the EU has traditionally been seen as a solution to Spain's problems in the post-Franco era. Spanish people and politicians alike have been remarkably pro-European, and do not tend to see much conflict between their national and European identities; indeed the national identity is seen as part of the European identity, 'nested' within it¹⁸¹. This positive attitude towards the EU has been historically and culturally conditioned, and that fact may explain the high levels of attachment to the EU and of feelings of affiliation despite relatively low levels of knowledge of how the EU works and the political issues on the EU agenda. While faith in both the EU and the national government has waned in Spain, there is still ultimately a pro-European attitude. When there is debate on Europe, it concerns more how the EU can help the cause of a given party, as opposed to membership of the EU itself. Policy discourse in Spain centres mainly on economic considerations and unemployment. The main current debate there in connection with the EU has been over acceptance of a second bailout package, which, it is argued, would undermine Spain's international image and reputation as a market and would entail a supervision programme as well. On the other hand, the factors of the public debt and high borrowing costs for both private and public companies are invoked in favour of accepting such a package¹⁸². The main discussion surrounding the EU, therefore, appears to concern how best to use the EU to make Spain better, rather than relating to the EU itself. While the Spanish people's perception of the benefits of the EU has cooled over the years, there has been no debate over leaving the Union. The experts agree that this is part of the Spanish tradition: the country is pro-European and there is no debate over EU membership, though feelings towards the EU have become less positive since the crisis. There is not much dialogue amongst citizens either. The main political parties are pro-Europe, and only small marginal parties are not really pro-Europe. From this it can be deduced that the cultural, social and economic situation in Spain has played a role in influencing the political debate concerning Europe. Public opinion and the views of politicians appear to play off each other, in that politicians do not mention the possibility of leaving the EU, nor does the public consider it a viable solution to national problems. The political debate on Europe is, therefore, not framed in terms of leaving or staying in the EU; rather, it focuses on how best to move forward within the EU.

The two biggest parties in Germany are the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), which together make up the current 'grand coalition' government¹⁸³. Both parties are generally in favour of the EU and support further integration and the solution of current problems within the EU framework¹⁸⁴. The Green Party, which has repeatedly formed part of the government and generally achieves around 10 % of the vote in the elections, also supports a strong EU¹⁸⁵. The Left Party, represented in the Bundestag after winning roughly 9% of the vote, favours the EU but opposed the Lisbon Treaty and wishes to see a significantly different Union. In particular, it opposes the provisions in the Treaty which concern the perceived militarisation of the Union's security and defence policy, the orientation of the EU towards neo-liberal policy, the lack of emphasis on state welfare provision, the plans for closer cooperation between police and

¹⁸¹ Molina I., Toygür I. (2012), Future of Spain, Future of Europe: A Dream or a Nightmare? http://eu.boell.org/sites/default/files/uploads/2013/12/europe_from_a_spanish_perspective-final_version.pdf. Accessed September 1, 2014.

¹⁸² Molina I., Toygür I. (2012), Future of Spain, Future of Europe: A Dream or a Nightmare? http://eu.boell.org/sites/default/files/uploads/2013/12/europe_from_a_spanish_perspective-final_version.pdf. Accessed September 1, 2014.

¹⁸³ For the results of the 2013 elections, see <http://wahl.tagesschau.de/wahlen/2013-09-22-BT-DE/>

¹⁸⁴ http://www.spd.de/themen/112510/koav_europa.html;
http://www.ruhrnachrichten.de/nachrichten/politik/aktuelles_berichte/Koalitionsverhandlungen-Union-und-SPD-sind-sich-einig-ueber-kuenftige-Europapolitik;art29862,2188274

¹⁸⁵ http://www.gruene-bundestag.de/themen/europa_ID_127756.html

security authorities within the EU, and the democratic deficit of the EU and its institutions¹⁸⁶. In the last elections, other parties did not reach the 5% hurdle required to enter the Bundestag. However, it is worth taking note of the newly founded party Alternative for Germany (AfD), whose Eurosceptic doctrine is its *raison d'être* and which advocates a Union with reduced powers and more control through national parliaments¹⁸⁷. The AfD obtained 4.7% of the vote in 2013 (the first time it contested a federal election) and thus only narrowly missed entering the Bundestag. In Germany, there is lively policy discourse on the EU within parties, between parties and between those actors and citizens and the media. The role of politicians as opinion makers and framers of policy debates can be seen here in that the diverse party positions towards the EU play a role in creating this lively policy discourse on Union matters. Firstly, the debate concerns the EU's governance structure and, in particular, the democratic deficit and perceived solutions, such as shifting power to the EP or reclaiming it for national parliaments. Furthermore, it is discussed whether the EU should move towards a *de facto* federation or, at the other extreme, whether Germany should leave the EU¹⁸⁸. Another hot topic is the measures taken in order to tackle the euro crisis and there is much debate on the effects of the austerity policy supported by Germany¹⁸⁹. A further point of debate concerns citizens' perception that the EU satisfies the interests of an international elite by circumventing democratic institutions. This opinion can be found, for example, in comments on online newspaper articles, which tend to be anti-EU. As indicated, national politicians tend to publicly connect their problems with the EU and Brussels. Transnational issues are portrayed as the fault of the EU; indeed, German politicians want them to be the EU's fault¹⁹⁰.

The largest Romanian political party, the Social Democratic Party (in Romanian: Partidul Social Democrat), which is also the political party of the current prime minister, Victor Ponta, maintains close cooperation with the EU. Its political programme puts great emphasis on fostering good relations with the EU, considering it a catalyst for economic reform and social and institutional improvement in Romania¹⁹¹. The second largest political party, the National Liberal Party (in Romanian: Partidul Național Liberal), has a similar positive position on the EU. Its political programme considers the EU to represent an important milestone in the development of Romania and commits it to facilitating the integration of EU values into Romanian society¹⁹². Interestingly, the party also pledges to better promote EU values (albeit without defining what these are exactly) with respect to the media, educational institutions, officials, politicians and, most importantly, the general public¹⁹³. The third biggest party, the Conservative Party (in Romanian: Partidul Conservator), is less ambitious with regard to the EU than the other two. Its statutes only affirm that it commits itself to ensuring that Romania lives up to its commitments undertaken with the EU¹⁹⁴. In practice, this party sees the EU as a necessary vehicle for

¹⁸⁶ <http://www.die-linke.de/partei/dokumente/programm-der-partei-die-linke/iv5-wie-wollen-wir-die-europaeische-union-grundlegend-umgestalten-demokratie-sozialstaatlichkeit-oekologie-und-frieden/>

¹⁸⁷ <https://www.alternativefuer.de/partei/wahlprogramm/>

¹⁸⁸ <http://blog.openeuropeberlin.de/2013/06/cducsu-und-spd-was-unterscheidet-die.html>

¹⁸⁹ <http://www.spiegel.de/wirtschaft/soziales/vier-wege-aus-der-euro-krise-was-eine-bankenunion-bringt-a-836873.html>;

<http://www.fr-online.de/meinung/wege-aus-der-euro-krise-der-sparkurs-blamiert-deutschland,1472602,22533526.html>

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Partidul Social Democrat [Social Democratic Party], Program Politic [Political programme], available at: <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/ialhi/90141/90141.pdf>.

¹⁹² Partidul National Liberal [National Liberal Party], *Relații Externe și Afacerile Europene [External relations and EU affairs]*, available at: <http://www.pnl.ro/subpagina/capitolul-12-rela-iile-externe-i-afacerile-europene> (last accessed 24 February 2014).

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Partidul Conservator [Conservative Party], Statutul Partidului Conservator [Statute of the Party] (2012), available at: <http://www.partidulconservator.ro/valori-conservatoare/statut/> (last accessed 24 February 2014).

Romania's economic welfare and 'historical reparation', compensating for the decades under communism¹⁹⁵. Policy discourse is generally centred on topics that directly impact Romania and its citizens. Such topics include debates on solutions for accession to the Schengen area¹⁹⁶ or the recent termination of the seven-year transitional period which lifts working restrictions for Romanians in various MS¹⁹⁷. It is perhaps interesting also to note that the Romanian Parliament's Chamber of Deputies has a specialised Committee on European Affairs¹⁹⁸. This ensures that Romanian interests and EU policies are discussed in parliament. Furthermore, there is a separate Directorate for EU law, comprising subdivisions including an EU Policies Office, a case-law monitoring unit and a database and translation unit¹⁹⁹. This Directorate provides the professional expertise in the field of EU policies and law needed to advise the parliament. Studies show that press discourse on EU-related matters concentrates mainly on Romania's accession to the EU and includes topics such as EU definitions and symbols, institutions ensuring the functionality of the EU and the effects and consequences of Romania's integration process, particularly in the political, economic, social and cultural sectors. Romanians have a strong belief that the EU stands as a symbol and vehicle for democratic principles. The fact that Romanians attach a high relevance to democracy when perceiving the policies of the EU may be the result of the country's political history. The fall of communism in 1989 resulted in major political reforms and the current main political parties in Romania have all committed themselves to democratic values. Once more, the combined roles of cultural history and other societal factors, along with the nature of the policy debate on Europe, can be seen to be shaping how politicians approach and discuss Europe. This has the reiterative effect of influencing national thinking towards Europe as well.

If one looks at the United Kingdom as a whole, the political sphere is not favourable regarding the EU. The EU debate has formed a recurring theme in British politics, particularly since the 1980s when Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government fought hard to enjoy the benefits of the EU whilst attempting to keep control over British affairs with the national government. Today, the issue of the EU remains a contentious one in the eyes of the general public and the political class in the UK, with many people in both areas resenting the increasing influence and powers of Brussels, coupled with feelings such as the EU being overly bureaucratic, a waste of money and not offering the UK many (visible) benefits in return²⁰⁰. Although Tony Blair's Labour government of 1997–2007 saw him push

¹⁹⁵ Partidul Conservator [Conservative Party], Cartea Valorilor PC [Book of values of the CP], <http://filosofiepolitica.wordpress.com/elemente-de-doctrina/partidul-conservator/> (last accessed 24 February 2014).

¹⁹⁶ Radio România Actualități, România 'poate proteja frontiera Schengen' [Romania can protect the Schengen border], (14 February 2014), available at: http://www.romania-actualitati.ro/romania_poate_proteja_frontiera_schengen-58180 (last accessed 15 February 2014). See also: Mediafax, România și Bulgaria NU vor intra în spațiul Schengen la 1 ianuarie 2014. Sunt prea multe opuneri [Romania and Bulgaria will not enter the Schengen area on 1 January 2014], (12 November 2013), available at: <http://www.mediafax.ro/politic/jose-manuel-barroso-romania-si-bulgaria-nu-vor-intra-in-spatiul-schengen-la-1-ianuarie-2014-sunt-prea-multe-opuneri-11666506> (last accessed 15 February 2014). From the academic sphere, see P. Dobrescu and A. Bargaoanu, The Discourse of Romanian Elites on an EU Topic: Islands of Europeanization in the Romanian Public Sphere, 4 Romanian Journal of Communication and Public Relations (2011).

¹⁹⁷ Capital, Ce se va schimba de la 1 ianuarie 2014 pentru muncitorii români și bulgari [What will change from 1 January 2014 for Romanian and Bulgarian workers] (22 December 2013), available at: <http://www.capital.ro/ce-se-va-schimba-de-la-1-ianuarie-2014-pentru-muncitorii-romani-si-bulgari-190191.html> (last accessed 15 February 2014).

¹⁹⁸ Parlamentul României Camera Deputaților [Romanian Parliament], Comisia pentru Afaceri Europene [Committee on EU Affairs], available at: <http://www.cdep.ro/pls/parlam/structura.co?idc=33> (last accessed 14 February 2014).

¹⁹⁹ Parlamentul României Camera Deputaților [Romanian Parliament], Direcția de Drept Comunitar [Directorate on EU law], available at: <http://www.cdep.ro/pls/dic/site.page?id=884&idl=1> (last accessed 14 February 2014).

²⁰⁰ Spiering M. (2007), British Euroscepticism, published on Politeia – Network for Citizenship and Democracy in Europe, Politeia Newsletter, 46. <http://politeia.net/>. Accessed September 1, 2014.

for more integration in the EU as being of potential economic benefit to the UK, the current UK government, constituting a coalition between the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats, tends to have a somewhat negative view of the EU²⁰¹. While politicians did not feel the urge to start a debate on Europe, in 2014 the current Prime Minister, David Cameron, broke the silence by calling for a referendum on the UK's membership of the EU. Despite a rich diversity of EU-focused think tanks in the UK, there is not much publicly covered dialogue regarding the EU. There is much debate in the media on Europe, but there is always a feeling that the EU is someone else's project. There is a political uneasiness regarding the EU, a de facto disconnection between the EU and the UK on a more fundamental level. Recently, however, the debate has become more lively and mixed, with a sense of a perceived need for reforms. Politicians are also not able to explain the EU properly, nor are they able to underline the importance of the EU. Most debate in the UK surrounding the EU tends to have a more negative tone; there is a national mentality of Euroscepticism, which tends to inform debates on the issue in the media and at a political and public level²⁰². Most citizens are not greatly involved in these debates. Recently, the business community, which does see the advantages of Europe and its single market, has been motivated to become involved in the debate.

In Sweden, there are eight political parties currently represented in the national parliament²⁰³. The Centre Party has an overall positive view of the EU and wants it to deal with broader issues (such as the environment, trade, and fighting crime), while believing that the MS should be left to deal with more narrow issues (such as education, pensions, and welfare)²⁰⁴. The Liberal Party of Sweden is also positive with regard to the EU and describes itself as Sweden's most Europe-friendly political party²⁰⁵. The Christian Democrats are mostly pro-EU, though there are areas that receive criticism, such as the single currency and the current level of centralisation²⁰⁶. The Moderate Party is also mostly positive with regard to the EU; however, like the Centre Party, it sets clear limits as to what it thinks the EU should deal with and what should be left to the MS²⁰⁷. The Social Democrats are also pro-EU²⁰⁸. The Green Party is more sceptical with regard to the EU and thinks it has moved in the wrong direction with more centralisation and taking competences away from the MS, but it does not want Sweden to leave the EU: rather, it believes the EU should take a step back in the process of integration²⁰⁹. The Swedish Democrats are even more sceptical with regard to the EU and want to renegotiate Swedish EU membership as a whole²¹⁰. The Left Party is the most Eurosceptic party of all the above mentioned parties and is actively against Swedish membership of the EU²¹¹. Debates on topics concerning the

²⁰¹ Gouglass D. (2012), Britain's rocky European Relationship, Social Europe Journal. <http://www.social-europe.eu/2012/05/britains-rocky-european-relationship/>. Accessed September 1, 2014.

²⁰² Spiering M. (2007), British Euroscepticism, published on Politeia – Network for Citizenship and Democracy in Europe, Politeia Newsletter, 46. <http://politeia.net/>. Accessed September 1, 2014.

²⁰³ Centerpartiet (the Centre Party), Folkpartiet (the Liberal Party of Sweden), Kristendemokraterna (the Christian Democrats), Miljöpartiet De Gröna (the Green Party), Moderata Samlingspartiet (the Moderate Party), Socialdemokraterna (the Social Democrats), Sverigedemokraterna (the Swedish Democrats), and Vänsterpartiet (the Left Party)

²⁰⁴ The Centre Party (website), Our Politics – The EU. Available at <http://www.centerpartiet.se/Var-politik/Politikomraden/EU/Politik-A---O/EU/>

²⁰⁵ The Liberal Party of Sweden (website), EU. Available at <http://www.folkpartiet.se/eu/>

²⁰⁶ The Christian Democrats (website), Kristendemokraterna antar EU-politiskt program. Available at <http://www.kristdemokraterna.se/Media/Nyhetsarkiv/Kristdemokraterna-antar-ny-poliitk-infor-EU-valet/>

²⁰⁷ The Moderate Party (website), EU skal göra rätt saker. Available at <http://www.moderat.se/eu/eu-ska-gora-ratt-saker>

²⁰⁸ The Social Democrats (website), Vår politik, Europapolitik. Available at <http://www.socialdemokraterna.se/Webben-for-alla/EU/EU/Var-politikny/Europapolitik/>

²⁰⁹ The Green Party (website), just nu – klimatval. Available at <http://www.mp.se/just-nu/gront-klimatval>

²¹⁰ The Swedish Democrats (website), Vår politik, Sverigedemokraterna och EU. Available at <https://sverigedemokraterna.se>

²¹¹ The Left Party (website), EU – Fördjupning. Available at <http://www.vansterpartiet.se/fordjupning/eu-fordjupning/>

EU are held in parliament in Sweden on a regular basis. For instance, between 2012 and 2013 there were over 450 such lectures and debates. The content of these debates varies widely and may concern any aspect of Sweden's relationship with the EU, as well as the EU's relationship with third countries. The Eurosceptic parties are very active in debates, with the Swedish Democrats being the political party that voices its concerns about the EU most often. However, it is important also to mention that the political parties that are positive about the EU have a much broader representation in these debates. The Swedish situation thus offers a picture of a mixed but engaged debate on Europe, which is echoed and reinforced at the political level.

If one attempts to generalise from the situation in the six countries studied, it may be concluded that established parties tend to be pro-European, except in the UK. All over Europe, a change is noticeable in the political landscape, and European elections are often used to send out protest votes directed at the sitting government in a given country. Moreover, critics of the EU tend to vote differently in European elections than in national elections: they may vote for a party which they do not otherwise support but which takes a critical stand on Europe. A specific finding from the research carried out is that sometimes national politicians play a negative role when framing the role of the EU towards national citizens. In Germany and Spain, there are dual dynamics at work. On the one hand, people rely on national politics to indicate what the pressing policy issues are at the EU level, owing to the distance many people feel towards the EU. On the other hand, national politicians are also rather quick to use the EU and Brussels as a scapegoat for unwelcome policies which they may or may not have supported in EU-level policy debates. Interviews with experts suggest that this latter dynamic has occurred in the countries studied, in the light of the fears existing among certain segments of those countries' population regarding further regulation from Brussels. By framing national policy debates in such a way that Brussels is seen as imposing rules and by focusing on specific problems facing a country, national politicians can influence how their national public judges Europe.

5.4. Role of the EP and its members

The most significant change in the institutional structure of the EP over the past two decades has been the growth in the powers of Parliament²¹². Moreover, enlargement has meant enormous changes for Parliament, boosting its size and diversity. Enlargement has also involved the entry into the EP of politicians from countries having very different political histories and political cultures from those of older MS. At the same time, the broader political environment of the EP has become much more problematic.

MEPs play an important role in communicating Europe. According to a study by Coleman and Nathanson, an MEP has three interlinked and inseparable roles, namely those of representative, party actor and legislator²¹³. Much of how MEPs are seen by citizens is dependent on how they perform these different roles in general, but in particular on how they represent their citizens' interests in the EP. This however runs counter to the fact that the role they play is not restricted to representing citizens from their home country, but representing citizens of the EU as a whole, since representing citizens' interests is often in line with representing policy areas/committee-related interests as well. The researcher Giacomo Benedetto argues that, thanks to the increased powers of the EP as joint decision-maker on EU legislation, MEPs have become more and more knowledgeable on the issues

²¹² Hix, S., Hoyland B. (2011), *The Political System of the European Union*, 3rd edn. London, Palgrave Macmillan.

²¹³ EPRI Knowledge Project, (2005), *Parliamentarians and ICTs: Awareness, Understanding and Activity Levels of European Parliamentarians*, Bussels, EPRI.
http://www.erepresentative.org/docs/8_IST_for_parliamentarians_2005.pdf . Accessed September 1, 2014.

they work on and may now be seen as policy experts²¹⁴. This could result in more and more work being devoted to their legislative role, leaving less time for their representative role or for constituency work²¹⁵.

Another issue is that MEPs' increasing work as legislators calls for policy expertise and necessitates them being provided with accurate and balanced information, partly in writing, but also information from experts and citizens themselves. In this way, MEPs play a dual but central role in conveying a message from Europe (being the voice), as well as listening to citizens' concerns and playing a role in EU policies that influence the daily lives and working environment of citizens.

Regarding the role of MEPs' political work, an oft-heard claim, echoed by the experts consulted in this study, is that it is difficult to identify the distinguishing political views of MEPs, especially at party level. Political parties at the EU level are considered as hardly distinct, since they are organised along broad lines, reorganising and combining very easily. This problem was already addressed by scholars at the time of the first EP elections, indicating that the political groups within the EP are not yet transnational political parties but rather only broad coalitions or alliances composed of different national parties²¹⁶. This state of affairs has not changed since then. For this reason, political parties lack a clear profile, resulting in very little connection of citizens with politics at EU level. For citizens, it is also difficult to find information on where parties and politicians stand. Some experts consulted for this study argue that the appearance of Eurosceptic parties in the EP could help make the mainstream parties more active and impel them to come up with more concrete policy agendas on Europe. Such parties are more closely aligned with the public, and greater involvement on their part at EU level would be a good thing for EU policy debates. Other experts are more sceptical, arguing that the established elite probably faces problems in countering the Eurosceptic parties' attacks, thus making Europe more difficult to govern.

According to a recent survey, it is clear that MEPs find it extremely important to represent their constituents²¹⁷. In 2010, around three-quarters of Members claimed this to be one of the most important aspects of their work. Nevertheless, the country studies implemented in the course of this study conclude that MEPs are not always visible in national debates and tend to distance themselves from national affairs. It was argued that MEPs should play a stronger role in conveying the national interest of EU developments to their Member State. The surveys targeting MEPs also show that eight out of ten members consider online and email activity to be crucial for communication with their constituents. There are, however, also studies that indicate that responsiveness of MEPs via email is low. A recent study, published in 2013, included an experiment in which ordinary citizens sent emails in their native language to an MEP from their Member State: some 29% responded (in comparable US studies, the equivalent figure was over 50%)²¹⁸. The findings of this survey also showed considerable variation between Member States in response rates. While in Luxembourg and Slovenia roughly three-quarters of MEPs responded, less than a quarter of Lithuanian or French MEPs replied. Interestingly, there is significant variation in the response rates of the

²¹⁴ Benedetto G. (2005), 'Rapporteurs as legislative entrepreneurs: the dynamics of the codecision procedure in Europe's Parliament', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 12(1), 67-88

²¹⁵ See calendar at: www.europarl.europa.eu

²¹⁶ Pridham G. and Pridham P. (1981), *Transnational Party Co-operation and European Integration: The Process Towards Direct Elections*, Boston, George Allen & Unwin

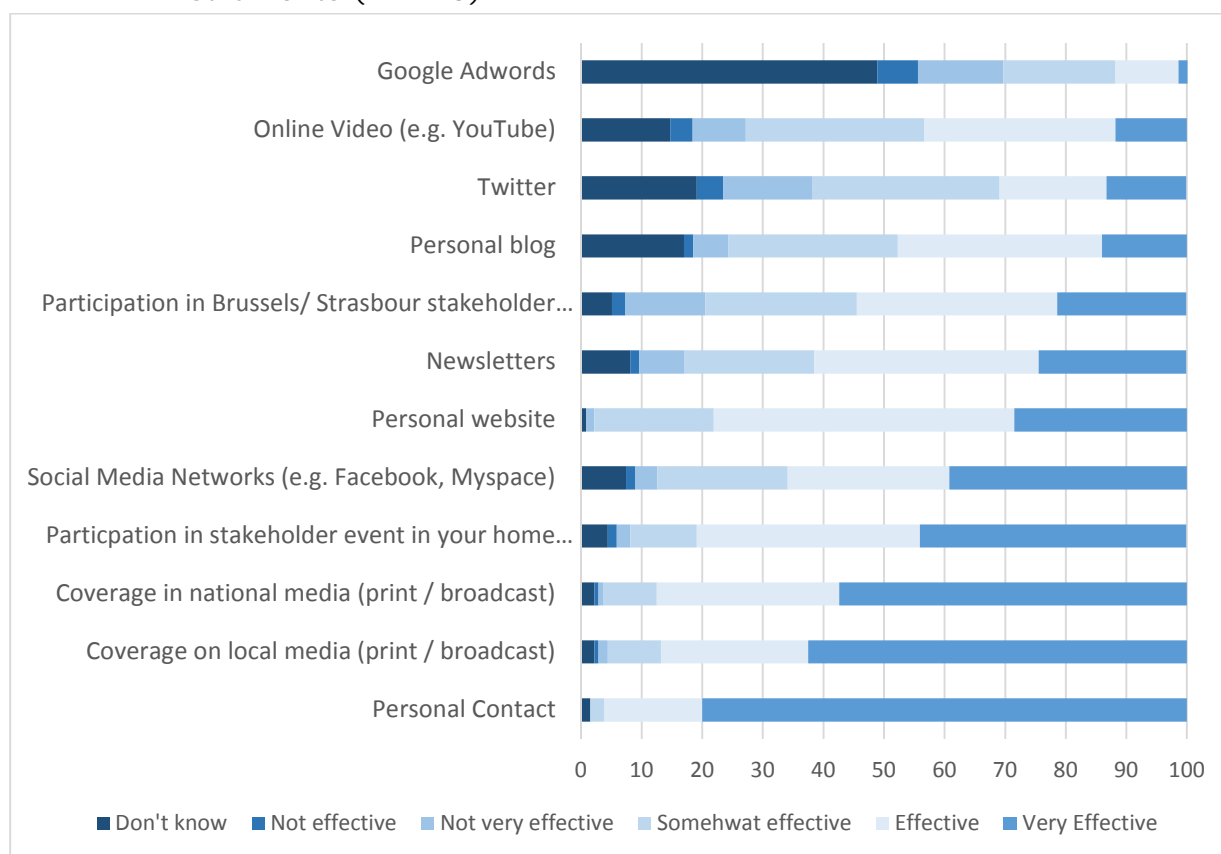
²¹⁷ Hix, S., Hoyland B. (2011), *The Political System of the European Union*, 3rd edn. London, Palgrave Macmillan.

²¹⁸ De Vries C.E., Dinas E., Solaz H. (2014), *You Have Got Mail! A Field Experiment on Legislator Responsiveness in the European Parliament*, presentation MPSA 2014. <http://catherinedevries.eu/EPExperiment.pdf>. Accessed September 1, 2014.

bailed-out MS, with Ireland, Cyprus and Spain displaying relatively high response rates while those for Greece were relatively low. This experiment also shows that when an MEP is up for re-election on an open list system, that Member is more likely to respond. Moreover, those more experienced MEPs who have been in Parliament for longer are more likely to respond compared to those with less experience. Given the importance MEPs attach to representing their constituents and using email, the experiment shows that there is still a communication gap between EU citizens and their representatives in the EP.

In order to better grasp the types of communication instruments used by MEPs, the survey carried out by Fleishman and Hillard (2011) indicates that personal contact and media coverage are viewed by MEPs as by far the most effective communication tools (see Figure 9). Targeted political dialogue and engagement with the public through social media are also considered to be effective. This confidence does not apply to all social media tools, since less than one in three of the respondents felt that Twitter was effective, a trust rate almost 20% lower than that expressed regarding blogs.

Figure 9: Assessment of MEPs on the effectiveness of different communication instruments (N=120).²¹⁹



Source: Fleischman and Hillard (2011)

MEPs to an increasing extent make use of social media to communicate with a wider public, a process initiated with the 2009 EP elections. While social media were first adopted as a campaigning tool for the EP elections, a large number of MEPs have continued to use this means of communication since. By 2011, 70% of MEPs have a Facebook presence and 38% have a Twitter account²²⁰. Of those who tweet and/or blog, the greatest benefit was

²¹⁹ Fleishman-Hillard (2011), European Parliament Digital Trends Survey. <http://www.epdigitaltrends.eu/>. Accessed September 1, 2014.

²²⁰ Fleishman-Hillard (2011), European Parliament Digital Trends Survey. <http://www.epdigitaltrends.eu/>. Accessed September 1, 2014.

universally named as 'expressing views to constituents'. This shows that MEPs' use of Twitter and blogging for actively engaging in conversation remains low. This may be one reason why many do not see Twitter or blogging as being particularly effective. This conclusion is in line with a study by Lucia Vesni -Alujevi (2013), in which the researcher offers a number of conclusions on how politicians regard social media. Firstly, she concludes that political actors in Europe tend to use social media for purposes of providing information, rather than interacting with and engaging their electorate; nevertheless, she stresses, people like to express themselves through social media, in ways that traditional media do not permit²²¹. Secondly, she concludes that politicians seem not to be fully aware of the strengths of social media, such as free advertising and the possibility of reaching, advertising to and motivating a large audience. Also, politicians tend to be wary of the constraints inherent to social media. The main constraint is the fact that social media require more time and engagement from politicians, as well as a level of interaction with citizens that is not always feasible during election campaigns. Thirdly, Vesni -Alujevi concludes that social media discourse in Europe has tended to be focused on the elite. For social media to be used in election campaigns, however, there is a need for politicians to become more engaged at the grassroots level: politicians should encourage citizens to discuss different issues by posting on current topics that are seen as controversial and interesting. Research carried out in the Netherlands is critical of the use of social media to engage those who are not yet interested²²²; another research finding is that voters are using social media to obtain political information only to a small extent. There are also some concerns regarding the authority of the source when a message is communicated via social media.

MEPs are using the internet and social media for communication purposes, but also as providing input for their thinking on policy. Here too, surveys show that personal contact and position papers are given the highest priority. Online stakeholder communications and websites on specific issues are valued more than generic organisation websites²²³.

5.5. Role of civil society in communicating Europe and the role of stakeholder consultations

5.5.1. Role of civil society in communicating Europe

The EU is a special type of structure in which political parties play a weaker role than they have traditionally done in many national contexts²²⁴. Interest groups and stakeholders, therefore, play a stronger role in providing contributions to civil society and expertise on policy. Given this comparatively smaller role of politicians, much emphasis is being placed on the role of interest groups in acting as intermediaries between citizens and policy makers.

The EC actively encourages the participation of interest groups and even stimulates the participation of, in particular, civil society organisations in policy processes by allocating considerable subsidies to such actors. The idea is that they help to compile public preferences and promote their concerns to the Commission. Indeed, interest groups inform both their members and the EU of the major developments taking place in their specific areas of interest. There is little doubt that these collective actors are important to the EU's

²²¹ Vesni -Alujevi L. (2013), Online strategies of members of the European Parliament, *Participations, Journal of Audience and Reception Studies*, 10(1), 432-435.

²²² TNS NIPO (2014), *Spiegelonderzoek onder raadsleden en kiezers*, Amsterdam, TNS NIPO.

²²³ Fleishman-Hillard (2011), *European Parliament Digital Trends Survey*. <http://www.epdigitaltrends.eu/>. Accessed September 1, 2014.

²²⁴ Lindberg B. (2008), *Party Politics as Usual? The Role of Political Parties in EU Legislative Decision-making*, *Journal of European Public Policy*, 15:8, 1107-1126.

communication strategy and that the Commission uses such actors to bridge the gap between itself and its citizens, thus constituting them as a source of democratic legitimacy. The role of civil society was originally defined by Jean Monnet at the Community's inception. It involved identifying a limited number of sectors of crucial importance for integration and the transmission of information – such as farmers' groups, consumers' organisations, the media, universities, women's and youth organisations, etc. – and working with opinion makers in the groups concerned in the hope that they would multiply knowledge by transmitting what they had learned about the EC to people within their own sector. For instance, it was hoped that opinion makers would, upon returning from a one- or two-day visit to Brussels and/or Luxembourg organised by the institutions, pass on favourable impressions obtained to their associates²²⁵. Civil society actors were also seen as a solution to the problem of budgetary constraints during election campaigns, thanks to which campaigners are forced to focus less on the general public than on opinion makers seen as likely to exert a multiplier effect in the Member States.

Although organisations representing various sections of civil society have for a long time been important actors in the EU system, their contribution has generally been seen in terms of policy outcomes and how they allow the development of effective and implementable policies – in the words of F.W. Scharpf, the EU's 'output legitimacy'²²⁶. In contrast, their contribution to improving the 'input legitimacy' of the EU, in other words the extent to which the genuine preferences of citizens are brought into the political process, is increasingly recognised but is still largely under-researched and under-theorised.

Civil society organisations are also explicitly mentioned as playing a role in communicating Europe in the different communication strategies that have been drawn up since 2005 (see Chapter 3). Elizabeth Monaghan argues that these strategies are not clear with regard to the role of civil society in communicating Europe and have tended to take the form of rhetoric²²⁷. Moreover, no distinctions are made between different types of civil society organisations (NGOs, think tanks, social partners, single-issue organisations, etc.), and this has implications for the extent to which civil society can play an effective bridging role. It is interesting to note that research indicates that NGOs operating at EU level are less effective at connecting locally to citizens, although these are the organisations which the Commission funds to help them in their efforts to communicate Europe to its citizens. It has further been concluded that the issue of funding is of central importance to civil society organisations playing a role in communicating Europe. Research shows that such organisations often do not have the resources to assist the Commission in its communication activities. Some sceptics say that civil society organisations based in Brussels are only motivated by the prospect of financial gain to sell the EU's aims and objectives. Dependence on European money could undermine the trust in civil society actors being independent.

5.5.2. Role of stakeholder consultations

Many different institutional mechanisms for listening to and communicating with the public have developed in modern liberal democracies²²⁸. Such mechanisms range from exercises in which everyone can participate, such as open online consultations and conferences, to

²²⁵ Lodge J., Herman V. (1980), Direct Election to the European Parliament: A supranational perspective, *European Journal of Political Research*, 8(1), 45–62.

²²⁶ Scharpf F.W. (1998), *Governing in Europe: Effective and Democratic?* Oxford, Oxford University Press.

²²⁷ Monaghan E. (2008), 'Communicating Europe': The Role of Organised Civil Society, *Journal of Contemporary European Research*, 4(1), 18–30.

²²⁸ Bishop P., Davis G. (2002), Mapping public participation in policy choices, *Australian Journal of Public Participation*, 61(1), 14–29.

restricted consultations such as hearings of members of advisory committees²²⁹. The relevance and frequency of consultation is growing. Back in 1995, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) already spoke of a 'strong trend towards renewal and expansion of public consultation in the regulatory environment'²³⁰. The EU is no exception in this respect and has taken a number of initiatives to strengthen communication and interaction with its citizens in the last few decades. Such consultation is expected to have several positive benefits. The expertise gathered may help improve the quality of public policy. It may also strengthen political responsiveness to citizen concerns, and thus increase trust in government and democracy more generally²³¹. Ian Holland (2002) argues: 'Consultation is supposed to be a touchstone in modern democracy. It is supposed to make governments both more responsive to the community and more legitimate in the eyes of that community'²³². At the same time, little is known about whether the various instruments end up achieving these goals in practice. The degree to which all the different initiatives launched have been successful remains somewhat unclear. The experts consulted in the context of this study were critical as to whether public consultations were truly leading to better policies and more involvement, as they believed that decisions are often already taken in advance and the instruments are only used for creating democratic legitimacy. Questions were raised as to how comments on draft regulations were assessed by Commission officials and how to weight citizens' contributions as against the mass of contributions from organisations and companies. Moreover, it was questioned whether feedback is given on what is done with the input provided.

Evidence shows that the different participatory instruments do stimulate participation, even if there is variation in the level and character of participants using the same type of instrument. Some of this variation can be accounted for by the character of the policy. In a study of participation of interest groups in the Commission's consultations, it was found that a higher number and broader range of different types of interest groups are active on expenditure-related issues, as opposed to regulatory policies²³³. In a related study, it was also found that where consultations fall within policy areas deemed salient by the general public, the number of participants increases²³⁴. When it comes to the participation of individuals rather than interest groups, preliminary findings indicate that the format of the consultations plays a role. When closed or semi-structured formats are used to collect responses rather than an open format, the proportion of individuals participating in a given consultative exercise goes up. These findings indicate that citizen engagement will be higher if the requirements for participation are not too demanding and if measures to involve citizens are deployed in non-technical areas of high salience to the public.

Together, these findings nonetheless show that the consultative function of interest groups can vary in line with a number of different factors. Understanding which factors make a consultation likely to gain the attention of a relevant target group could help improve the efficiency and transparency of the EU's consultation procedures. The effectiveness of

²²⁹ European Commission (2002a), Towards a reinforced culture of consultation and dialogue – General principles and minimum standards for consultation of interested parties by the Commission, Brussels.

²³⁰ OECD (1995), Public Consultation and Government Regulation. Public Management Forum, 1, Paris, OECD Publication Service.

²³¹ OECD (2001), Citizens as partners: OECD handbook on information, consultation and public participation in policy-making, Paris, OECD Publication Service; Chabanet D., Trechsel, A. H. (2011), EU Member States' Consultation with Civil Society on European Policy Matters, Observatory, E.U.D.O. Florence, European University Institute.

²³² Holland I. (2002), Consultation, Constraints and Norms: The Case of Nuclear Waste, Australian Journal of Public Administration, 61 (1), 76-86.

²³³ Rasmussen A., Carroll B., Lowery D. (2013), Representatives of the Public Mood? Public opinion and interest group activity, European Journal of Political Research, 53(2), 250–268.

²³⁴ Rasmussen A., Carroll B. (2013a), Determinants of upper-class dominance in the heavenly chorus: Lessons from European Commission online consultations, British Journal of Political Science, 44(2), 445-459.

stakeholder consultations is often evaluated without a clear benchmark. When low numbers of participating actors in a given EU participatory exercise are singled out as being problematic, it is often not taken into account that participation in similar exercises at national level may also be low. In this respect, some of the engagement problems faced by the EU are of a general nature, rather than being linked to the EU as such.

5.6. Concluding assessment of the role of the political sphere and challenges ahead

The political sphere plays an important role in shaping public opinion among EU citizens. In this study, some strengths and weaknesses of the role of the political sphere are identified.

On the national level, the following challenges can be identified:

- Public debate and dialogue on the EU are often missing at a national level. The EU is often a divisive issue which national politicians are reluctant to debate. In many Member States, popular Eurosceptic movements are gaining increasing public support, triggered by the negative public perception of the EU, but also by disillusionment with national politicians. This is also forcing the established parties to position themselves in the Europe debate.
- The European institutions are very often used by political decision-makers at MS level as scapegoats to camouflage controversial political moves of a national character. This process is aggravated where the decision-making process concerned exerts a major influence on the parliaments and executive branches of MS at European level.
- Only a limited number of national politicians are fully aware of how the EU works and the policies in place. This sometimes leads to situations where politicians wrongly accuse the EU of making a decision that in fact MS themselves are responsible for.

On the EU level, the following challenges can be identified:

- MEPs are not always visible in national debates and often keep a certain distance. One of the reasons is their increasing work as legislators due to the growing legislative powers of the EP, as well as their party work, leaving less time for conveying the national interest of EU developments to a country. Fieldwork also indicates that MEPs are not always responsive to questions posed by national citizens.
- Personal contact and media coverage are viewed by MEPs as by far the most effective communication tools. However, European politicians should use social media more often to build networks of supporters, engaging with the community by communicating with the audience.
- The EU has taken a number of initiatives to strengthen communication and interaction with its citizens over the last few decades by implementing public consultations. Such consultations are expected to have several positive benefits (improving the quality of public policy, strengthening political responsiveness to citizens' concerns, and more generally increasing trust in government and democracy). At the same time, little is known as to whether the different instruments will end up achieving these goals in practice.
- The Commission has placed considerable emphasis on interest groups as a channel of communication between citizens and policy makers. Although these groups' contribution to improving the 'input and output legitimacy' of the EU is increasingly recognised, it is still largely under-researched and under-theorised.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. Introduction

This study provides input to the European Parliament's Committee on Culture and Education on how best to communicate Europe to its citizens, by informing and engaging its citizens as well as promoting the work of the EU. It explains the main trends in public perception of the European Union, describes how and by whom Europe is communicated, assesses the communication strategy of the actors concerned, and, finally, offers recommendations for improving the communication strategy.

The study shows that communicating 'Europe' is a complex matter in which a large number of factors play a role, influencing and reinforcing each other. Moreover, much depends on the performance of European legislation and policies (output), on democratic processes (input), and also on the state of the economy and the cultural and historical context of individual countries: these factors all work together in determining citizens' expectations towards the EU. In some cases, communication could bolster a positive perception of the EU, but in some Member States positive communication about the EU could be counterproductive, since their citizens tend to reject pro-European messages as too complacent and not open for debate.

At the same time, it needs to be emphasised that many of the conclusions reported in this study echo the outcomes of evaluations and reports from the past (such as the evaluation of the first EP election campaign in 1979). The key question at this point concerns what happened with all those recommendations (as drawn up in different study reports), for better targeting and framing news items, more inclusive cooperation and social action, as well as increased searching for citizen dialogue etc. Strategies were developed, higher budgets were allocated, services and instruments were put in place, but Europe still faces the same communication challenges as always. At the same time, public support has been declining over the years, giving an impression of 'deadlock' in the EU.

Generally, it can be concluded that there is no Holy Grail or panacea for developing engaged European citizens or European identity. This study shows that there is an outer limit to the effectiveness of mediated European communication in terms of informative value, as well as transmitting positive aspects (values, credibility, and beliefs). The study does not advocate ceasing communication, but, rather, argues that political and public organisations need to have a proper communication infrastructure in place in order to provide accessible information on the functioning of their institutions and policy outputs for a wider public. Nevertheless, it does recommend that budget allocations should be focused on where the public outreach is largest, and that communication services and instruments should be carefully assessed regarding their cost-effectiveness. Funding programmes that stimulate social action, going beyond the verbal sphere and addressing the cultural component of Europe, have proved to be demonstrably effective. The strategic dimension and long-term effectiveness of these non-verbal cultural communication programmes should therefore be better taken into account in strategic communication planning. One of the experts involved in the research even states that in order to create emotional identification with political actions and programmes, the use of 'cultural surrogates' should be explored. One suggestion here is the creation of a 'European Weekend', during which, over two festive days, the European passport would entitle everyone to free-of-charge return travel by train or ferry to wherever they might wish to go during this time. Despite the problems of practical feasibility in implementing such a

measure, it illustrates the underlying idea of 'social action'-oriented communication efforts, which should be further explored by the relevant stakeholders.

The following section discusses the conclusions and recommendations of this study along with the main (f)actors playing a role in determining public opinion, namely:

- The evolving context in which Europe is communicated (Section 6.2);
- The role of the EU institutions in communicating Europe (Section 6.3);
- The role of the media in communicating Europe (Section 6.4);
- The role of the political sphere in communicating Europe (Section 6.5).

6.2. Assessment of the evolving context in which Europe is communicated

6.2.1. Conclusions on the context of communicating Europe

If one now proceeds to the assessment of the evolving context in which Europe is communicated, three main conclusions can be drawn.

1. The first conclusion relates to the difficulties in communicating a single coherent message. This is first of all caused by the fact that European integration is a moving target. Scholars argue that the EU is an 'unfinished project', an 'evolving entity' and a 'network of networks', characterised by multiple tiers of sovereignty and governance. The EU is currently at a crossroads, debating the issues of further integration and/or enlargement, how to increase democratic legitimacy, and how to guarantee more efficient decision-making at Union level. These are the very topics that EU citizens are strongly divided on and where the opinions of the political elite and EU citizens do not always correspond, posing challenges on what to communicate. Moreover, although European values are addressed in the different European Treaties, there is no consensus on what constitutes a European identity. As a result, European values do not play a central role in communication policies, or if that is the case they are not communicated in a consistent way. Finally, the institutional set-up of the EU, with various institutions each of which sends out its own messages, leads to an overabundance of information and confusion amongst citizens.
2. The second conclusion relates to the fact that public opinion differs across countries and social groups. Countries differ in how their citizens perceive Europe, depending on their historical, socio-economic, media and political context. Depending on these factors, citizens have different feelings of belonging and differ in how they delegate power to different political units to make decisions and form expectations of how life should be. Generally, it can be concluded that trust in political institutions is decreasing, although citizens have more trust in the EP than their national parliament (except in Sweden, Finland, Germany, Austria, and the UK). Citizens of the new Member States, especially, show high trust in the EP as compared to their own national parliaments. There also seems to be a gap between the opinions prevalent in different social groups with regard to Europe. Eurobarometer reports the existence of differences in terms of age, educational level and socio-economic status.
3. The third conclusion is that European integration can be characterised as having strong output legitimacy, based on the principle and added value of cooperation, and a more criticised input legitimacy, the latter referring to the manner in which European decision-making occurs. However, the economic and financial crisis has put this output legitimacy under pressure, making it more difficult to explain the benefits of the EU, and

has led to disillusionment with all types of institutions in a number of MS. This study shows that these negative evaluations of the functioning of European democracy are not always equivalent to Euroscepticism. In many cases, they are also demands for better performing EU institutions or a better form of integration, which is a form of constructive or critical Europeanism (and could also be a sign of political maturity resulting from increased EU visibility).

From an overview of the contextual developments in which public opinion is shaped, one has the impression of a 'deadlock' in the EU, with low trust figures: the Union is not seen as democratic or as able to provide a solution to the current economic and political crisis. Experts argue that Europe may be in a 'cycle of downward spiralling' and doubt whether sufficient mechanisms are in place at EU level to overcome this negative cycle (such as discussion, debate, repercussion and repositioning).

6.2.2. Recommendations on the evolving context of communicating Europe

Taking into account the conclusions as presented in the previous section, three recommendations may be put forward in relation to the context in which communication policies are implemented.

1. The first recommendation addresses the need to improve the democratic legitimacy and transparency of the EU and to ensure economic recovery. Although the scope of this recommendation goes beyond that of this study, we will state that we found evidence that:
 - a. A more elaborate system of checks and balances in the EU would give people a stronger sense and feeling of influence and transparency with regard to the Union. Some specific challenges will need to be addressed, such as guaranteeing a more efficient decision-making process, more transparency for citizens, stimulating public debate on the EU, and improvement of tools for direct democracy. Nevertheless, having a democratic and transparent system in place at national level is not a guarantee for high trust figures in government and politicians. Other processes also play a role, such as questions related to output legitimacy. Moreover, in the event that democratic instruments (such as referendums or public consultations) are used, the outcomes of the democratic process should not be neglected, as this could have an even more devastating effect (recalling the experience of the 'no' votes on the draft EU constitution in some Member States).
 - b. The current economic and financial crisis has placed the output legitimacy of EU institutions under pressure, since public opinion is strongly influenced by the economic state of Europe. Communication strategies could emphasise more actively than is currently the case the EU's measures to counter the effects of the crisis, showing the added value of European cooperation.
2. The second recommendation concerns the need for the EU to send out a coherent message to its citizens, taking into account the following aspects:
 - a. The need to be clear on what concrete goals Europe perceives in the coming years, and to avoid vague promises on further integration or further enlargements of the EU. Communicating a system in flux is difficult, so there should be a clear idea of where the EU is heading. The achievements of European cooperation should be communicated in the framework of a long-term vision in relation to a more concrete aim or objective in the short to medium term (e.g. the current legislative term). Having more concrete goals to work towards can help create a broader coalition of support and a prospective sense that things can be improved.

- b. Concrete outcomes of EU legislation and policies should be better addressed in communication policies. Currently, two issues need careful attention when communicating Europe, namely economic policies and the added value of labour mobility on labour markets, since these are the issues about which citizens are most concerned.
 - c. The Commission, the EP and the European Council operate on the basis of a clear separation of powers and roles, and therefore have different political interests in communicating 'their' Europe. For this reason, communication strategies cannot be completely harmonised. Nevertheless, citizens often see the different EU institutions as being one and the same, and find themselves facing mixed messages. Harmonisation can only be achieved by getting across more clearly the role of each institution in communicating Europe and by identifying issues on which there is shared responsibility, such as the main framework of EU policy objectives within a given legislative period.
 - d. The need to launch a discussion on what European identity and values are and to express that identity and those values in messages and arguments can be used in a uniform and consistent way in future communication activities. The right balance should be struck when communicating the cultural and civic components of European identity - the first addressing the perceived level of sameness amongst citizens, driven by collective symbols, values and images of Europe, and the second focusing on more political communication, addressing the fact that citizens are part of the European political system. Currently, most communication attention is given to the civic component. Communication must stress that identity is not a uniform or exclusive phenomenon. The philosophy should not be one of promoting European identity as a replacement for national identity (it is not a zero-sum game), but as an additional dimension characterised by a sense of attachment. European identity is not to be equated per se with the entire EU or only with the EU. It can also be a cross-national region-based identity, and can, furthermore, go beyond the sum of the existing Member States (as a continent-based identity).
3. The third recommendation relates to the need for communication policies to better take into account the wide diversity of audiences and different country contexts in order to target their messages on those different groups and contexts as far as possible, while respecting the need for the position of the EU institutions to be objective and neutral (and recalling that framing messages have an upper limit). The anti-European sentiments within some groups cannot be pushed away by the usual kinds of communication measures (brochures, internet presentations, speeches, etc.). Insight into the functioning of social and public communication suggests that the chance of containing such feelings should first be explored, before entering into communication planning.

6.3. Assessment of how the EU institutions are communicating Europe

6.3.1. Conclusions on the role of the EU institutions in communicating Europe

While in the early years of European cooperation, communication was mainly focused on the elite, from 1970 onwards, as a consequence of the increasing powers of what would become the EU, communication became increasingly focused on the citizens. Since then, communication has become a policy topic, further enhanced in the wake of different crises, such as the resignation of the Santer Commission and the no votes during the ratification of the Treaty of Maastricht. Since 2004, the EU institutions, especially the Commission, have adopted a number of strategic documents describing their policy ambitions for better

communicating Europe. Keywords guiding these documents have included: 'dialogue with citizens', 'interaction', 'going local', 'active citizenship', and 'communicating in partnership'.

On the basis of the present study, six main conclusions can be drawn regarding the way in which European policies and European values are communicated to EU citizens.

1. First of all, this study concludes that strategic documents, i.e. those which address the importance of setting up a dialogue, going local, empowering citizens, developing a European public sphere, and communicating in partnership, are still to be considered relevant. However:
 - a. The EU's communication strategy is criticised as being ambiguous and having too many unspecified suggestions. There is still a lack of clarity as to what is actually meant by 'going local', 'setting up a dialogue' or 'promoting engagement', as also regarding what actions should follow and which public groups should be involved and how. There are also concerns regarding the practical implementation of the strategy on the tactical and operational level. No concrete follow-up documents have been produced since 2009.
 - b. There is evidence that the EU's political public relations are still too often fragmented and disjointed. In addition, the role of the Commission's DG COMM in coordinating communication policies across the EU institutions and between their internal departments is still regarded as fragile. The three main decision-making institutions each have their own communication apparatus, at both political party and national levels. Each institution has different political interests in communicating its decision-making role. Even within the setting of each institution, there are sub-units with their own interests and communication apparatus.
2. Secondly, when discussing communication by the EU institutions (and above all the Commission), a sharp distinction should be made between communication efforts:
 - a. to inform on and promote the work of the EU institutions, policy outputs and European values for a wider public; and
 - b. to engage citizens in constructing an ever-closer Europe, thus further developing a sense of European citizenship.

Each of those two goals requires other types of instruments to be implemented. Communication for the purpose of informing stakeholders includes standard forms of communication such as press events, activities of spokespersons, contact centres, information networks, representations, and websites. Communication for the purpose of engaging citizens includes initiatives such as the Citizenship Programme. Currently, these goals and instruments are not always clearly separated in policy documentation.

3. Thirdly, it can be concluded that the EU has a wide range of sophisticated types of communication services and instruments in place for communicating Europe. These have been developed over the years by allocating a substantial budget to communication activities. Monitoring data and evaluations show positive assessments of these services and instruments. However, the following issues need to be mentioned in this regard:
 - a. Most information services only reach the usual suspects, those who are interested in and already informed about the EU, but not the general public. Those who are not interested or have a negative opinion with regard to the EU are especially difficult to reach. This points to the need for a serious discussion on the cost-effectiveness of these services and instruments.

- b. There is limited information on whether citizens are in fact becoming better informed and more engaged.
 - c. The visibility of EU symbols has increased over the years (the flag, the driving licence, passport, coins, the anthem and more), and as a result awareness of these symbols has grown in parallel. Nevertheless, there is no indication that this has resulted in citizens being more in favour of the EU.
 - d. Communicating Europe is not an endeavour over which the EU institutions have much formal influence, as a large part of how Europe is communicated takes place at and is influenced by the national level. It is, therefore, not possible to evaluate the effect of communication policies on public opinion in quantitative terms.
4. Fourthly, the study identifies some important challenges for communicating the EU, in relation to the actual communicative techniques and activities that the EU engages in when presenting itself to the public:
 - a. The content communicated often holds limited relevance to the majority of citizens and is seen as being too detailed and as irrelevant to the average citizen's daily life (and mostly of interest to 'insiders'). Attention is primarily focused on communicating the overarching sectoral policies and the policy decisions taken. European values and norms, on the other hand, are scarcely communicated by the EU institutions in a consistent or structured manner.
 - b. The EU's communication tone is seen as being impersonal and distant, too bureaucratic, too formal, too technical, too detailed, too inward-looking, too abstract, and sometimes too complacent in the sense of being blindly optimistic and not open for constructive feedback.
 - c. The channels of communication do not reach out to or interest citizens who are not already interested in the EU (see above).
5. Fifthly, programmes that aim to engage citizens in the European project, such as the Citizenship Programme but also Erasmus+ and Creative Europe, are shown to be effective in engaging citizens, developing emotional attachment to and identification with Europe. The evaluation of the Citizenship Programme indicates that participants are more inclined to make new contacts, become involved in events, visit the partner countries or host people from these countries in future actions, and acquire a strong mutual understanding of other cultures and heritages. There is also an abundance of evidence in the literature indicating that Erasmus participants tend to identify as European, although it is not clear whether this identification was triggered through Erasmus or was already present before participating in the programme. A major problem within these programmes is that their financial scope is too limited to reach a substantial group of EU citizens (and especially to reach out to the non-usual participants). These findings echo other research that concludes that emotional attachment created by socialisation processes is a far stronger force in helping to 'uphold' European integration than giving utilitarian support. This opens up the question as to how to create this emotional attachment, going beyond the utilitarian form of support. Only limited research has been done on how citizens make Europe part of their social reality.
6. Sixthly, it is the case that Member States deploy additional, often formal communication activities, over and above the work of the Commission Representations and EP Information Offices (which often manage only a limited outreach to the wider public, thanks to the limited resources available to promote Europe at country level). Websites have been developed by national governments to provide a platform for discussions. However some countries, such as the UK, have hardly any government initiatives promoting the EU, this task falling in those Member

States to various NGOs and think tanks. Germany and Spain appear to rely more on EU- initiated projects to inform people. In addition, different issues and perspectives relating to the EU are included in national school curricula in almost all Member States.

6.3.2. Recommendations on the role of the EU institutions in communicating Europe

On the basis of the conclusions set out in the previous section, this section puts forward seven recommendations for improving the role of the EU institutions in the communication of European policies.

1. First of all, this study recommends re-emphasising the importance of starting up a dialogue with citizens, empowering citizens, developing a European and interconnected political and public sphere, and communicating in partnership. The new strategy should be a cornerstone of all EU operations. Communication should be an integrated part of all political and policy discussion, rather than, as is currently the case, 'hanging in mid-air'. The following points should be taken into consideration:
 - a. Further operationalise and specify the meaning of engaging in dialogue with citizens, going local, empowering citizens, and developing a public sphere, all this being underpinned by activities of a clearly-defined nature.
 - b. Include strategic planning for a minimum differentiation of target groups, taking into account national cultures and their identification patterns of variation in elite horizons (e.g. value orientation vs. economic orientation), generational cohorts (European 'memories') and group age variants (e.g. media orientation vs. active social communication orientation).
 - c. Rethink communication channels on the basis of the above differentiation. Younger audience segments increasingly do not turn to traditional media outlets such as television or newspapers for information purposes. In this respect, the coverage of European affairs through traditional media will increasingly serve an ageing audience. In view of the need to communicate Europe, the European institutions have to find means and methods for reaching out. A first step should be to reconsider how Europe is presented on the internet, making use of social media and placing the emphasis on mobile IT media. The institutions have already made a move in the right direction by being present on social media, but need to closely follow new developments.
 - d. Evaluate the cost-effectiveness of the communication services and instruments in place. It is necessary to carefully assess the outreach of the services and instruments implemented. If they all serve the same 'elite' audience, careful reconsideration should be given to the added value provided by more traditional communication instruments (e.g. funding of the much-debated EU-wide TV and radio channels, recalling at the same time that this is one of the most expensive cost categories). Greater use of the internet and social media could lead to cost savings in the communication budget.
2. Secondly, EU institutions should target communication efforts better and avoid a one-size-fits-all approach:
 - a. Pay specific attention to young people. The young are the group most affected by the current challenges faced by the EU, the most worried, the most educated and the most frustrated by the economic and financial crisis. This generation is the most appreciative of Europe, but there is a danger of losing its support, given all the pressures it is facing. The crisis has curtailed the appreciation of Europe; however, this is exactly why the long-term problems faced by these young people must be addressed at the political level.
 - b. Better address non-voters and disenfranchised groups. Generally, these groups have a low economic status, narrow localised interests, are lacking in social

mobility and face general social insecurity. Furthermore, these groups are a breeding-ground for populism and, in particular, are liable to share anti-European thinking.

3. Thirdly, make a clear distinction between communication to inform (or promote), and communication to engage (financing mobility and political/cultural/sporting events and festivals). As is the case with every public administration, the EU institutions should ensure that citizens have easy access to neutral and objective information on the institutional aspects of the Union and its policy outputs. This is a basic function that the institutions should satisfy. Nevertheless, it is not to be expected that these communication efforts will lead to more engagement (taking account of the limitations of traditional communication). It is up to politicians and civil society to promote Europe and engage citizens in European affairs, whether or not with funding from EU programmes. These actors may adopt a more or less implicit or explicit style of promoting the EU, European values, products, etc. Such activities should ensure that Europe is an object of debate, news coverage and public attention. Here, conflict and clashes of opinions are important ingredients.
4. Fourthly, rethink the content and tone of communication in order to make a better connection with citizens by:
 - a. making communication messages less technical and formal, while also providing more background information. There is a tendency in the communication patterns originating from EU institutions to explain and transfer decisions and issues within their original setting (legal, economic, technological, etc.). The practical, daily and direct effects of EU decision-making, on the spot and where citizens live, are only rarely visualised. Therefore, these gaps in the quality of information transfer have to be dealt with (by implementing the 'audience test' for all communication produced). On top of this, better use should be made of hard evidence showing the added value of European cooperation, such as that collected in the studies on the costs of non-Europe, or on the local impact of the single market, of regulation and of funding programmes. Efforts should be increased to present more of the entire structure of the iceberg and not only its tip;
 - b. adapting messages better to the national context and giving a better explanation as to why certain policies will work in a specific country;
 - c. diversifying information for different target groups: those who are insiders (policymakers or technical people), business representatives and citizens.
5. Fifthly, invest in action-based communication, actually engaging EU citizens, and increase its outreach by:
 - a. increasing budget allocations for programmes such as Citizenship Programme, Erasmus+, Creative Europe and others stimulating interaction between citizens across borders, as these programmes are far more effective in engaging citizens towards the EU than are 'verbal' communication campaigns.
 - b. investing in school curricula and teacher training to ensure that young people become familiar with Europe at an early age. Most countries have embedded the topic of Europe in their national curricula, albeit some to a greater extent than others. Good practices across countries should be shared, and more teachers should take part in mobility actions (Erasmus+).
6. Sixthly, give the EU institutions a 'human face' by improving the communication of Europe by having Commissioners and senior officials (managerial staff) visit Member States and attend public events, instead of staying inside the 'Brussels bubble'. This should also apply in some cases to non-managerial staff. This last group of officials,

especially, should be better trained in how to communicate policies and EU values towards different target groups (to EU citizens but also to the media). Officials, particularly non-managerial staff working for EU institutions, are often specialists and find it difficult to communicate policies outside the organisation.

7. Seventhly, improve cooperation between the EU institutions and between sub-units within the institutions in the area of communicating Europe, while respecting the diversity and specific role of the institutions:
 - a. Improve coordination between EU institutions (but also between DGs and EU funding programmes); develop a communication strategy overhaul for all the institutions at once, and establish a task force to do this in the coming years;
 - b. Ensure better sharing of good practices in communicating awareness of Europe;
 - c. Cooperate in implementing the recommendations outlined in this section.

6.4. Assessment of the role of the media in communicating Europe

6.4.1. Conclusions on the role of the media in communicating Europe

As no pan-European public sphere yet exists and national media systems differ from country to country, EU citizens are also differently informed. On the basis of this study, three main conclusions can be drawn regarding the role of the media in communicating Europe.

1. First of all, information provision very much depends on what the public finds newsworthy. Also, the coverage of EU news in the media is cyclical in nature, with priority peaks following which the news vanishes from the agenda. Moreover, the EU is considered as largely faceless in the news, and its coverage is neutral or slightly negative. Research on media data shows that the more often EU news was framed in terms of benefits of EU membership, the higher the proportion of people who perceived their country's EU membership to be beneficial. The phenomenon of lack of coverage is explained by three interrelated factors that are embedded in the three conclusions that follow.
2. Secondly, journalists from national and regional newspapers consider their readership to be less interested in European politics than in politics in general and that readers have a low understanding of the working of European politics. As a result, these journalists see few incentives to write about Europe.
3. Thirdly, EU institutions make relatively little effort to penetrate the information resource pools of national and regional journalists. A number of aspects of the distribution of information can be challenging for journalists in terms of processing information to ensure it is newsworthy, namely:
 - a. EU institutions target EU correspondents considerably more often than more general journalists, indicating that the EU directs its communication towards subject specialists.
 - b. The complexity of the information provided by EU institutions raises barriers for journalists. The EU mostly makes use of highly technical press materials that are not always easy to understand. Also, information regarding the EU is rather scattered. This is mainly caused by the threefold institutional model (the European Council, Parliament and the Commission) and the fact that the institutions often communicate independently of one another.

- c. The information provision of the EU institutions is not always effective or organised. The institutions produce a heavy flow of information that undermines the newsworthiness of European daily politics and increases the workload of journalists. Obtaining additional information is difficult and dependent on ad hoc contact with the institutions' press officers or other officials, and this itself depends very much on who one knows in Brussels.
4. Fourthly, journalists and media organisations generally look for (conflicting) stories, which they often do not find at EU level, as communication of the EU is often neutral, positive, or without any debate. Media organisations, therefore, have difficulties translating EU-provided news into newsworthy articles. Barriers towards effective coverage of European news are:
 - a. Resources of media organisations for news gathering, research or simply being present in Brussels are limited.
 - b. Journalists have insufficient links to EU institutions. This affects their access to documents, experts, public figures and politicians. Also, they face difficulties fitting EU stories in with existing news formats.
 - c. Editors place low prioritisation on European stories.
 - d. Journalists have insufficient language skills, face knowledge deficits on how the EU works, and overuse nationalised interpretative frameworks.
 - e. When discussing these barriers the role of the economic situation of the media industry, with special reference to decreasing budgets and cost-cutting, must be taken into account.

6.4.2. Recommendation on the role of the media in communicating Europe

On the basis of these conclusions, the following two recommendations may be made on the role of the media in communicating Europe.

1. First of all, it is recommended that the EU institutions should take better account of political communication and news framing, while:
 - a. firstly, remaining fully aware that news media operate under an audience-led logic (some also having additional 'public service' obligations) and will therefore only cover issues if they are new, relevant and/or contentious (useful frames include: the human aspect of news, a conflict-driven story, or an economic loss-or-gain story);
 - b. secondly, ensuring that the neutral and objective character of the EU institutions is respected and a suitable balance is found as regards the emotional side of the message. The institutions should not come up with news stories that are subjective or fail to do justice to the neutral and objective character of the institution; they should, however, be better aware of how news is produced and make better use of the room for manoeuvre to frame messages.
2. Secondly it is recommended that the EU institutions make more effort to facilitate journalists reporting on the Union, by taking the following points into consideration:
 - a. The institutions should better adapt press releases to the specific contexts of countries or groups of citizens, not by changing the message but better contextualising it (for instance, by organising their press units into national desks, as the EP already does for the organisation of its press releases).

- b. Information supply to journalists should be improved, helping them find information more easily. The vast resources available on the internet have, up to now, not been fully exploited.
- c. A helpdesk for journalists seeking EU background information should be established. Producing information in all EU languages is also considered to be helpful when doing press work.
- d. Press officials should be hired and trained who are able to properly describe and find the national angle and who can explain the broader meaning of developments and the relevance thereof to the national level.

6.5. Assessment of the role of the political sphere in communicating Europe

6.5.1. Conclusions on the role of the political sphere in communicating Europe

This study offers four main conclusions on the role of the political sphere in communicating Europe.

1. First of all, it can be concluded that at Member State level a public debate and dialogue on Europe is missing. The EU is often a divisive issue on which national politicians are reluctant to enter into debate. Nevertheless, in most countries a debate is emerging, due to the following developments:
 - a. In many of the Member States, popular Eurosceptic movements are gaining increasing public support, triggered by the negative public perception of the EU, and are also forcing the established parties to position themselves.
 - b. Citizens are becoming more aware of the personal implications of EU policies (such as the consequences of free movement of citizens for the labour market and the demographic structure of the population).
 - c. The implications of the economic crisis and recent austerity measures and the role of the EU have been widely discussed in the public domain.
2. Secondly, the European institutions are very often used by political decision-makers at the MS level as scapegoats to camouflage controversial political moves at national level. Nevertheless, trust in the EP is on average higher than citizens' trust in their own national parliaments (except in a small number of Member States). Experts indicate that a small group of national politicians are fully aware of how the EU works and what policies are in place. This sometimes leads to situations where politicians wrongly accuse the EU for decisions that were encouraged by the MS themselves.
3. Thirdly, it can be concluded that MEPs do not always succeed in reaching European citizens given the nature of their parliamentary work and their distance from the national level. This is influenced by the following issues:
 - a. Political parties at EU level are not particularly present in public debate. Some experts consulted for this study argue that the appearance of Eurosceptic parties in the EP could make the debate more interesting, obliging the mainstream parties to become more active and come up with more concrete and better profiled policy agendas with regard to Europe. Other experts are more sceptical, arguing that the established elite would probably face problems countering their attacks.

- b. MEPs are not always visible in national debates and appear to be distant by reason of their increasing volume of work as legislators at EU level. Research shows that MEPs are generally not easily reached by email.
 - c. MEPs increasingly make use of social media (Facebook, Twitter). Nevertheless, there are also doubts here about the authoritative nature of such sources and the actual use of social media to collect information on the EU.
4. Fourthly, the EU institutions have taken a number of initiatives to strengthen communication and interaction with their citizens over the last few decades, by implementing public consultations and involving interest groups. The consultations are expected to have several positive benefits (improving the quality of public policy, strengthening political responsiveness to citizen concerns, and more generally boosting trust in government and democracy). At the same time, little is known as to whether the different instruments will end up achieving these goals in practice.

6.5.2. Recommendations on improving the role of the political sphere in communicating Europe

The study provides the following two recommendations for improving the role of the political sphere in communicating Europe.

1. First of all, improving public debate on the EU at national level is crucial in terms of ensuring that:
 - a. national politicians are better informed with regard to EU institutions and policies, and correctly frame the EU in national debates. This is considered as one of the most crucial aspects for improving public opinion's perception of the EU, since politicians influence national media and citizens directly in their multiplier role;
 - b. it is recognised that the EU should not be not seen as isolated from national policy or be made a scapegoat for unpopular policy decisions. National politicians should integrate EU policy much more into national policy-making, e.g. by actively debating EU policy in national parliaments and using existing standing committees for deliberation of EU-related matters, rather than deferring EU material to specialised EU committees;
 - c. MEPs, and also Commissioners, are more actively present at national/regional level, explaining the added value of European policies and decisions and the links to the national context.
2. Communication should not only rely on formal and political channels, but should be broadened by using other platforms and routes that can gain the trust of citizens, in particular those who reject the reasoning of the EU institutions. The following points should be taken into account.
 - a. Some representative organisations are currently mainly active 'upstream' towards the EU; however, they could also play a role in 'downstreaming' information to their audience. In this light, the story of Europe will be told by other actors and not by the usual suspects, therefore having a greater impact.
 - b. Using trusted national-level actors to convey the EU's messages might be the only way to get around the distrust felt by many citizens who reject the reasoning of the EU institutions. These could be well-respected persons or organisations in politics, business, culture or sport. It is very important to keep confronting the problems and to find the right venues, actors and messages to communicate facts and views on policy issues at national level.

- c. It is important to mobilise beneficiaries and final recipients of policies and funding programmes and to involve them in communication efforts, thus helping explain programmes and policy impacts to a broader audience.
- d. National politicians should also be mobilised to address the benefits and identity of the EU (see point above).

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