

Reporting on TTIP project: Do EU - correspondents contribute to the Europeanization of TTIP media coverage?

Thesis

Eleni Gkiola

Student ID: 429574

Supervisor: Chris Aalberts

Master Media Studies – Media, Society and Culture

Erasmus School of History, Culture, and Communication

Erasmus University Rotterdam

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Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION	3
2. CASE STUDY: TTIP PROJECT	4
2.1. WHY IS IT DIFFERENT AND IMPORTANT?.....	4
2.2 CONTENT.....	5
2.3 RATIFICATION PROCEDURES AND THE ISSUE WITH THE MIXED AGREEMENTS	5
2.4 CRITICISM	7
3.THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	9
3.1. TTIP AND THE “PUBLIC SPHERE”	9
3.2. A “EUROPEAN PUBLIC SPHERE” OR “EUROPEANIZED NATIONAL PUBLIC SPHERES”?	11
3.3. JOURNALISTIC PRACTICES AND NEWS PRODUCTION.....	15
3.4. THE ROLE OF BRUSSELS-BASED CORRESPONDENTS IN THE EUROPEANISATION OF THE NATIONAL PUBLIC SPHERES	21
3.5. OVERVIEW	24
4. METHOD	25
4.1. RESEARCH DESIGN.....	25
4.2. IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS.....	26
4.3. RESPONDENTS	27
4.4. TOPICS	30
4.5. ANALYSIS.....	32
5. RESULTS	33
5.1. THEME 1: NATIONAL DIFFERENCES	34
5.2. THEME 2: INTERACTION WITH THE EU INSTITUTIONS, COLLEAGUES AND OTHER NON-EU SOURCES	42
5.3. THEME 3: INFLUENCES FROM THE HOME ORGANIZATION	56
6. CONCLUSION	65
6.1. SUMMARY OF RESULTS.....	65
6.2. DISCUSSION.....	68
6.3. LIMITATIONS – FUTURE RESEARCH.....	71
REFERENCES	72

1. INTRODUCTION

TTIP project is an EU Commission initiative in the framework of the EU's trade policy. As such it has received media coverage in all EU member states. National media outlets have shown interest in reporting on the topic despite the fact that the one responsible for the negotiation with the US administration is the EU Commission, an elite European institution, and not the EU Member-States individually. It is not the first time, that the EU –as a unified political body- negotiates and ratifies bilateral trade agreements. However, this time it happens amid two major events that are currently shaking the European political scene and European society: first, it is the repercussions of the Eurozone economic crisis and, second, the rise of extreme right political parties in EU Member-States. These two forces threaten to bring a possible agreement over TTIP project to a standstill (Cotula, 2014).

European officials insist that the conclusion of TTIP will boost the European economy and create new jobs. Private sector corporations also support TTIP, largely sharing the same view with the EU Commission. However, politically engaged groups in various Member-States, oppose a free trade zone between the EU and the US, on the basis of democratic and environmental concerns.

In this debate, the role of the media is crucial, since it is inextricably linked to the communication of the events to the public. Anyhow, the EU political institutions, private corporations and the civil society are not the only agents to shape decision making in the European environment. Arguably, the role of journalists is of equal importance as they are responsible to represent the public interest. Even in today's digital world, one cannot question the role of journalists as opinion leaders, especially in topics that are not well known by an average European, who would be mostly focused on issues like the refugee crisis or the Greek crisis in Europe. TTIP is one such topic, which, due to its technical aspects and the time-consuming process of negotiations, requires extensive journalistic coverage. In other words, journalists are the main conduit, interpreting and transferring information on TTIP to the general audience and feeding into the public debate.

For the above reason, mass media have been identified as the single more significant contributor towards the creation of a public sphere, which in turn is one of the major pillars of democracy (Habermas, 1974). Therefore, it could be argued that journalists who work in mass media and report on European issues, such as TTIP, contribute to the debate in a "European public sphere" (EPS). Nevertheless, the very existence of a pan-EPS is questioned in the literature. One side in the debate argues that the mere function of a European bureaucracy and the relations it has built with national structures, civil society, and mass media cannot prove the existence of the EPS (Abromeit 2003, p. 40-41 in Van de Steeg, 2006). In that context, TTIP is used as a case study to

examine the existence of a EPS, by the Europeanization of the topic in media coverage. This research explores the issue focusing on TTIP, a current economic EU project in order to assess whether the European politics are discussed with national or European lenses.

The following research question is hence introduced:

RQ: How do EU-correspondents contribute to the Europeanization of TTIP media coverage?

2. CASE STUDY: TTIP project

2.1. Why is it different and important?

TTIP project has been chosen as a case study because it is presented by both the EU and the US as not just another trade agreement, but as a milestone on the way towards more open trade globally (EU Commission, 2015). Normally, trade relationships between the US and the EU Member States are (or should be) regulated by the WTO framework, since all parties are full members of this international organization. Nevertheless, TTIP aspires to go beyond the WTO framework, in the sense that it is, purportedly, a move towards political integration on top of trade integration between the US and the EU (Hoekman, 2014). Therefore, if concluded, TTIP agreement promises to reposition the two major political and economic blocs ahead of the global open market competition. In that regard, TTIP is all about “creating a more strategic, dynamic and holistic US-EU relationship that can generate jobs and growth, engage third countries more effectively, and strengthen the ground rules of the international order” (Hamilton, 2014).

For TTIP negotiating parties, it appears that the foregoing goal is not reachable within the WTO framework. This is because a large proportion of the 160 WTO member states do not seem to be equally interested in adopting new measures towards a more market-based economy and open commerce (Hamilton, 2014). That was evident by the stalemate reached in the “Doha Round” negotiations between which failed to agree on further liberalization of the rules relating to markets access (Hoekman, 2014). Thus, TTIP project can be seen as a step beyond the WTO and the Doha Round agenda, towards consolidating the “special” political, economic, and cultural relationship that brings closer together the US and the EU (Hamilton, 2014).

Another aspect that distinguishes TTIP from other EU policies is the scale of the project and its significance for the EU integration. Shaken by the long-lasting financial crisis the EU is in the process of changing not only its political and economic strategies but of reinventing itself as a multi-lateral organization. Hence, it is argued that the outcome of TTIP negotiations could either “make or brake” EU project, at least in the economic sphere, especially now that at the negotiating table is sitting the EU Commission and not any individual EU Member-States governments (Bendini, 2015).

2.2 Content

TTIP project consists of 24 chapters, which are categorized in three basic parts. The following information is being made available on the Commission's official web page, as part of the recently adopted transparency policy on the project's details.

The first part refers to market access and more specifically to the rules of origin, which formulate the basis of fair global trade. In addition, in this part it is stressed that, as a result of TTIP, custom duties and other barriers to trade will be removed, in an effort towards deeper trade integration, with lower transmission costs. According to the official EU Commission's position, this policy ensures that the European companies will have equal chances in competitiveness as the US enterprises. Finally, in this part there is a comprehensive list of appendices with the measures aimed to ensure the protection of public services, regulate the cultural sector and frame electronic commerce.

The second part functions as a bridge between the US and the EU approaches on specific regulations. It aims to clearly address technicalities on the issues of food safety, chemicals, cosmetics, engineering, medical devices, pharmaceuticals and other sensitive domains of trade activity. The necessity for building a mutual approach on the above trade domains serves not only as a pro-action for instances of dispute settlements but also maps a new understanding in international trade, one that takes a distance from WTO's multilateral system.

The third part focuses again on regulation. This time issues like government to government dispute settlement, intellectual property, competition and investment regulations set the normative grounds not only for an economic but also for strategic and political participation. This becomes clearer, when principles such as the rule of law in labour, human rights and environmental standards are explicitly mentioned.

2.3 Ratification procedures and the issue with the mixed agreements

An interesting feature of TTIP project is that the negotiating parties in it are the US government and the European Commission, instead of the EU Member-States national governments. It is worth noting, that these type of negotiations were put forward only after the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty by the EU Member-States in 2009 (Bendini, 2015). The Lisbon Treaty conferred additional powers to the EU Commission allowing it to lead the negotiations in a series of policies, including the EU trade policy, on behalf of national governments (Cotula, 2014).

The Commission's new trade strategy aspires for the EU to remain flexible in cases of legislative reforms or other developments in innovation, trade and technology (EU Commission, 2012). Thus, it adopts new kind of negotiating mechanisms, which for the first time appear in the TTIP project, and ultimately aim to establish a "living agreement" with the US (Hamilton, 2014). This makes the procedures towards ratification somewhat more complicated and mostly explorative, in the sense that certain steps are still to be agreed upon.

More precisely, the negotiations are held by the European Commission Directorate-General for Trade, thus the political accountability relies on the Commissioner for Trade. The European Commission is negotiating after the binding mandate given by the Trade Ministers Council in 2013. This is –officially- the member states' consent (ECOFIN, 2015). According to the EU Commission's official statements, negotiators are followed by experts from the Directorates-General of the European Commission. There is also an advisory group consisting of 14 experts from the field of consumer protection, from trade unions, and from various industries (ECOFIN, 2015). The European Parliament may intervene at any stage, by submitting a resolution, which is not binding in any legal form (EU Commission, 2012). After the finalization of the agreement, this has to be approved by both the EU Council of Ministers and the European Parliament, as well as, the US Congress (ECOFIN, 2015). When the negotiations are finalized and all the legal aspects are covered, the Council and the European Parliament are informed. The Council decides on the signature and conclusion of the agreement following the proposal of the Commission (EU Commission, 2012). The agreement is formally signed by the two parties. After the signature by both sides, the Council transmits the agreement together with the draft decision to the European Parliament asking for its consent (ECOFIN, 2015). The Parliament will cast a yes or no vote on the agreement. This procedure will have to take place in the first plenary session of the European Parliament, followed by the internal procedure of consent, most of which takes place in the Committee for International Trade (ECOFIN, 2015). Finally, the EP votes in plenary session to give its consent or not.

When the agreement contains provisions that fall under the responsibility of Member States (this is known as a "mixed agreement"), individual Member States also have to ratify the agreement, alongside the EU, according to their national ratification procedures (GoN, 2015). The European Commission expects TTIP to be a mixed agreement. Although it has not yet officially confirmed this, the EU's trade Commissioner Cecilia Malmström said that all national parliaments must have a say on it (GoN, 2015). In a scenario like that, after the consent of the Parliament and the ratification by the Member States, the Council will adopt the final Decision for finalization of the agreement' which will be published in the Official Journal (ECOFIN, 2015). The European Commission has submitted the trade agreement with Singapore to the European Court of Justice

requesting the Court to determine whether it is a mixed agreement or not (GoN, 2015). The court's decision for Singapore could be legally binding for the TTIP as well.

2.4 Criticism

TTIP proved to be a controversial topic for part of the European public. Although, concerns about the project vary from one Member-State to another, and among different sections of the populations, the criticism on TTIP focuses on the following major areas:

2.4.1. Eschewing WTO multilateralism

More than an economic project strengthening transatlantic trade, there are those who see in TTIP a strategic plan on behalf of the EU and the US to maintain and even widen their competitiveness advantage vis-a-vis the emerging economies in global markets. In particular, TTIP is seen as an attempt to push further towards the liberalization of the world economy overcoming more conservative approaches favored by most of the developing countries in the WTO (Hamilton, 2014). TTIP is also expected to increase pressure on the emerging economic powers (i.e. BRICS) which -if TTIP is implemented- will allegedly experience a significant decline in their exports towards the EU and US. Thus, TTIP can work as a leverage in the interest of the transatlantic bloc, pushing countries in the periphery towards adopting new "market-opening initiatives" (Agazzi, 2014, Hamilton, 2014).

Moreover, the bilateral negotiations on TTIP appear to undermine the multilateral global trade regime as this is being evolving within the framework of the WTO (Agazzi, 2014). In that regard, TTIP project is allegedly contradicting the principle of "international trade non-discrimination" as that is stated in Article 1 of GATT (Falkenberg in Levchenko, 2015).

2.4.2. Social concerns

It is assumed that differences in labour laws will eventually harm European employees' labour rights. Especially, the ratification of only two out of the eight major conventions of the ILO on behalf of the US, causes increasing concerns in Europe that an aggressive liberalization of the labour market will have to take place (Agazzi, 2014). Moreover, there are fears that the implementation of TTIP will result in significant job displacement and long term unemployment (Raza et al., 2014).

2.4.3. Health concerns

There are fears that TTIP -and especially the elimination of “Non-Tariff-Measures” (NTMs)- will lead to the erosion of environmental standards, consumer safety, and public health, which at present are bound to stricter regulations in Europe than the US (Raza et al., 2014). One of the most cited examples is the eventual opening of the European market to genetically modified goods such as “chlorinated chicken, hormone-treated beef etc” (Agazzi, 2014).

2.4.4. Economic concerns

Critics mention that the predicted economic benefits of the implementation of TTIP are overestimated. In particular, GDP and real wage increases are expected to be below the estimated rate (a range from 0.3 to 1.3 %). It is also argued that TTIP will only marginally affect the creation of new job positions which would help reduce unemployment in the EU. Most important, these changes will be effected in a period among ten to twenty years after the implementation of TTIP (Raza et al., 2014).

In addition, because of the NTMs, the EU budget is expected to suffer a significant revenue loss which is estimated to reach a 2% or €2.6 billion p.a (ibid). Finally, trade among the EU member-states will most likely decrease after TTIP, exerting more pressure on national budgets (ibid).

2.4.5. Business concerns

As far as the European business environment is concerned, the main issue is the introduction of a system of Investor State Disputes Settlement (ISDS) that foresees the referral of business disputes to bodies other than the national judicial system of the Member-State (Tandon, 2015). This aims to increase protection of investments allowing investors to sue governments if the latter pursue actions in the name of public good but which have a negative impact on business prospects. This type of disputes would be referred to “investor-state arbitration tribunals” and not to national tribunals (Cotula, 2014).

2.4.6. Democratic deficit

Finally, there are many voices, especially among the European civil society, that point to what they claim to be “lack of transparency in the negotiations between the EU Commission and the US

Administration which also raises the issues of accountability of the EU institutions and of a democratic deficit in the European political scene (Tandon, 2015).

All in all, it must be stressed that TTIP has been conceived as a major project creating a common trade area spanning across the US and Europe. The implementation of TTIP would have a tremendous impact, bringing the two transatlantic partners into a privileged position in global trade. However, different trade standards and procedures on the two continents across the Atlantic raise concerns about the political, economic and social changes that such an agreement would bring with it. In particular, various sections of the European society raise concerns over health issues (consumer's safety), labour rights, national jurisdiction and democratic transparency. The above make TTIP a topic worth covering for mass media across Europe.

3.THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1. TTIP and the “public sphere”

One of the founding principles of the democratic society is that topics of public interest are discussed in public, giving the opportunity to the citizens to comment on them, endorse them or reject them. In modern-day democratic societies, this debate has largely moved from the *agora* to the mass media (both traditional and new) which have become the major conveyors of information on public affairs (Garcia-Blanco & Cushion, 2010: 395).

This brings also to the fore the role of journalists as those actors, whose selection of what to be reported and how to be reported significantly affects the nature of the public debate (Walter, 2015). The analysis of how journalistic practices affect news content and style will be the topic of the second half of the theoretical framework. Before reaching this point, it is important to focus on the nature of the space -or “public sphere”- in which public debates take place. The reason for focusing on the “public sphere” has to do with the character of the TTIP. Most often, issues of national or local interest are being debated within the boundaries of a national public sphere. However, since TTIP is an EU-led project, it is of public interest both to the European society as a whole and to the various national societies of the Member States that constitute it. The supranational (pan-European) and national (Member States) dimensions of TTIP cause a complex situation, for the debate over its aims, appropriateness and potential benefits or harms for the European citizens has to transpire at various levels. Furthermore, as explained in the introductory chapter, because of its controversial character, the painstaking negotiating procedure and pervasiveness in citizens' life the TTIP, can be seen as a real test for democratic accountability within the EU. A first major question that arises from the above is whether there is a EPS running in

parallel with the national “public spheres”, in which TTIP can also be debated. To examine this question, a brief introduction to the concept of “public sphere” is deemed necessary.

The notion of the “public sphere” was introduced by Habermas in his seminal work “The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article” (1964). The author claims that “public sphere” is the space of social life in which public opinion is moulded. Through debates in the “public sphere” public is able to affect politics and decision making in state and societal institutions. In fact, Habermas stresses that, within society there may be a variety of public spheres, some of them consisting of small number of people assembling to discuss public issues of common interest and other including hundreds or thousands of citizens connected through mass media (ibid). It is worth mentioning that Habermas developed his theory while studying the political and social interaction in the eighteenth and nineteenth century European society (more specifically that of the British and German societies), in the wake of modernity, focusing on the change brought about by the rise of the mass media (press and radio). He suggested that the emergence of mass media put a wedge between the world of power (state) and the world of money (economy/private sector) creating a public space or “public sphere” in which citizens could be kept informed of and debate current developments (Habermas et. al, 1974). Lunt and Livingstone, (2013) claim that Habermas saw in the concept of “public sphere” a tool to mitigate the negative impact of individualization and commercialization experienced in the modern capitalist society, also of his post-war era. Moreover, they insist that in the refined version of his “public sphere” theory, Habermas gave emphasis on the following functions both mass media and journalists working in them must fulfil in the “public sphere” (p. 92):

- first, they should contribute to creating the conditions of possibility for participation and deliberation by adopting the position of an institution operating in the public sphere. This should include inviting (or researching) the expression of public discourse and then translating the key issues and concerns of the public into a language that is intelligible to the political administrative complex.
- second, media institutions should contribute to the constitution of a civic republic by actively engaging the public in the production of news and current affairs by creating a public sphere around each institution as part of the dispersed institutional sites of the new governance structures.

Although, not explicitly mentioned in his works, Habermas had in mind the emergence of a “public sphere” (or several public spheres) at the national level. This can be deduced from his writings on

the rise of nation-wide, public-service, mass media and their effects on the relationship between society, politics and economy, as well as from his thinking of the “public sphere” as playing an instrumental role in the consolidation of the democratic political order within a country (Habermas et. al, 1974). Van de Steeg (2002) explains that the boundaries of a public sphere are inevitably defined by factors such as language and a “delimited public” which force mass media to operate within a specific geographical area. Nonetheless, he contends that this specific geographic area is not necessarily meant to be a country or a nation state. In his view, it is important to highlight that the core element for the materialization of a public sphere is the development of the “discussion on a specific topic between people in front of (and possibly with) a specific public”. Thus, the topic of the discussion is equally important in defining the participants in the debate and the geographical extend of the public sphere (ibid, p. 94). Yet, the question of whether this means that a public sphere can transcend national boundaries to occupy a transnational space is still begging for an answer. For instance, can TTIP, as a topic of pan-European interest be debated in a larger (European) public space than the existing national public spaces?

Previous research has shown that when the decision making process in what are considered large-scale European projects lies mostly with the EU institutions, there is a public debate that takes place concurrently within all EU Member States (Koopmans and Erbe, 2003). This means that some topics are being discussed in a “distinctly European manner”, which bespeaks that there is something more in the EU space than the mere existence of a “series of fragmented national public spheres”. Can this be a EPS or many parallel “Europeanized national public spheres”? To answer the question, the paper firstly explores, in the current chapter, the academic debate over the the potentiality of a EPS. Then it focuses on the journalistic practices of correspondents based in Brussels to assess their professional contribution, through reporting on TTIP, towards the creation of a unified communication space in the EU be it a EPS or the outcome of the “Europeanisation of national public spheres”. The correspondents’ view on “Europeanization” will be checked against the existing theory to identify whether there is convergence with it or there are gaps that need to be covered. It will also be assessed whether the media professionals see the Europeanisation of TTIP through national lenses -where the interest of their own countries colors the scope of TTIP agreement- or not.

Hence, the subsequent research question derives: *How do EU- correspondents contribute to the Europeanization of TTIP media coverage?*

3.2. A “European public sphere” or “Europeanized national public spheres”?

Whereas the shaping of the “national public sphere” takes place within well established boundaries, that of a EPS appears to stumble on a variety of issues, most notably, the compartmentalization of the European communication space in a plethora of national communication spaces. The lack of a unified communication space across the EU is usually attributed to structural factors such as the linguistic variety and the absence of shared (political) culture and identity among the people in Europe (Van de Steeg, 2002). Abromeit (2003, p. 40-41, in Van de Steeg, 2006) points out that the rise of a European public opinion is constrained by “the predominance of national rather than European character of the media”, the numerous national languages, and the difference in political culture among the EU Member-States. Emphasis has also been put on the role of mass media and their function of mediating communication between the EU and the European public. Specifically, it has been argued that how European issues are being reported in the media affects European integration in its social and political aspects (Semetko et al. 2000). In this regard, mass media are often charged with covering EU issues from a national point of view, failing to instil the European perspective to the citizens of the Member States (Statham, 2008). Nevertheless, there is disagreement over whether this “communication deficit” is the cause or the effect for the lack of a EPS. Scholars attempt to solve the “mismatch” between “national” and “European” public spheres in various ways. In that respect, some ideas for the development of a EPS involve top-down (vertical) approaches with, for instance, the evolution of pan-European media, or horizontal approaches, where national public spheres open up for Europe, through the Europeanisation of the national media (Brüggemann and Königslöw, 2009).

3.2.1. Transnational media and the Pan-European perspective

Örnebring (2009) is convinced that currently there is no such thing as a “European” public sphere and the reason for that is the failure of journalism to overcome the urge of reporting on EU policies through national lenses. As he explicitly puts it, when mass media across Europe report on EU issues their coverage “is largely structured to fit with national concerns and national stereotypes” (p. 3). Therefore, the mass media coverage on Europe, as currently takes place, is not contributing to the emergence of a “European” public sphere “where European issues can be debated by all Europeans” (ibid). An additional reason for that, cited by Örnebring, is the lack of pervasive “Pan-European” news outlets. In his view, those mass media which purport to play this role generate little, if any, interest to the wider European audience (ibid).

Garcia-Blanco & Cushion (2010, p. 395) put forward the idea that the existence of transnational mass media is a sufficient condition for the creation of a EPS. Therefore, their core

concern is whether there are currently operating in Europe transnational mass media or not. To answer that, they examine the function of the Euronews channel and its contribution to the consolidation of a EPS. Their main conclusion is that because of an elitist outlook and lack of proper resources (anchormen, specialized reporters etc.) Euronews does not help towards the establishment of a “European” public sphere, which would acquire “supranational relevance” (2010, p. 407).

Corcoran and Fahy (2009) examined, among others, the role of the “Financial Times” (FT) newspaper in the making of a “European” public sphere. Their findings suggest that the FT adopt a “Pan-European” journalistic style which is adjusted to address a conceived “elite” audience. The FT is considered by many practitioners (journalists, politicians etc) as the best example of a Pan-European newspaper, as its coverage focuses largely on the European-wide political and economic developments. At the same time, its readership spans across all the EU Member-States (ibid, p. 103). Nevertheless, according to the researchers, a closer look at both the sources that feed its reportage and the consumers of its news, suggests that the “Financial Times” is an “elite-oriented” newspaper (ibid, p. 109). As such, it could not serve the purpose of a “European” public sphere but that of a smaller, “elite public sphere” which consists of those who have a special interest in the developments around the EU policies, such as “senior business people, national and EU politicians, diplomats, civil servants, and journalists” (ibid, p. 109).

3.2.2. National vs European perspective: The “Europeanisation” of national political discourses

Koopmans and Erbe (2004) contend that any attempt to approach the issue of a “European” public sphere focusing on the existence of Pan-European mass media is bound to get a negative answer (ibid, p. 99). Instead, they assume that the emergence of such a supranational public sphere can only come as a result of the “Europeanisation” of the public political communication or the communication among all relevant actors who are or should be genuinely concerned about the EU policies (ibid, p. 114). This “Europeanisation” of the public political communication can take place beyond the domain of the traditional mass media and can be developed in three forms: First, it is the communication among the EU institutions themselves and the EU institutions and collective actors who are concerned with EU policies. This is the “supra-nationally Europeanized communication”. Second, it is the “vertical Europeanisation”, which focuses on the interaction between the national and EU actors. In its “bottom-up” variation, this type of communication refers to the involvement of national actors in the debate over the EU policies, while the “top-down” form points to the

intervention of the EU actors in the making of national policies, in the name of safeguarding the EU acquit and the implementation of the EU regulations. Finally, the third form is the “horizontal Europeanisation”, in which media and actors in one Member-State comment on developments and policies in another (ibid, p. 114). By shifting the attention from “Pan-European mass media” to the more general process of “Europeanisation” of the public political communication, Koopmans and Erbe make an attempt to soften the criteria determining whether there actually is a “European” public sphere or not. Nevertheless, their research on the issue, even from this angle, did not bear any conclusive results. In presenting their findings, the authors stress that the answer whether there is a “European” or “Europeanized” public sphere “depends entirely on the policy field [EU or national] one studies”.

Meijers (2013) argues that instead of speaking about the emergence of a single, comprehensive, EPS one could see signs of the “Europeanisation” of national public spheres. This happens when in certain occasions (specific cases) the EU “becomes more visible in national news”, in more than one EU country at the same time (ibid, p. 6). This is linked to the previous discussion about the significance of a topic for the EU citizens. As mentioned in the first section of the chapter, EU policies that have a pervading impact on the life of citizens become topics of a debate that acquires a supranational character. In other words, although the importance of the national scene, to the citizens of the Member-States, does not favor the shift towards a supranational public sphere, the pervasiveness of the EU in national politics, as a result of the process of European integration, can tune the national public spheres into the EU agenda. Following the above example of Koopmans and Erbe (2004), Meijers also uses a case study to test his theory. Choosing from the economic (policy) field, he examined the coverage of the Eurozone crisis by the German and Dutch media. His conclusion is that on certain EU topics of high -perceived or actual- importance ‘national public spheres can Europeanize quickly’ (Meijers, 2013, p. 28). An important question, however, that remains to be answered is whether this “Europeanisation” of national public spheres is a “temporary phenomenon or a persisting alteration” of the national mass media function (ibid).

Finally, Walter (2015) takes for granted that the “Europeanisation” of the national public spheres is something that is currently happening across the EU and looks at the “actor-structure” dimension to identify what is its most prevalent form. Her findings suggest that, in general, EU officials and national politicians -especially government figures- enjoy more visibility in EU news coverage than other actors, such as political parties, lobby groups (intermediaries), and citizens (civil society). This shows, in her view, that the vertical structure (top-down) is the one dominating in the “Europeanized” public sphere (ibid, p. 15).

Besides the relations among the various actors involved in the creation of a shared European communication space, another significant factor -usually overlooked- which appears to heavily affect the process is the functional context of the mass media and, especially, the journalistic practices of those professionals which are assigned to the coverage of European issues. It is important to explore how the professional context in which media professionals abide to, influences the “Europeanization” of the public political communication. For instance, EU correspondents working for national mass media must take into consideration the political debate and news demand in their home countries when reporting on EU topics. By contrast, Pan-European media journalists employ in their work a European perspective on the issues at hand, which does not particularly reflect any national position. Thus, the second subsequent research sub question of this paper is: *What are the differences in TTIP reporting among correspondents employed by national media organizations and those working for Pan-European mass media?*

These involve issues of interacting with sources of information at the EU level, “patterns of reporting and presentation”, as well as the “effects and repercussions” of the journalists’ coverage in the reception of EU news by the audience (Sievert, 2010). However, before getting into the details of this issue, one must explore the role of journalistic practices in the production of news, since this can be considered as their major contribution to the strengthening of the public sphere.

3.3. Journalistic practices and news production

The following section explores the journalistic practices that influence the production of the news. It focuses on three main issues: processes, professional values and perception of audience.

3.3.1. Processes in the news production by journalists

Journalism, like any other profession, exists, evolves and develops its products within a specific framework, whose borders are delineated by a set of organizational, ideological and literary conventions, which are particular to its nature (Shoemaker & Reese, 2011). Journalists, themselves, are viewed as professionals who struggle to give their own input, overcoming organizational and other constraints, when writing a newspaper article or reporting on a topic on national news (ibid). The above indicate that when it comes to the production of news in any mass media around the world, there is a constant battle between “structure” and “agency”, which finally determines what reaches the audience and in what form. Schudson (1989), in his seminal work “The sociology of news production”, focuses on the question of how news is produced, giving some important insights. His main argument is that the function of news production is heavily influenced by three

major elements. Firstly, he draws on political economy to argue that the economic structure of the mass media (big conglomerates, national, public, private etc.) has a significant impact on the selection and representation of news to the audience (ibid). Secondly, he borrows from organizational theory, to make the claim that journalists adjust their personal values to fit with the organization's expectations and are also affected in their work by occupational routines, in-group relations, relations with editors etc. (ibid). Thirdly, he points to the cultural background of the journalists as the filter through which they understand, interpret and relay "what is happening". More specifically, Schudson contends that each journalist coming from a particular culture with a particular symbolic system, inevitably uses cultural symbols that would resonate to the targeted audience when relaying the news (ibid).

The tripartite approach to news production does not necessarily mean that each one of the three processes takes place independently of one another. On the contrary, in most cases, and most of the time, the processes take place concurrently. As Tuchman (2002, p. 90) puts it, the three processes are to be understood as "different moments or aspects of news production, approachable from different angles using different methodologies". In fact, he argues, news production is the outcome of "social reflexivity and contestation" which involves all three instances (ibid). For Cottle (2003) the key to bridging the three processes is to be found in the "reflexive sociology" of the French sociologist and philosopher Pierre Bourdieu. The latter emphasized in his work, among others, the role of "practice" in the development of social dynamics. Through empirical observations in the newsroom, Bourdieu noticed that the "journalistic field" works at the conjunction of the "cultural" with the "political field" in the sense that not only produces cultural, "symbolic goods" and "categories for vision" but also contributes to the re-production -or sometimes change- of power and hierarchy in the "symbolic space" of politics (Bourdieu, 2005, p. 37). Therefore, the production of news is the outcome of journalistic practices, which are moulded in the social and political *milieus* and are, at the same time, depended on all three processes. The latter has an impact on the notion of "journalistic freedom", since one can deduce from the above that a journalist can only be relatively "free", "autonomous" or "independent", as long as he or she is not only defined by the social and political structures of his or her surroundings, but also positioned in the micro-cosmos of the journalistic field (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

3.3.2. Professional values and roles

The inevitability of the merge of the three processes in the "journalistic field" does not necessarily mean that the outcome of the contestation in the production of news is always the same. In other words, the input of organizational constraints, economic interests, and individual agency varies

from one mass medium to another and from country to country. In this regard, it is worth examining what are these specific elements (both structural and individual) that could influence the journalistic practices. A first major observation is that in recent years the news production is increasingly driven by economic motives. Witschge and Nygren (2009) maintain that the advent of digital media has put pressure on traditional mass media to become more competitive, more profitable, and more efficient in order to reach out to new audiences and attract advertisers. This appears to move journalism from a service-oriented approach, in which the aim is to provide public service in terms of knowledge, information and advice, to infotainment journalism, which sees the public as spectators interested in the consumption of private lives' details, gossip, sensationalism, emotions and entertainment (Mellado, 2015). Hence, the fulfilment of financial targets seems to undermine the notion of "public service" which is supposed to be one of the core values in the journalistic profession. In addition, the increasing emphasis on economic profit and technological developments mark a change in the division of labour encouraging the rise of "multi-skilled" journalists. These, are involved in more phases of the news production, than solely that of news reporting, which means that they have to think primarily about the overall objectives and interests of the mass media they work for and secondarily about their own individual contribution in the formation of news (Witschge & Nygren, 2009).

Beyond economic considerations, the professional input of journalists is shaped by the organizational culture of the mass media they work for. Professional routines (organizational demands, goals and standards), in-group relations (professional socialization among journalists, editors and directors), organizational change (move to digital products, change in tasks) and collective (professional) values are all decisive factors for the journalistic product. Especially, as far as the intersubjective (collective) values or "occupational ideology" are concerned, these are supposed to ensure high quality in the journalistic output (Witschge & Nygren, 2009). Deuze (2005) also focuses on journalism's "occupational ideology" which, according to him, corresponds to inter-subjectively accepted ideas, beliefs and values on the nature and objectives of the journalistic profession. Tracing the genealogy of journalism, he is able to identify the following core ideas that shape the field (p. 447):

- Public service: journalists provide a public service (as watchdogs or 'news-hounds', active collectors and disseminators of information);
- Objectivity: journalists are impartial, neutral, objective, fair and (thus) credible;
- Autonomy: journalists must be autonomous, free and independent in their work;

- Immediacy: journalists have a sense of immediacy, actuality and speed (inherent in the concept of ‘news’);
- Ethics: journalists have a sense of ethics, validity and legitimacy.

Several studies (Weaver & Johnson, 1996, Shoemaker & Reese, 2011) have shown that the professional values are more important to the production of content by the journalist than his or her personal values (developed through socialization, education, family) although the latter should not be disregarded whatsoever. As already mentioned above, the journalist systematically draws - sometimes even unconsciously- on cultural symbols embedded in his cultural background to build news stories that would make sense to his audience. Especially, when journalists ask themselves the question of “what is worth reporting?” they come up with answers that are influenced also by their own biases, environment and heredity (Plaisance & Skewes, 2003, p. 836).

How journalists interpret the professional values has an impact on what they think about their professional roles, or in other words, how they see themselves while exercising their profession (Weaver & Johnson, 1996). The opposite is also true, since the identification of a journalist with a specific role reveals a lot about his professional values (ibid). In general, scholars agree on the distinction between three major roles undertaken by journalists when doing their job, those of: timely disseminator, interpreter, and adversary (Weaver & Johnson, 1996). The utmost concern of the “timely disseminator” is to communicate the news -especially breaking news- timely, taking a neutral approach, free of personal value judgments (ibid). Journalists embodying this role are “audience oriented in cautious”, while at the same time, avoid dubious reporting practices, such as recording interlocutors without previous consent, using documents without acquiring authorization etc. (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1996). However, besides individual assessments about professional values what can push a journalist towards picking this role are external factors such as competition between mass media and organizational perceptions promoting the belief that breaking news is what the audience wants (Weaver & Johnson, 1996). An “interpreter” is a journalist who sees his job as giving context and perspective to the news he reports. This has to do with an implicit understanding of the significance of the journalistic profession in the public sphere (ibid). To have a say in the story implies also that the journalist is very familiar with the topic of his reportage grasping nuances, motives, and patterns in its development (ibid). The core idea that better defines the interpretative role in journalism is that of “public service” (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1996, p. 837). Lastly, the “adversary” role is that of the watchdog which maintains a “skeptical outlook” towards power and a “combative style” always oriented towards exposing wrongdoing (ibid). This role is linked to what is widely known as “investigative journalism” and regards “autonomy” as the most important value of the profession (Mellado & van Dalen, 2013). It suffices

to say that the above “journalistic roles” are ideal types constructed upon idealized “professional values”. In reality, journalists can follow a combination of roles or think of themselves as embodying an ideal type (role) while, in fact, enacting another. The added value of integrating “journalistic roles” and “professional values” into the debate of how news is produced is to achieve a better understanding of the internal factors (both professional and personal) that drive the journalist when reporting the news (Plaisance & Skewes, 2003).

It is worth noting that the journalist’s decision to undertake a specific role is also influenced by the beat or special thematic area which he has been assigned to cover. Journalistic beats work as “micro cultures” having their own norms and values that dictate the content and style of reporting. For instance, the “political” news beat being closely related to the notions of political power and democratic accountability, seems to encourage the “adversarial” journalistic role. By contrast, the crime or sports beats because of their social nature, call for the professional roles of the “disseminator” or the “interpreter” (Skovsgaard & van Dalen, 2013). Finally, as it will be discussed in the next section, professional roles may also vary depending on perceptions of audience’s expectations from the journalists.

3.3.3. News values and audience in news selection

The question of what guides the selection of news to be reported can also be answered by looking at the news values and the journalistic perceptions about audience. Allern (2002) claims that the most important news values are those of (p. 140):

- *significance* (the relevance and importance of the event or phenomenon to readers)
- *identification* (geographical or cultural proximity)
- *sensation* (the element of surprise)
- *timeliness* (proximity in time)
- *conflict* (controversy, confrontation)
- *salience* (familiarity, prominence)
- *influence* of the country, institution or person in the news story

For Njaastad (1999) *identification* or *proximity* is definitely the most important among them and the one that more often guides news selection. To further stress the significance of proximity, he differentiates between various aspects of it, such as “*proximity in time, proximity of effects or consequences, geographical proximity, cultural proximity and emotional proximity*” (p. 36). Nevertheless, news values can be reliable guides in news selection and production only if one

assumes that journalists and mass media know their audience (Allern, 2002). This means that the former must discover what is the interest of the latter. As a matter of fact, “audience interest” has been identified as one of the most significant factors determining what is “newsworthy” (Tai & Chang, 2002). For instance, empirical observations of the US media, have shown that a lack of audience interest in developments outside the US has led to the decline in the coverage of foreign news (Hoge, 1997).

However, besides relying on what can be measured (lack of interest in international news) journalists proceed to the selection of the news they choose to report by using their own imagination to guess what could attract their audience’s attention. In that sense, subjective ideas about what news can better relate to the audience are an equally important factor -as external factors- in the news selection process (Tai & Chang, 2002). In today’s commercialized news landscape, there is criticism that journalists and, above all, media are those shaping the “audience interest”, not those going after that (ibid). Anyhow, it appears that technological advancement and focus on profit have altered the traditional relationship between the journalist and the audience. In the era of the Internet, the journalist’s privilege of being the only source of public information about public affairs has ceased to exist. Especially, the emergence of web 2.0 and social media have allowed for proliferation of the sources of information, putting the nail on the journalists’ “knowledge monopoly” (Evet, 2003). Expansion and simultaneous fragmentation in the field of news updating creates bigger competition over the share of advertisement and profits. As a result, it has been observed that, more often than not, financial considerations trump “professional ideology” when selecting the news to be reported to the audience (Ornebring, 2008). Nevertheless, one should not conclude that commercialization of news will inevitably become the only factor dictating the “needs” of the audience in terms of news consumption. Audience expectation for quality news and journalists sticking to its traditional professional values and roles will remain a check against neoliberal trends in the news industry (Allern, 2002).

So far it has been explained how journalistic practices in the news production are influenced by factors such as the political economy of the media, work routines and relations in the newsroom, occupational ideology, professional roles, news beats, news values and perceptions of audience. Although not explicitly stated, the above indicators have been the product of empirical observation on journalists and mass media operating at national level. Therefore, the subsequent research sub question remains:

Which elements influence the news reporting of EU correspondents?

This is a case for the “EU correspondents” who are being seconded to Brussels by their organizations to cover EU topics. The following section will examine the journalistic practices of the EU or “Brussels-based correspondents” aiming to find out, firstly, whether they relate to the journalistic practices described above, and secondly, how they affect news production on EU topics. Eventually, the answers to these two questions will be an indicator towards the extend of the Europeanisation of national public spheres.

3.4. The role of Brussels-based correspondents in the Europeanisation of the national public spheres

This section will explore the role of the Brussels-based correspondents in the Europeanisation of the national public spheres. The analysis that follows aims to lay the theoretical foundation for the empirical research with a group of Brussels-based correspondents (interviewees). The latter’s contribution to the topic of the research will be ascertained through the answers they will give on the journalistic practices they employed when covering TTIP on behalf of their mass media.

In general, it has been noted that journalistic routines in the communication of EU policies affect to a great extend the “news-consuming habits of European audiences” (Statham, 2008). However, the EU was quite late to discover the important role of journalists in this process. In 2006, the Commission announced its intention to “make communication a policy in its own right”, focusing on “five areas of action” to enhance communication with the European public. Among the Commission’s top priorities was to engage with mass media to enable them report more effectively on European issues (White Paper on Communication, 2006). In the same period, the EU was funding the efforts of independent institutions such as the European Journalism Centre (ECJ) and the European Journalism Training Association (EJTA) whose aim was to instil a “common understanding of professional standards and values” to journalists across Europe (Lauk, 2009). In the wake of the EU enlargement of 2004, the EU supported a three-year empirical research, titled Adequate Information Management in Europe (AIM), on the routines, mechanisms and projection of values of traditional media (newspapers and television) in eleven European countries. The main goal of AIM was to identify the role of national mass media in the creation of a EPS or multiple EPSs (AIM, 2007). As expected, the outcome of the research confirmed that when mass media report on European issues, do so through a national prism, taking into consideration the national political, economic and social context (Balcytiene & Vinciuniene, 2008).

Nonetheless, AIM also found out that despite carrying in themselves a national orientation, those correspondents who reported on European themes from Brussels, showed signs of gradually developing a “European journalistic culture” based on “growing common awareness and unique

common practice” (Kopper, 2007, p. 187). Yet, what constitutes a “European journalistic culture” and whether this links to the emergence of a EPS is a highly controversial issue. What seems to be a less disputed topic, is the “power” of the EU machinery to induce a certain level of conformity to Brussels-based correspondents, in terms of the journalistic practices they follow. In the course of almost sixty years since its establishment, in 1957, the EU has been evolved into a big bureaucracy with deeply entrenched procedures, functions and routines. Irrespectively of the background and journalistic culture of the correspondents who take their duties in Brussels, they all have to confront these deep rooted routines of the EU institutions. For instance, the structured manner and the formalities that the EU institutions follow in communicating with correspondents encourage the latter to adopt homogenized practices and professional standards when contacting their sources of information (Balcytiene & Vinciuniene, 2008). In addition to institutional factors, scholars identify other exogenous phenomena affecting the journalistic practices in Brussels, such as the forces of globalization, commercialization and technological evolution (Cornia, 2010). Close interaction with supra-national structures and working in an environment that is heavily influenced by the international context have a significant impact on the reporting of correspondents, especially in terms of selection of topics and adopted perspectives in journalistic coverage (ibid). Finally, what promotes conformity is the social interaction between Brussels-based correspondents themselves. By attending the same briefings and press conferences, focusing on the same major issues, and even hanging out at the same places, journalists in EU institutions form close professional networks and sometimes personal friendships. These networks allow for cooperation in exchange of background information, professional values, and personal views, leading towards greater homogenization (Balcytiene & Vinciuniene, 2008).

Nevertheless, one can argue that what is described above as the institutional impact on the journalistic practices of correspondents in Brussels, represents a monolithic view of the EU as a unitary actor. Reality is far more complex as the core EU institutions -let alone the numerous EU Agencies- pursue communication policies that greatly vary from one another. As a matter of fact, the way the EU Council, Parliament and Commission choose to channel information to correspondents creates different types of obstacles to the emergence of common “European journalistic practices”. In particular, information on the policies pursued by the Council comes from a variety of sources. Next to the formal briefings organized by the Council itself, correspondents obtain important cues on priority policy areas from the Presidency -which is assumed by all Member-States on a six-month rotation basis- as well as the Heads of States or the M-S’s ministers who attend the various Council’s ministerial sessions. The situation differs in the European Parliament, where most of the initiative in channeling information to journalists is being undertaken by the members of the Parliament themselves. The latter, as they are being elected by the popular

vote, maintain a strong interest in informing their constituency of their activity and views on European and national issues. This, however, puts a significant obstacle in the process of homogenization of journalistic practices at the EU level, since most of the time mutual interest limits the exchange solely to that between parliamentarians and correspondents of national mass media (Reymaekers et al. 2007). By contrast, the EU Commission, being the executive branch of the EU, organizes the flow of information to mass media in a very structured way, through regular updates (daily briefings) of its priorities and policy initiatives. That helps correspondents develop common practices, even if it does not guarantee that they report on the Commission's proposed topics in a positive way (ibid). A final remark has to do with the implicit preferences of the EU institutions when communicating information to correspondents. Despite the avowed principles of impartiality and equal treatments, it appears that the EU officials are more positively pre-disposed to channeling information to journalists of elite media (pan-European, transnational, major national mass media) than to correspondents working for less known or less influential media organizations. Allegedly, this also hinders the mouldering of common professional practices among the Brussels-based correspondents (Balcytiene & Vinciuniene, 2008).

At this point, it is worth mentioning once more that the formation of common journalistic practices among correspondents to the EU institutions is still an "emerging trend" and most likely far from becoming the day-to-day reality in Brussels any time soon. Described above were the exogenous pressures -institutional and others- exerted on correspondents towards homogenization of practices. This largely refers to one-way communication, from the EU institutions to correspondents, highlighting the impact of structure on this relationship. Journalistic practices, however, are heavily dependent on other factors too. Firstly, one must take into account the agency (as opposed to the impact of structure) of the journalists themselves when managing interaction with their sources of information and interpreting the stories they choose to cover the most. The analytical capacity, personal preferences and opinions of the Brussels-based correspondents affect to a great extent the representation of European issues to national audiences (Kopper, 2007). Secondly, the correspondents' perspective on European issues is directly linked to the perspective of their home organization (mass media) towards the EU (Gleissner & de Vreese, 2005). Whether reporting for Euro-positive or Euro-sceptic media, journalists are likely to adapt their style and angle of viewing things accordingly, to conform with the editorial and readership expectations (Reymaekers et al. 2007). Thirdly, it has been observed that the correspondents put emphasis on presenting EU news in "familiar narrative forms" to better resonate with the wider (national) audience (Cornia, 2010). Intimately linked to that, is the priority given to the coverage of EU news with "national relevance". As Firmstone (2008, p. 438) puts it, media coverage of the EU is always guided by "the need to present EU affairs in terms of national consequences". In other words, the

closer an EU issue is to the national news agenda the more likely to be domesticated (Gleissner & de Vreese, 2005). Fourthly, the journalistic practices of the Brussels-based correspondents cannot escape the influence of the journalistic culture and tradition of the country of origin. For instance, in the UK, journalists and media, in general, have the role of watchdog to political power, which makes them adopting a mostly critical stance against political decision making in Brussels (Balcytiene and Vinciuniene, 2008). By contrast, in Germany journalistic culture requires that the news are being presented in the most objective way without any commentaries or opinions that could provoke a bias effect (ibid). Furthermore, mutual understanding and respect between mass media and their news sources is of utmost importance to Nordic countries, while in “young democracies” a clientelist relationship between mass media and power structures is quite common (ibid).

In conclusion, the journalistic practices of the Brussels-based correspondents are the outcome of the interaction of a variety of factors which have to do with the international, regional (European), national and local, political and economic context, the structural influences of the EU institutions, the dynamics and the agenda of the home organization, the journalistic tradition in the country of origin, and the personal analytical capacity of the correspondents in interpreting and presenting the news.

3.5. Overview

The development of a “European” public sphere is considered an implausible scenario both in the academic discourse and in practice, as this would require a number of conditions to be fulfilled, such as the emergence of a federal system in the EU, the use of a single common language etc., which is currently unavailable. Instead, the present situation seems to be closer to that of “Europeanized” national public spheres, in which national mass media feed into the debate on EU issues. By using TTIP project as a case study, the paper will examine how Brussels-based correspondents of Pan-European and national mass media report on this topic (negative/positive, national/European lens), as well as what is the dominant structure of this “Europeanized” public sphere (vertical/horizontal).

Having the subsequent research sub questions (SRQ1-SRQ4) in mind, the theoretical issues touched upon in the paper, will be linked with the profound insights obtained from the media professionals. The aim is to define the process of Europeanisation of news with a pan-European interest, such as TTIP. This is to be reflected on the choices made by the professionals, the

journalistic practices they follow, the perspective they adopt, the sources they use and the audience they address, as well as their reporting style.

Equal emphasis is given on how the answers given by the professionals to the subsequent research questions will shed light on the existence or not of any systematic differences (on style, choices, perspectives and audience perception) between Brussels-based correspondents from different nationalities, and between them and correspondents working for Pan-European media. Answers to both streams of inquiry will feed into the academic debate, closing up the gap in literature, concerning the process of “Europeanisation” of news by EU-correspondents.

4. METHOD

4.1. Research Design

Qualitative research measures social phenomena without the use of numbers. Instead, it provides richer observations, which are able to shed light on the causes of those phenomena, that existing theories might have overlooked (Gilbert, 2008: 35). In that sense, the use of qualitative method in this thesis gives the opportunity of a holistic understanding of the journalistic procedures and the conditions of the journalistic work, that lead to specific results concerning the reporting of the TTIP project and the subsequent contribution to a EPS. While quantitative data aim to gather precise observations, which can be easily summarized, generalized and statistically analyzed (Gilbert, 2008), in the case of TTIP project coverage and the nature of its connection to a EPS, more complex causal connections need to be explored. Those cannot take a form of a hypothesis testing process, since the variables of the journalistic reporting methods and the EPS cannot be attributed to certain preexisting conditions. In such case, one would have obtained only limited results. Contrary, the qualitative approach, according to Hesse-Biber (2010) places the human factor in the center of attention. As the scholar asserts, a qualitative research seeks to understand the world through the lenses of the respondents. Hesse-Biber (2010) continues by saying that in qualitative approach, reality is perceived to be the subject of human constructions and interpretations, thus the role of the researcher is to make sense of those constructions and interpret them.

This qualitative research aims to present: *How do EU- correspondents contribute to the Europeanization of TTIP media coverage?* To answer that, the method of a case study with in-depth interviews was selected.

As already mentioned, the journalistic coverage of TTIP project is used in this research as a case study to assess the Europeanisation of national debates around EU-wide policies. The method of case study has received criticism for producing only context-dependent knowledge that cannot be

generalized to reach overall conclusions of a phenomenon under examination (Abercrombie, Hill & Turner, 1984, p. 34). Nevertheless, research has shown that the validity of the case study as a method to explain larger phenomena depends on the case that has been chosen and its position (centrality) in the phenomenon to be examined (Flyvbjerg, 2006). TTIP project because of its strategic significance, aiming to build a transatlantic trade alliance to lead global trade, and its impact on multiple aspects of public and private life, is considered to make such an important (central) case study. More specifically, among the elements that make TTIP a case study to test the EPS are the leading role of the EU Commission -instead of national governments- in negotiations, the large areas which will be affected by a potential agreement, such as trade, economy, health, environment, and the controversy this causes, and finally, the timing this is happening, in a period in which Euro-skepticism is in the rise. In addition, the existence of a case study serves the comparability of the emerging themes, since it provides with a clear framework. In a different case, it would be meaningless to just refer to the general political perspective.

4.2. In-Depth Interviews

According to Hermanowicz, (2002) the method of qualitative interviewing provides in-depth knowledge of the cultural realities of the interviewee's working environment. By designing semi-structured interviews, engaging the respondents in the process, the aim is to extract useful data about how they construct their understanding of TTIP project and how afterwards they report on it. Thus, it can be argued that the results coming from the in-depth interviews shed light on the complexities of journalistic practices and their effect on the EPS.

Although, during an in-depth interview, attitudes and behavior are not measured in the quantitative sense, this does not reduce the researcher's ability to assess the interviewee's point of view on the topic. It is worth mentioning once again, that the way one makes sense of an issue and reports on it, is subjective and thus constructed. Therefore, the in-depth interview encouraged the respondents to explore sensitive aspects of their routine, revealing connections, relations, and rationale. Especially on the topic of TTIP, which is a rather new and not-well documented case in the media, this process gave valuable insight.

To create an atmosphere of a fruitful discussion, the interviewer must resort to certain technics. Those can be summarized as the "probing and prompting" ability of the researcher (Gilbert, 2008:250). Probing refers to the follow up questions in order to obtain a more detailed response, especially on topics related to the research question of the study (Gilbert, 2008). Prompting, for its part, is the verbal and non-verbal encouragement of the respondents to answer a question or explore it a bit further (Gilbert, 2008).

Gilbert (2008) explains that the existence of an interview guide, in semi-structured interviews, serves the reliability aspect of the research. This is because it sets the guidelines for the discussion with the interviewee and ensures that the researcher obtains valid data. It also allows for efficiency in terms of time for both the interviewer and the respondent, giving to the latter the impression of a professional, well-organized work.

Finally, a basic ethical principle was followed before the actual conduct of the interview. This was the explicit consent of the interviewee to the process of the interview, and was obtained, at the first email contact with the respondent. The consent form is a standardized document, ensuring the protection of the personal data of the interviewee and his rights at any point during or after the interview.

4.3. Respondents

In order to answer the research question, the paper seeks to understand how the Brussels-based correspondents cover the developments in the TTIP project. Aiming to obtain rich and credible data, twelve respondents were selected to be interviewed. Their selection was based on the following criteria:

4.3.1. Brussels based correspondents

The conclusion of TTIP is expected to bring about major changes in the fields of trade and investment, especially in the EU. On the European side, the responsible party for leading the negotiations and concluding the agreement with the US Administration is the European Commission. In this regard, the correspondents that are based in Brussels have, at least in theory, better access to the original sources of information giving them much insight on the developments of TTIP negotiations. In addition, the fact that the Brussels-based correspondents focus on European issues makes them contribute with their coverage to the public debate on Europe. The latter, ideally takes –or at least could take- place within a EPS. Therefore, one expects the correspondents who cover TTIP to also shape the EPS with their reporting. The feedback from the interviews illustrates whether this is the case and answers the question of how EU-correspondents, contribute to the Europeanization of TTIP media coverage.

4.3.2. Nationality of media employer organization

a) *Brussels based correspondents, who have reported on TTIP and work for Pan-European mass media:*

According to Corcoran & Fahy (2009), mass EU-wide media have achieved “pan-European” status, meaning that their audience transcends European national borders. The insight of the Brussels-based correspondents working in EU-wide media outlets, shed light to the question whether there is a EPS or a European “elite” sphere.

b) *Brussels based correspondents, who have reported on TTIP and work for their respective national media organizations:*

The nationality of the Brussels-based correspondents is an important criterion as it shows whether the coverage of TTIP is made through national lenses or follows a common code of reporting on European developments. In particular, to examine this aspect of the research, the correspondents were chosen to be of *British, German, and Greek* nationality.

- ✓ Firstly, the British correspondents report back to their national audience in a period in which the public debate is dominated by the question of whether the UK should remain in the EU. Hence, it is important to understand how they report on TTIP in front of ascending Euro-skepticism engulfing the country.
- ✓ Secondly, Germany is known to be at the “heart” of the European project, pushing towards “more Europe”. Thus, German correspondents report on TTIP in a climate, back in their home country, that is in favor of European integration and EU powers.
- ✓ Lastly, the Greek correspondents, feed information on TTIP into a society which is at the same time deeply enmeshed in the financial crisis and for the first time governed by a leftist government. In addition, although the Greek political scene seems to reject European imposed austerity, this does not move it from its firm pro-EU position.

The above conditions were deemed as sufficient to also establish the reliability of the study. In fact, the interviewees are highly specialized professionals who provided comprehensive answers to the questions posed to them. The detailed description of the criteria followed on the selection of the correspondents allows the research to be replicated if necessary by future researchers.

Respondent 1	Greek - working for Greek newspaper	He works as trade correspondent for the most popular conservative newspaper in Greece. He was assigned to Brussels from 2008-2014. Currently he is working in Athens.
Respondent 2	Greek - working for Greek media	She is working for the same newspaper with respondent 1 and additionally she appears on television, covering the Brussels beat. She is working in Brussels since 2011.
Respondent 3	Hungarian - works for a German newsroom in Berlin.	She is an investigative journalist for the newsroom she works for in Berlin. She has been focusing on TTIP since 2012. She visits Brussels regularly for meetings or other events on TTIP. She is also accredited from EU commission's press office to attend events on TTIP and other trade agreements.
Respondent 4	Greek - working for a Greek newspaper	He is based in Brussels since 2010. He is working for the most popular weekly (Sunday) newspaper.
Respondent 5	Dutch - working for an EU-wide media outlet	He works for a well received EU-wide media outlet since 2014. TTIP has been one of the issues he has covered extensively.
Respondent 6	British - working for a British daily newspaper	The past six months he has been seconded by his newspaper to Brussels, to follow the developments concerning the UK referendum, over the EU. His newspaper is one of the most Eurosceptic in the U.K.
Respondent 7	British – working for British daily newspaper	He has been assigned to Brussels for four years. His newspaper is also Eurosceptic, however, not populist.

Respondent 8	German- working for a German newspaper	He has been working the last 12 years in Brussels, covering mainly economic issues. He has done an extensive coverage of TTIP.
Respondent 9	American – working for an international news outlet	A senior Brussels-based correspondent, specialized on business coverage. He has a great experience on covering trade agreements and TTIP in particular.
Respondent 10	German working for German media	He works from Brussels for the television and the newspaper, that are owned by the same media organization in Germany. He is covering business topics in Europe.
Respondent 11	German – working for an EU-wide media outlet	He is responsible for the trade section in the news outlet he works for. He has been in Brussels for a year. He is focusing on covering the developments around TTIP.
Respondent 12	German – working for a German newspaper	He has been working in Brussels the last 3 years, covering EU- trade and other economic issues. He has written many pieces on TTIP.

Seven out of the twelve interviews were conducted face to face with the respondents in Brussels. Three were conducted via Skype, one via the telephone for practical reasons and one respondent answered the questions in a written form, via email, after his request. The interviews lasted between thirty minutes and one hour, with the exception of the telephone interview which lasted twenty minutes.

4.4. Topics

The interviews were semi-structured and focused on the following topics:

4.4.1. EU institutions and their communication policy

This topic aims to shed light on how the communication protocol works within the Brussels beat. By looking at the official procedure of the information flow, and the relevance of each of the three major EU- institutions, the respondents comment explicitly or implicitly on issues of transparency. The effort made by each institution to enable and support more information on the developments in TTIP negotiations indicates that there is a potential of the “Europeanization” of TTIP’s coverage by the correspondents.

4.4.2. Professional environment in Brussels

In this section of the interview the respondents were asked to evaluate the level of influence the international environment - in which they live and work- poses on their choices of coverage and their reporting styles. An important element of TTIP’s “Europeanization” is whether the journalists use the same language and pretty much the similar perceptions when they talk about it. The respondents reflect on the moments of influence from their colleagues in relation to the working reality in their home country.

4.4.3. Home organization

The influence of media’s economy in reporters’ choices is an issue well documented in theory. In this section the respondents describe their actual experience working as Brussels based correspondents for bigger or smaller media organizations. They comment on the role of the editor and the competitive business environment in general in their working routines, the time and energy they dedicate on TTIP and the hierarchy of the EU news in their agenda.

4.4.4. Sources

This topic explores whether there are any systematic differences on the style and choices between Brussels based correspondents from different nationalities and/or between them and the Pan-European correspondents, as it can be illustrated by their existing network in Brussels, besides the interaction with the official institutions’ press offices.

The interviewees, were asked to comment on who makes an interesting source on TTIP and how it appears in their published pieces. They provide insights on which sources can be quoted and which serve just for their information and opinion – making process. They also give an image of the

kind of sources that are excluded when they investigate TTIP, for reasons of professional integrity or those related to the perceptions they have about their role as journalists.

4.4.5. Audience

This part concerns the criteria and method applied by the journalist when they select on which topics to focus their coverage. In other words, it aims to examine the procedure followed by EU - correspondents when they prioritize certain topics over others, the time and space they dedicate in reporting on this topics, how they interpret the information received etc., in relation to the audience they address.

A related issue has to do with the audience of the mass-media production in Europe. If the audience includes people from all strata of the European society this would be an indication that a EPS exists. By contrast, if the audience is composed mostly of elites (political, economic, social), then one could talk about an “elite public sphere” instead of a EPS.

4.5. Analysis

This paper’s objective is to assess the systematic differences between the group of respondents. Hence, the data obtained from the interviews are analyzed and then synthesized by using the method of constant comparison of the codes assigned. According to Gilbert (2008) the emphasis on the coding procedure as the initial analysis of the data is traced back to the principles of grounded theory. When the interview transcripts are coded, the researcher assigns “conceptual labels to different segments of data in order to identify themes, patterns, processes and relationships” (p. 87).

According to Boeije (2010) there are three stages of coding:

- Open coding: the process of engagement and familiarity with the screenplay transcripts, followed by the assignment of codes to data segments, until the point of saturation (Boeije, 2010:107). An initial coding scheme is produced (see: Appendix, Table A1)
- Axial coding: constant comparison of the quotes of the transcripts, which were assigned to certain open codes, with the end goal to cluster the data under certain categories and subcategories. This process of data refinement validates the clear definition and properties of each category (Boeije, 2010:114). A coding tree is produced (see Appendix, Table A2)
- Selective coding: determining the central themes, which emerged from the theoretical modeling of the relationships among the data. A coherent interpretation of the context of the data is

provided in relation to the assumptions of the existing theory (Boeije, 2010).

The thesis adopts Boeije's coding, aiming to detail the analytical steps that it will follow. At the same time, this facilitates the future replication of the research.

According to Gilbert (2008) the constant comparison of data properties is crucial to the analytical process, since it signals the point of the theoretical saturation. In other words, the analytical process will end when all the processed data point to certain theoretical schemes (saturation point). Gilbert (2008) continues that the “theoretical sampling” (p.90) which derives from the above described process, is subject to further coding and comparison, aiming to “reduction” and “integration” of the final set of categories, which will be consequently compared to the existing theory in order to finalize the results (Gilbert, 2008:90). The final themes that emerged were: “National differences”, “Interaction with the EU institutions, colleagues and other non-EU sources” and “Influences from the home organization”.

5. RESULTS

After the analysis of the data, the results section is divided in three major themes that appear to influence the respondents' decision whether and how to cover TTIP: national differences in terms of politics, society and culture; interaction with sources in Brussels; and the influence of the home organization. Each theme is further divided in several sub-themes, each of them explaining in detail how European journalism practically works and whether there is space for the “nationalization” of European topics or the “Europeanization” of national debates.

The first theme of national differences touches upon the political culture and perceptions of public interest in the three countries from which the respondents come from. Therefore, the British public is traditionally in favour of trade liberalization. In Germany, a large portion of the society believes that the interest of middle sized companies is protected against the expansion of the US conglomerates. In Greece, the financial crisis leaves less space for discussions on the European trade policies. Finally, the international or the EU-wide media outlets are the only ones allocating time and space to present the EU perspective on TTIP.

The second theme focuses on the EU Brussels' environment and how the interaction with officials, other colleagues and various sources influence the journalistic choices of the respondents. Beyond the regular briefings from the Commission and the other main EU institutions, the Brussels-based correspondents must maintain a network of well informed sources to extract information on the topics they cover. Nevertheless, despite the extensive contact with the EU officials and institutions, the correspondents usually report on the topics (including TTIP) from national lenses.

This is also because, although they are in the Brussels-bubble, they continue to socialize with colleagues working in the same or other national media outlets.

The last theme brings to the fore the influence from the home organization on the correspondents' choices for news coverage. This influence comes from the media economy, the perceptions about news demand, and time constraints. It emerges that TTIP as a long term project, with a lot of technical details, and without having imminent impact on the lives of the EU citizens, cannot make it among the topics that are to be reported in national media.

5.1. Theme 1: National differences

From the interviews it became clear that the decision of the Brussels-based correspondents on whether to cover TTIP and to what extent, is influenced by the political and social landscape in their home countries. This means that the people in some Member-States may be more sensitive to the impact of free trade policies on their lives than in others. If this is the case, then the possibility that TTIP hits the news headlines is higher in these countries. In what follows, the variation in national character, political culture and civil society from one country to another, and how that affects the "Europeanisation" of TTIP, will be detailed.

5.1.1. Germany:

The German correspondents covering EU developments were somehow forced to report on TTIP, after the latter became a topic of concern in civil society, in Germany. In fact, TTIP was not among the journalists and editors' priority topics until it appeared that the concerns of NGOs towards the EU-US negotiations affected the national political discourse, raising concerns in the public about the project. At that point, the German media felt obliged to communicate the EU point of view to their audience in order to help it obtain more balanced information on the issue. That proved to be a hard task for both the reporters and the media because the debate had already been dominated by the anti-TTIP rhetoric of the NGOs.

That happened despite the fact that the German public is generally in favour of the European integration, not least through the free trade zone and common currency. What made Germans very skeptical over TTIP was the potential for US trade expansion and the influence this might have on their economy's equilibrium. The US is the basis of the biggest conglomerates and companies in the world. Germans appear to be worried for the future of the medium-sized companies in the case that the EU finally reaches an agreement with the US administration on TTIP. As one of the respondents maintains:

“Since TTIP is complex, it also relates back to a rather cultural sentiment of Anti-Americanism which is strong in Germany and German speaking nations [...]. Germans are afraid that TTIP will water down consumer protection policy and is geared towards the profit of globally operating firms, keeping in mind of course that 60% of Germans work in small and medium-sized companies” (Respondent 10, p. 3).

However, the above shows that the debate on TTIP is not an anti-EU discussion within Germany. On the contrary, it would be misleading to link skepticism towards TTIP with the appearance of a Eurosceptic trend in the country. Rather, the heated public discussion on TTIP reveals an anti-US sentiment, along with a knee-jerk response towards the protection of the national interest.

German politicians, especially those coming from the Green Party, took advantage of the anti-US feeling, shared in portions of the German society, to trigger a heated debate on TTIP. Social Democrats followed suit later on, adopting a similar strategy in their EU elections campaign. This political debate within the country happened to coincide with the appearance of several extensive reports written by different NGOs against TTIP. Those NGOs were not necessarily driven by political motives. Some of their arguments against TTIP relied on environmental or food safety concerns, that could have been shared by citizens of other Member-States as well. All those initiatives together (cultural, political and civil society) proved to be enough to mobilize the grassroots of the German society to engage in what some German journalists in Brussels perceive to be a biased discussion on the dangers of TTIP.

“I see that at least in Germany more and more media are putting emphasis on doing something on TTIP, so I think it is in the agenda of lot of media in Germany. This is the first trade agreement which is getting a little bit more tangible, but I have the impression, and that’s something that’s going on for a long time already, that the majority is speaking more to the critics of TTIP than to the German government who is pro TTIP or the Commission who is pro TTIP or the industry. There might be a small bias against TTIP in this context” (Respondent 8, p.3).

It is exactly this bias against TTIP that the Brussels-based correspondents of German nationality are disappointed of. They believe that no matter how pro-EU the German politicians and the majority of the society are, they find it themselves, as the communication experts of the Brussels beat, very hard to properly inform the public on TTIP or somehow influence the rhetoric around that topic.

“When I called my editor and said I want to write an article about a Commission’s new trade policy (TTIP) and how the NGOs in Brussels are criticizing it, I got just 15 lines on page 15. Nobody was really interested in that [...] And then a couple of months later when the debate in Germany started, pushed by German NGOs on the one side and trade unions and some politicians on the other side, it became more interesting for my editor”

(Respondent 8, p.8).

It seems that in Germany the discussions on TTIP *“had reached such a level of sensitivity that any voice from Europe is rejected by default”* (Respondent 3, p.2). Nonetheless, it is worth noting that the Brussels-based correspondents could not afford covering TTIP in a sustained way. It has not been possible for them, because of limited time and writing space, to write two or three articles about TTIP every single week. Instead, their coverage is more dependent on the popularity of the debate during a specific period in the German news. According to the respondents, the audience at some point lost its connection with the latest developments on the negotiations. In addition, fluctuation in the news supply, on their side, was only hurting a balanced and proper European news coverage.

This dependence on the national news agenda reveals that TTIP as a topic is mostly a national debate, rather than one of a European nature:

“When it comes to debates like TTIP, probably the ‘Greek debate’ as well, certainly the services directive of ten years ago, those debates are not triggered by Brussels and are not triggered by us [Brussels based correspondents]. They are triggered by groups within the Member-States” (Respondent 8, p.8).

At the end of the day the German correspondents in Brussels feel that their most important work is to fight for a proper coverage of EU affairs, which would ideally be independent of national political considerations or the vested interests of certain groups within the German society. They claim to be satisfied if they only get the chance to persuade their editors even for an EU-inspired title for their articles: *“For example instead of the title “Brussels asks for that”, I would ask my editor to adopt a more specific one like “Commission proposes this policy”,* but even this seems to be a challenge according to Respondent 8 (p.2). Brussels based correspondents consume a lot of energy on explaining to their editors what exactly is the role of every institution in Brussels and how this affects national politics.

However, ignorance of the EU political structure cannot be a major reason for the existence of a national-centric culture in news coverage. As the respondents explain, the German civil society

is very well organized. There are a lot of NGOs defending different issues: environmental, data protection, or food safety. As much as this is a healthy function for democracy, in the case of TTIP it does not help to promote a European space for dialogue, or at least a space for European news within Germany. The Commission has been aware of this “German complexity” and according to some of the respondents, the EU institution decided to enter the national debate with press conferences and other TTIP-related events based in German soil. This initiative could only mean that “*European journalism, in the case of TTIP, has failed in Germany*” (Respondent 10, p.1).

In brief, the German public became aware of TTIP, firstly, from those parts of the political spectrum and civil society, which were antithetical to the project. That, along with a tradition of skepticism towards US trade policies cast doubt on TTIP. The Brussels-based correspondents tried to correct this image by communicating the EU perspective on the TTIP negotiations. This did not change the fact that the TTIP remained a national and not Europeanized debate for Germans.

5.1.2. United Kingdom:

In the UK there is a culture of euro-skepticism which according to the respondents is guiding their choices and reporting style. British journalism traditionally is critical towards any form of power and in the case of EU the main focus is the concentration of power in Brussels and EU budget spending. On the contrary, the British public is generally supportive towards trade liberalization initiatives, which means that TTIP could not be considered as a “good” topic to criticize EU.

In that regard, the British respondents assert that in the UK there is a fundamental belief that free trade with other countries promotes the growth and prosperity of a nation. In that sense, the average British citizen would never think against a free trade agreement with the US. Traditionally, Great Britain has been supportive of the creation of big economic fronts with prosperous and liberal nations. People and politicians in the UK equally believe that such agreements (such as TTIP), would not only be financially beneficial to Europe in the long term, but will also promote the Western values and culture to the world’s third countries. Furthermore, the common language and the shared values of the British with the US add to the positive stance of the public towards more integration between Europe and the United States. As one of the respondents put it:

“Much of the opposition on TTIP comes from the traditional supporters of the European Union, like Germany and France, whereas for Britain it is actually something that the British government is very supportive of. We kind of think it’s important for the EU trade so as to rescue these continent’s alien economies. As a country we were always in favor of trade liberalization” (Respondent 7, p.2).

Ironically this positive public stance towards TTIP project, results in its limited coverage at the national press. British correspondents have excluded TTIP negotiations, and other related developments around the issue, from their list of priority topics. In their view, there is not enough “tension” on that trade agreement, capable of attracting the interest of their editors back home. Therefore, they mostly prefer to cover stories on the spending of the EU budget, a topic for which national politicians and the public opinion have always been very critical of. Nevertheless, it must be noted that a major reason behind the British journalists’ choice to cover EU policies that are subject to criticism and not TTIP, cannot be explained only by the Eurosceptic debate within the UK. As one of the respondents notes:

“We doubt the ability to deliver and we doubt their legitimacy, which is kind of what British newspapers have always done. British journalists, for 150 years, our job has been to doubt power, so it is not an anti-EU thing, its an anti-power thing”. (Respondent 7, p.2)

Finally, British correspondents focus on topics that are directly related to the interest of the British audience and not Europeans in general. In the light of the upcoming EU referendum, in which British citizens will decide whether they want their country to remain in the European Union or not, the correspondents, based in Brussels, are assigned by their home organizations to present “*how the national politics perform in Brussels*” (Respondent 6, p.1). In other words, the news coverage from Brussels revolves around the official visits of British politicians to the EU headquarters and their interaction with the EU officials.

“Issues related to EU-led trade policies or legislation proposals, are for the moment completely irrelevant for us. This lack of interest in the EU affairs is rather disappointing, especially at the time where the nation is called to decide on the EU referendum. However, it is as it is, editors would never be interested for something else”. (Respondent 6, p.4)

TTIP felt victim to the paradoxical relationship between the British public and the EU. Although TTIP is an initiative conforming to the British spirit of free trade and as such should be praised, it does not attract the attention of the British public which finds nothing important to criticise in it. As a result, the British correspondents in Brussels focus on other topics that could reveal that the EU is not doing its job properly and not on TTIP which is among the right EU initiatives.

5.1.3. Greece:

Because of the financial crisis that hit Greece in 2009, and the subsequent negotiations with the EU and IMF on bail-out packages, even the less educated Greek citizens have a basic knowledge of how the EU institutions work. At the same time, the Greek correspondents in Brussels are very active in informing the public on the EU affairs. Nonetheless, the magnitude of the financial crisis would not allow any space for the coverage of other, less important topics such as TTIP.

In that sense, the Brussels based correspondents covering EU news for different Greek media organizations, were also concerned with the extend to which their national political scene is influencing the reporting choices and their job in Brussels. They generally see the European communication space being very fragmented due to different perceptions of what the EU represents for the citizens in every member state.

“In Greece we are experts, now, with the EU institutions because of the evaluations of our economy from those institutions. For the rest of the European countries, you can see differences: on the one hand you have Germany, France, Netherlands. They know a lot about Europe, but you see countries like Denmark and Great Britain, which do not care for the EU affairs that much” (Respondent 4, p.1)

When it comes to the case of TTIP, Greek respondents agreed that it has not been their priority to either follow the developments on the negotiations or to publish a related piece back home. They mostly focus on covering economic issues and topics on migration. To their view those are the issues that the Greek society is anxious about:

“The supply of news depends on the demand. The demand at the moment is clearly focused on economy, evaluations, migration, etc. So everybody here thinks along those lines. And this is probably why certain issues cannot be ‘Europeanized’; there will always be the national interest, the demand of news back home dictating everything. We cannot really move beyond that” (Respondent 2, p.5).

This is a common view for all Greek respondents, who tend to evaluate the Brussels’ beat as mono-thematic. For the long period in which the Greek economic crisis has been attracting the interest of their European colleagues a lot of pressure was added to the correspondents’ everyday work. They felt responsible for covering extensively every development in the negotiations between the EU and the Greek government. The news updates, especially during the Euro group meetings, were

constant. A lot of follow-up reports were required, even until today, that the frenzy around the Greek economic crisis appears to have subsided a bit.

This news demand constrained the Greek correspondents' choices of topics. Even if there was an intention from their side to report on TTIP, a respondent suggests that the editors would *"politely trash it"* (Respondent 2, p.5). Respondent 2 continues: *"they would tell you: well you can write about TTIP if you insist, but before you have to bring us what the whole nation cares about"* (p.5). This can be explained from the political and economic turmoil that afflicted Greece over the past few years: *"we are still on a bad economic situation. I guess five years ago or even three years ago editors would have been more open for stories like TTIP and the European development in general"* (Respondent 2, p.5).

A notable thing, however, is that the work of Brussels-based correspondents is really crucial for the Greek media. Even at the times of crisis, or especially because of the dependence of the Greek economy on the European institutions' policies, the audience is very much interested in receiving information straight from the Brussels' beat. In their majority, the Greek respondents agree that their reports are capable of triggering discussions or debates in topics related to economic policies proposed by the EU institutions to the Greek government. It is not that European journalism has failed on that issue, like their German colleagues felt in the case of TTIP coverage in Germany. However, as one respondent maintains:

"In Greece we have the tendency to focus on Greek-related issues only and as a result we either place too much importance in topics that are common in Europe or we tend to ignore topics of equal political importance and TTIP is one such case" (Respondent 1, p.8).

The respondents support that TTIP is not a mainstream topic and it would appeal only to a limited group of well educated business oriented audience back home: *"an article on TTIP or trade in Europe would be perceived as quality journalism, which would target highly educated citizens with higher income"* (Respondent 4, p.7). In general, the news demand in Greece is largely dependent on the audience's economic status or political positions. Again their view is Greek-centric, thus the correspondents are the "eyes and ears" not only of their nation but also of the editors back home, for everything that involves the country's future in the Eurozone.

The interesting case with Greece, of course, is that it is the first country with a leftist government, which ideologically would reject the idea of free trade agreements and would have been very skeptical towards TTIP. However, this debate did not appear in national politics, since the Greek citizens are, in general, in favor of the EU. The latter, along with the mono-thematic

focus on the developments as regards the ongoing financial crisis, contributed to the journalists and editors' decision not to cover TTIP.

5.1.4. International Media outlets:

For Pan-European and international media outlets TTIP was a good opportunity to present the meticulous EU work on an issue of big importance, in their view, as the trade negotiations between the Union and the US Administration. For that reason, the reporters of international and EU-wide media organizations held a really critical stance on the issue of national influences on the coverage of TTIP. According to them, the strong focus on national politics is the outcome of most of the Brussels-based correspondents bias. As they put it, Europe has by definition a business constituency. It is normal that the Commission proposes policies with long term effects for every member state.

“Unfortunately, this is where most of the national political correspondents are missing a huge opportunity to cover topics properly for their country. In the case of TTIP they can focus on a sector which will be influenced and try to explain the effect of an agreement on that specific sector. I can't imagine that the audience or the editor would not like to be informed on something like that. But they insist on trying to find political tension in a place of governance and not government” (Respondent 9, p.1).

In fact, it seems that the top priority for the “international” and “EU-wide” correspondents is to exclude this national factor from their reports.

“I have been monitoring several reports from the German media on TTIP and they all quote different NGOs representatives without making it clear that the opinions expressed are focusing only on one side of the TTIP debate. The official view of the Commission is always absent, something that I find extremely unprofessional” (Respondent 11, p.3).

Having adopted a clearly European perspective, the respondents of the EU-wide media organizations do not share the view that Member-States' politics are able to influence the policies in the EU. For them the focus is rather sectorial and only as such it seems legitimate to be nationalized. In fact, the journalists who work for the EU-wide or international media outlets see in the topic of TTIP a missed opportunity for Europe to be favorably presented in front of the EU citizens.

5.1.5. Overview:

Germany, Greece and the United Kingdom view the EU from different lenses. That makes them adopt different stance towards European issues, in general, and trade in particular. Nevertheless, it is interesting to see how those differences result in the same outcome: TTIP is either not reported at all, or when reported, it is not “Europeanized”, which means that it is criticized as a policy, through national lenses. The British correspondents do not report on TTIP because the advancement of free trade in the world is nothing exceptional for the British public. The latter is more interested in criticism towards EU policies than in projects that must be generally implemented anyways. This comes to contrast with the German case, since since the German public are, in general pro-EU and normally would applaud EU initiatives. Nevertheless, as regards TTIP the German public -or at least part of it- seems to be really protective of the middle-sized German companies when it comes to the competition with such a large market like the US. In that sense Germans are thinking of more practical consideration (TTIP will bring competition), whereas British are more driven by ideology (TTIP will create a Western trade front). In their turn, both Germany and Greece appear to be pro-EU countries, which are -nonetheless- largely inwards-focused when it comes to public debates concerning the EU. This means that they put much emphasis on national politics and how they can be benefited or not from the EU policies as members. The downturn is that this does not allow much space for the “Europeanisation” of the debate, especially, when it comes to topics such as TTIP. Finally, the journalists working in pan-European or international media believe that the EU should be covered for what it is and any effort of domestication of European news, by the journalists in Brussels, should be made on the basis of policies and not politics. In other words, the respondents from the EU-wide media perceive differently the role of the Brussels-based correspondents. According to them, the job of the Brussels-based correspondent is not to bring the national tensions on the EU level, but on the contrary, to make sure that he or she highlights properly those policies that might affect their national sectors – not influenced by political ideologies or other considerations.

5.2. Theme 2: Interaction with the EU institutions, colleagues and other non-EU sources

In what follows the respondents explain how their interaction with different sources within Brussels practically assists their working routines. They start by analyzing the communication policy of each one of the three major EU institutions and how this helps transparency or not. They continue with the description of relations among the accredited journalists and the importance of building a

network of sources to achieve diversification. The respondents admit that their work is largely dependent on the interaction with the Commission and some important non-official sources which are capable of influencing policy decisions within the EU. Furthermore, they agree that although based in Brussels, they are very much shaped by their national culture and interests, which is explained just by the fact that they mostly exchange views with journalists of the same nationality, especially those working in competitor media outlets. This indicates that although most sources are Europeanized, there is no Europeanized network of journalists that could further facilitate the Europeanisation of TTIP.

5.2.1. Interaction with the Commission:

In this section the respondents share their experience with the Commission's press office. The Commission follows a structured policy when it comes to press inquiries. This can be both helpful or an obstacle for the journalists, depending on the topic. For TTIP, the language of press releases is very technical, thus the respondents find it really helpful that they are able to attend some background technical briefings arranged from the lead negotiators. However, the more technical details surround a project the more difficult becomes for a journalist to translate them into something meaningful and easily understood for his audience. The complexity and technicalities of TTIP raise questions about the transparency of the negotiations. In fact, it is not the lack of published details on the negotiations anymore (since Juncker's presidency) that worries the reporters, but the fact that the information is too technical. In addition, while the Commission releases the details of the negotiations after the closure of each round, it does not necessarily link them with the outcomes of previous rounds. So one has to follow closely the developments, something that is not always practical or possible for the respondents.

In any case, the respondents agree that if one would like to cover TTIP the role of the Commission in giving out information over the project is crucial. The European Commission is this institution which is negotiating on behalf of the Member-States with the US administration. The majority of the information on which the Brussels based correspondents rely, in order to produce analyses or general updates on the negotiations, is a product of their interaction with Commission's officials or the Commission's press office.

This interaction with institutions is predetermined by the European protocol that regulates the flow of information. Accredited journalists receive daily emails with information for the venues and time of different events that the Commission organizes. There are a lot of different degrees of information flow: first of all, there are the "on-the-record" briefings. Those are events organized mainly by the Commission's press office (the daily midday briefings belong to this category),

where the spokespeople are informing the press on Commission's official position on different topics. They can accept questions from the journalists on that setting, but the responses they provide are rather standardized and often superficial, since the spokespeople are not the ones who work on the different projects they are called to present:

“Every noon around 12, we have the midday briefings, where you are informed on every issue and then you are free to ask any question you want. Lately I don't even go there, because I don't find it helpful, I hear stuff which I already know or the answers to my questions are not satisfying” (Respondent 2, p.2).

At times, a Commissioner would also be available for an interview, depending on his schedule and his agenda as well. If a Commissioner is personally interested in communicating a specific message to the audience, then he would be easily reached for an interview. The second degree of information flow is the “off-the-record briefings”. This is where officials, some times even the lead negotiator himself, go to the press room and inform journalists about developments on the negotiations, their objectives during the discussion with the other part etc. The deal is that journalists cannot quote directly the officials who are present and provide information in those meetings, however in the pieces they produce, they can quote anonymously an “EU source”:

“That's a very common thing that happens in Brussels. In those policy briefings they want to inform, but they do not want to be accountable for having said what they said and it might not be so transparent, but at the same time at least a journalist can say that this information came from the Commission” (Respondent 5, p.4).

The third degree of information flow is the so called “background briefing”. In the background briefings journalists are participating in a discussion but they cannot quote anybody from there. Those background briefings are offered to the journalists in order to assist them gain an in-depth knowledge in the topics they are called to cover. In the case of TTIP and other trade agreements, exactly because those issues can be very technical, journalists have the opportunity to gain a more detailed perspective. Those meetings serve the Commission's vision to shape a common understanding within the journalists from different backgrounds and nationalities:

“If we (journalists) attended all those background meetings, we would see an ideal expression of the EPS. But most of the times we are busy covering topics which are mostly interesting for a national audience, rather than for Europe as a whole” (Respondent 6, p.2).

In general, the respondents agree that Commission is very serious when it comes to communication issues. The institution's press office is generally interested on what the accredited journalists are writing and they follow closely their publications back home or on social media:

“I got some complaints about certain tweets of mine, especially in the beginning, when I first arrived here. I was told why you tweeted this or that and I was like “oh I had no idea that I shouldn't”. I understood that they know whether they can trust you or not. If you don't fit, they are never going to trust you again” (Respondent 2, p.3).

Nevertheless, the respondents did not have positive views on every aspect of their communication with the institution:

“In general, I wouldn't say I am a big fan of the Commission's press releases and the way those are written. They use a bureaucratic language, with a lot of jargon for example in economic issues. And they really want to promote what they are doing, so there is a bias in that sense” (Respondent 1, p.2).

A lot of respondents pointed out that the Commission's communication policy has been built only in order to promote the institution's ideology on the different policy choices for Europe. It has not been a clear intention from the press office to connect with different audiences. This is also a reason why the wording in the press releases is complicated even for native speakers. The respondents maintain that the case of TTIP's lack of transparency, is happening because the Commission avoids explaining to some nations why this deal could have been less beneficial for them compared to the economy of another nation:

“Most of the time they are quite good of selling more of what they are doing instead of why. They do it exactly because they want to avoid the nationalistic staff, but quite often in legislation or proposals there will be something that could really work for certain countries and thus they don't really explain what they are doing when we journalists ask for that, so they focus more on general, politically correct information” (Respondent 6, p.6).

An additional problematic area in the interaction with the Commission for the Brussels based correspondents is the importance the institution assigns to the hierarchy between the journalists. Respondents agree that not all the journalists are treated equally, besides of course the events which

are organized for everyone and for which all accredited journalists receive email invitations to attend. Especially the Commission is very reluctant to interact with those correspondents who represent Eurosceptic media organizations: *“the paper is very Eurosceptic and we are the most critical when dealing with the Commission, so we would never be at favor”* (Respondent 6, p.1).

The respondents shared some further valuable insights from their experience with the Commission in the case of TTIP. The general rule that the institution had at the beginning of the negotiations was to not comment on questions related to the details of the discussions. The Commission has received a lot of criticism from the civil society about this communication choice, but the respondents point out that the US administration from its side held a similar position, so politically speaking, the Commission’s choice should be equally respectful to its counterpart’s strategy:

“In my opinion it is the US administration to blame, since they do not really like to publish details when something is negotiated. The US, they rather prefer to agree on everything first and then go public with the details and everything” (Respondent 4, p.3).

However, as time went by, the Commission’s communication strategy changed dramatically, as far as the amount of information the EU officials were releasing on TTIP is concerned. In the beginning it was mainly the chief negotiator who briefed once in a while in the pressroom, off the record, a body of interested -on the topic- journalists. In addition to that, smaller pieces of information were released in the “Digit Trade”, for a smaller group of journalists, coming from the main EU newspapers and agencies. Gradually, the institution started to publish more documents, and organizing more press conferences and off the record briefings. There are a lot of different reasons explaining that shift, according to the respondents. The first and most evident would be the criticism from civil society which could have had an impact on the secretive mentality. This mentality was, until TTIP’s debate, a normal phenomenon for the trade negotiations:

“When I think about other trade agreements we were happy to ever be really briefed on specific details. Even for me, working for a big newspaper and having for some other issues the privilege to ask for and get a personal briefing with somebody who is involved in, well you name the topic, for trade agreements there was always a secrecy. Now we are at a situation to learn about points where the two sides disagree on, how to deal with them and then get quite detailed information and that is quite unusual for trade negotiations”.

(Respondent 8, p.4)

The second reason explaining the willingness of the Commission for more openness on TTIP is the role of the US mission and the linkage of information by their side:

“It is more the American, the US mission to the EU, it is more active now than it was in the beginning, so it’s in a way like a ping pong game. The more the Americans are briefing, the more the Commission puts forward its own briefings” (Respondent 8, p.4)

A third reason for the better flow of information is the role of people and their personality within the institution:

“The attitude changed a lot and not so much the attitude of the press speakers who are there to help you with your everyday press inquiries but the attitude of the Commission [...] since December 2014- January 2015, when the Commission changed and then the Juncker Commission got in power and so that was one of the milestones, where they said ‘ok we have to be more transparent, we have to make more information public in order to win the public for ourselves’ ” (Respondent 3, p.2)

Despite this change in mentality within the institution concerning the amount of available information, the respondents still find obstacles when it comes to the proper coverage of the topic for their audience:

“They are doing a lot of effort in putting the latest documents online, in putting a lot of information online, which doesn’t mean that normal people understand anything or recognize anything from these documents. So on the one hand the Commission says “ok we are doing our job, we are no longer non-transparent” but on the other hand from that documents, you are not going to know “ok how does this affect me?” (Respondent 3, p.3).

Apparently, the job of the journalists is not becoming easier by getting more information. In the case of TTIP is not just the amount of information that matters, but also the ability to link the latest developments with aspects concerning people’s real life. Ideally, for this to happen is for the journalists to keep monitoring trade and economic issues both in Europe and TTIP but also the economic context of the Member-States.

All in all, one can say that the information on TTIP coming from the Commission is neither particularly helpful nor hindering for the correspondents. This is because it follows the protocol of its official communication policy believing that this way it can achieve certain transparency.

Specifically, on the topic of TTIP, most of the respondents believed that the information flow from the Commission even superseded their own expectations with the amount of details published after every negotiation round. However, it is also the case that the Commission's officials are less eager to interact on a personal basis (beyond the protocol formalities) with those journalists who represent Eurosceptic organizations. The exact opposite appears to be the case for international media outlets, or EU-friendly, large national newspapers.

5.2.2. Interaction with the European Parliament:

As far as their interaction with the European Parliament (EP) is concerned, the respondents were more critical. Both the information they were getting on TTIP, but also the institution's communication relevance in general were questioned: *"the parliament I can't do lots with. they kind of read the committee papers so I don't deal with the parliament that much"* (Respondent 6, p.2). In their majority the respondents accept that there is a digital space where they can find information on TTIP coming from the Parliament, but it will never be much different from the Commission's official position:

"To be fair there is a series of videos in the Parliament's official web page dedicated to TTIP, focusing mostly on the benefits of such a deal with the US. There is also a committee discussing the issue within the parliament, because at the end MEPs will be called to vote for it, but actually nothing interesting for us there. They just repeat the same things with the Commission" (Respondent 4, p.5).

The correspondents tend to be suspicious of the role of the parliamentarians. They try to avoid being manipulated by a politician's personal agenda:

"The Parliament is very fragmented, obviously, because you've got all these different MEPs and all these different parties. It is about finding your ally, finding your person to help you out. But that's completely fragmented. The Parliament itself doesn't really have a strategy" (Respondent 7, p.4).

The respondents assert that politicians from the leftist parties, on the one side, are absolutely against TTIP so they have interest in highlighting only the negative aspects of TTIP. On the other side, more conservative parliamentarians are pro-TTIP so they also have their own agenda:

“You have to take care, you cannot take for granted somebody who likes to talk or somebody who gives you important information [...] you always have to have your journalistic filter and always try to see if there is an interest behind every announcement. So you have to check the information that you get from people who have a certain agenda”
(Respondent 3, p.4).

Furthermore, another reason which makes EP a secondary source, journalistically speaking, is that MEPs hardly ever express opposition to Commission’s proposals or policies:

“To tell you the truth we did not pay so much attention to the MEPs [except for] only when we were assigned from the newspaper to join a conference and listen to what your national MEP would say, who anyways they are in favor of communicating much more their positions, but those positions often have no measurable effects on policies in Brussels”
(Respondent 1, p.2).

The respondents believe that for this situation only the MEPs should be blamed, because after the Lisbon Treaty the European Parliament gained more power and it would be possible to influence even more the European policies. However, the general view among the Brussels-based correspondents is that MEPs prefer to remain passive and they are too dependent on their parties back home. In that sense, the MEPs do not really contribute politically to the European construction and from a communicational perspective, they do not contribute to the formation of a EPS:

“It is really impressive how the national parties dictate their positions, so they are operating within their national bubble mostly, basically they do not want to use their power because they do not want to have any kind of conflict or tension with the national party. So it is inevitable for the journalists to lose their interest. I mean, I would have been interested in the cases where the European Parliament had to vote for a policy to be implemented, there it would have been interesting to see what their position is only in case the later was different from Commission’s official stance” (Respondent 1, p.3).

The most profound political problem which the respondents pointed out in the case of the European Parliament is their communication deficit:

“The problem in Brussels is that somebody in the EU Commission thinks that [the latter] should be Europe’s communication machine, but it is not their job to solve the

communication deficit. It is on the European parliamentarians; if the MEPs showed the direct effect of the policies on national level to their voters with actions and more visibility, then the reporters would inevitably pay much more attention to them. Those are to blame for the fundamental disconnection of the Member-States with EU. MEPs would be the perfect way to bridge policies with national interest, but they do not do that. They look for excuses to go back to their home country and scratch the backs of their parties there” (Respondent 9, p.5).

In addition, it appears that MEPs have relationships mostly with journalists from the home countries and less with the Brussels based correspondent, who have a better knowledge of the EU affairs and the role the MEPs play there. The national media outlets have their own sources within Brussels, the midday briefing is not one of the main channels for information gathering, since only the Brussels-based correspondents are accredited to follow the event. Furthermore, the respondents suggest that for their colleagues back home, who only visit Brussels ad hoc, they focus less on covering the European perspective. They are mostly interested in finding political tensions between politicians representing their national political parties, thus they more often seek for direct contacts with their national MEPs:

“They [the MEPs] tend to contact more our colleagues back home and not us in Brussels, you know they have the people whom they know back home. And of course when you are a journalist in Brussels you know what is happening first hand, so you are not really interested in the European parliament, that’s also a reason we are not so into each other” (Respondent 1, p.2).

To wrap up, in the case of the European Parliament, the respondents are reluctant to interact closely with politicians who serve certain interests, especially when it comes to such a controversial topic like TTIP. MEPs serve the ideology of the political party they come from whereas the official position of the Parliament, in general, is hardly any different from that of the Commission.

5.2.3. Interaction with the Council:

As far as the EU Council is concerned, the respondents were more positive towards its communication policy, in general. In fact, they all agreed that the Council seems much more tuned in what is need of the governments and its communication role focuses more on the effort to build consensus. In that sense, the Council is much more pragmatic than the Commission, where ideology

seems to guide most of the communication policies: *“in the Council, they just try and get staff done, whereas that commission is much more ideological”* (Respondent 7, p.5). However, for the case of TTIP, which is still under negotiations, the Council has not a major relevance.

5.2.4. Interaction with colleagues:

The following section looks at how the interaction of the respondents with colleagues from all over the world might influence their working routines or reporting style. A general observation is that although the correspondents meet all together in several events, they tend to exchange views only with the colleagues of same nationality. For correspondents working in national clusters even where they are in Brussels, is one significant reason which can explain why issues in Europe cannot really be Europeanized.

The Brussels beat is by definition an international environment, where journalists from the European Member-States and from all over the world co-exist. However, even in a cosmopolitan environment as such, the national factor is still practically influencing correspondents' working routines and ultimately their reporting choices. European journalism, and in this case study, the coverage of TTIP, are much dependent on the national lenses of the different groups of journalists. It is misleading to discuss about the existence of a “Brussels’ bubble”, when the working conditions remain national for the correspondents. “National bubbles” are always evident within this so called “Brussels’ bubble”. The European structure has not succeeded in inspiring an environment of multiculturalism and cross-countries’ cooperation. Basically, journalists of the same country or language tend to form national or regional fronts during different events or press conferences. With the words of a German correspondent:

“You always face a German bubble within the Brussels bubble. So the interaction with colleagues from other Member-States is not as intense as i would think it ideally. The interesting thing is when you come to the press room, you would see people grouping along the national lines so you would see Germans on the right hand side in the back, the Italians would be two rows in front of them, the Spanish would be right in front of the podium, etc. And then the interesting thing is the way Swiss journalists are split, because the Swiss-German speakers are sitting with the Germans, whereas the French speaking are sitting with the French journalists. And of course for some of the Member-States there are not so many journalists, for example the Slovenian ones or Croatian ones, they would sit together so there would be some kind of a Balkanized block” (Respondent 8, p.10).

The interaction between those journalists is mainly restricted within their national group. The same issues that form the top news back home are discussed again between the professionals and transferred in the form of questions to the EU officials. It is rare that a journalist of a different nationality would take advantage from those questions to inform his reportage on a certain topic. Even in the case that such influence existed, it would be difficult to quantify it, so the respondents were reluctant to say that they gain insight from colleagues of other nations. Nevertheless, they all agreed to have had a more idealistic view on this issue, when they were first assigned to work in Brussels. *“In the beginning when I came I thought I will just sit at the other side of the room to make a difference but after a while I realized that I was there on my own”* (Respondent 8, p.10). Two explanations were the most popular among the respondents on why this is happening: the first was related to the “human factor analysis”, where according to the journalists one tends to talk and trust someone of the same cultural background. The second explanation was much more business-oriented: journalists assert that increasing competition and the crisis that the news business is going through over the past ten years, demand consistency in news supply amongst all the main competitors within a country or, in a different case, the organization would stay out of business. All this pressure is transferred by the editors to the journalists, which always stick together just to make sure that none from the competitors’ side has something they have missed:

“At the end of a briefing, or an event, we all [correspondents of the same nationality] get together to decide on the main points of the announcements. This is how we make sure that we all have pretty much the same understanding on the pieces we publish. Creating noise or impressions, is something that have not been proved beneficial for neither the correspondent nor the organization back home. Staying on the safe side for at least the routine topics’ coverage is the most efficient way to keep your boss happy from your work in Brussels” (Respondent 4, p.6).

The only exception on that would be when a reporter from a small national organization would approach a colleague of a larger, usually international organization, for assistance. According to the respondents, the reporters of EU-wide media which target a business elite audience, have always better access to sources within the EU officials and they generally enjoy respect within EU’s headquarters:

“There is a hierarchy between us journalists here in Brussels. Some papers, like pan-European papers, get a lot and national papers get much less and critical papers get absolutely nothing. This is not disrespect to the journalists working there, because their

usual work is incredibly hard and incredibly professional, it is not like they get an easy ride, far from it. But it remains the case that the Financial Times would get a lot of leaks, Wall Street Journal will also. I am talking about spokesmen services this isn't about individuals but the corporate positions" (Respondent 7, p.4).

In the case of TTIP coverage the above described relations between the Brussels-based correspondents would only mean one thing: that the coverage of the issue would be uniform within each one of the Member-States. In other words, if there is a national debate on TTIP in one of the Member-States, then the journalists of this country, decide together to cover the topic and monitor the developments in the EU. However, the correspondents of a Member-State where TTIP has not entered the sphere of the public debate, do not bother to pick it up independently, if the rest of their colleagues working in competing national media are not interested in it too.

5.2.5. Interaction with other Sources:

Besides the interaction with the EU officials and with their colleagues, the respondents highlight the importance of additional sources in achieving proper coverage of a controversial topic like TTIP. In what follows the respondents explain how crucial the diversification of sources is for the final news production and their professional credibility. They provide insights on who can be an interesting source on TTIP and finally they touch upon a critical problem in the age of digital media, namely, the amount of distracting noise coming from different sources and how it can be an obstacle in their job. To avoid being distracted or misled the correspondents have to build their own network of trustworthy sources for having an adequate information flow.

A fact that the majority of the journalists agreed on is that most of the interesting sources on TTIP came outside the official way of press conferences, background meetings or press releases:

"Obviously we are more interested in those who are inside than those who are outside the room. So you have diplomats, people who are working in the Commission or even a commissioner, or someone from the Cabinet. It happens that sometimes an MEP for example can be a worse source from the person who keeps the minutes inside the negotiations' room. It is more likely that a low ranked insider knows more than the officials. I mean politicians have their own agenda and you can never be sure with them"
(Respondent 1, p.7).

In addition, the respondents note that besides the interaction with those working inside the Commission, any third stakeholder can be a very interesting source on TTIP. They mostly refer to lobbyists, who prepare a lot of texts and are also involved, in one way or another, in negotiations. If the correspondents manage to talk to them, they often get access to off-the-record information, that shed light on aspects of the negotiations for which the Commission either does not want to comment on, or does not want to make them necessarily public. Thus, this type of contacts is an important factor enabling the Europeanisation of TTIP.

NGOs are, in general, the most accessible source when it comes to sharing their position on TTIP. They seek publicity and often this fact can make them less reliable:

“NGOs, well yes, they would help me understand where TTIP is wrong, which groups are not benefited, but generally you have to be careful, because you have the responsibility on what you are writing or tweeting etc. People are influenced, organizations are influenced, economy can be influenced. So I always double or triple check my sources and I prefer to be on the safe side” (Respondent 2, p.6).

NGOs like the Corporate Europe Observatory have been quite active in the debate around TTIP and quite successful when it comes to leaking papers. Several consumer protection organizations, like “Food Watch”, which are mainly active in Germany might as well influence the news production on TTIP. Furthermore, the majority of the respondents found that the US mission is a key entity, when it concerns background information on TTIP: *“They do brief quite a lot and there are lunch invitations to meet front men. They do more technical briefings and they are quite active for quite a while”* (Respondent 8, p.11). Finally, the industry in Brussels, but especially in Germany, is also interested in participating in the debate over TTIP, either by providing interviews to Brussels-based correspondents, or releasing video packages with several information on the positive outcomes of this trade agreement.

Exactly because there is a lot of interest from many different players to enter the public discussions on TTIP, respondents always double check their sources or the leaks, that those sources provide them with. Often they wait long before they publish something that they have learned only from one source:

“In many instances you don’t need to actively seek out different interest groups to hear their opinion, because they will tell you anyway. And other sources will maybe, for example, leak documents. When it comes to a secret negotiation like TTIP if you have access to the

documents that reveal the position of the EU, that of course is valuable, but you always have to double check it and be sure before you publish it” (Respondent 5, p.5).

Many among the respondents were critical of the noise that some “*unprofessional or tabloid*” digital publications make, exactly because they never bother to double check one source. Finding the reliable sources is a major indicator of reliability for the correspondents, whose work in Brussels is always monitored by the EU institutions’ press office. Credibility is a significant element in the process of Europeanisation of TTIP:

“We have been doing it for a bit more than a year now, still the puzzles get together. In this puzzle there is the information that you get off the record from your sources and sometimes it takes weeks or months to check info and say this is really true or valid” (Respondent 3, p.5).

The issue of sources in Brussels, as for any issue in general, is largely tied to the resources of the organization one works for. More specifically, correspondents of large and financially healthy international organizations, have better access to officials and people sitting in the TTIP negotiations table. The smaller the organization (usually this is the case for national organizations) the more difficult to have direct access to sources.

“We have been talking to everybody involved in TTIP negotiations, we are trying to approach them and we are trying to do it all the time, but there is a very rigid system. I may have all the email addresses of the negotiators - this is not hard to find, you just have to google it- but then they will not going to just talk to you, they will put you through the process of press inquiries to the press speaker and then they will provide a standardised answer. This procedure is meant to secure negotiators from being in direct contact with the journalists” (Respondent 3, p.4).

The situation becomes even more complicated when correspondents work for Eurosceptic news outlets. Thus, the background of the organization one works for is one major factor influencing his access to information, more than the official way (protocol) with the institutions.

A way out of this challenge is the correspondent’s personal effort to build his network in Brussels. Any system, according to the respondents, is made by the people working for it. Talking to key-people is really important for a journalist to get an exclusive information. This is not an easy job, but experience has shown that people can be accessible, if one just makes the bold step to go

and talk to them. For the coverage of TTIP, the interaction with officials and key negotiators, when successful, is really valuable as it broadens the perspective of the correspondent. For a successful network building respondent 4 notes that *“it is important to know who is responsible for what here and which institution is responsible for what topic. So you really need to know who is who (p.9).*

5.3. Theme 3: Influences from the home organization

This theme touches upon the practicalities of the respondents' working environment, which are not related to the Brussels' beat. More specifically, it looks at the influence of the financial situation of the organization one works for, the perceptions of the editor in chief on the final publication, the news demand of the audience and further issues concerning the time constraints in monitoring topics like TTIP (long term investigations) and the knowledge or specialization that these topics require.

5.3.1. Media institutions' economy:

Most respondents agree that their work in Brussels and the choices they make what topics to cover, largely depend on the environment of the organization they work for. This does not mean that the editors dictate the work of the correspondents or reject their proposals whatsoever. It rather means that because of strong competition, the perceptions on what should be published on a newspaper (either the hard copy or its digital version) are created not from the correspondents themselves, but from what the editors believe that the audience wants to consume.

The impact of the media institutions, which the journalists work for, can be either implicit or explicit. The implicit influence, for example, takes place in cases where the organization faces certain financial problems that affect the correspondent's feeling of job security. In such case, the journalist feels obliged to cover topics in a biased way, only to make them more appealing to the public. The explicit impact is traced back to the different perceptions the editors have from their correspondents. The respondents provide a clear image of how this interaction with their news organization, in the currently changing media landscape, influences their work in Brussels in general and their work on TTIP in particular.

The interaction with the editors is much less frequent for the Brussels based correspondents, in comparison with their colleagues, who are assigned in national beats (like the national parliament, or national economic institutions etc.):

“Me personally, I don’t have someone who tells me every day you have to write about this or the other. I have a certain autonomy to choose what I will write about and it depends from the reception of my articles whether the editor will be happy or not” (Respondent 4, p.7).

And as much as this is a fair claim, most of the respondents agreed that they would rather prefer a closer relationship with their editors. This would help them to easier explain how the environment in Brussels is and how the bureaucracy works, both issues that editors back home ignore: *“people working for my newspaper, lack the basic knowledge of the EU structure”* (Respondent 8, p.1). The respondents claim that they have always to take into account that not only their readers, but also their editors might not have a clue on how decisions are taken on the EU level, what the competencies are and how national politicians could react at any proposal of the Commission.

Nevertheless, even if the editors are not well aware of the EU reality, according to the respondents, they still hold a strong position on the pieces that should be published and the tone in which certain issues should be discussed:

“It seems that the world is focusing on one thing but in reality editors are focusing on one thing. And this is important because if you come with a story like TTIP, you cannot write everything you want. I mean in the digital version of my newspaper I have unlimited space, where indeed I have the freedom to publish everything I find interesting or important. But it is not equally the case when it comes to feature stories. So when the theme is ‘Grexit’ or ‘Brexit’ it is very hard to say: “Can I do a feature story on TTIP?”. The editors decide only on the themes of big analytical articles” (Respondent 9, p.4).

Journalists who work for international, or EU-wide organizations, however maintain that the relations with their editors never reach tensions. According to their view this happens because the bigger the organization is and the healthier its financial situation, the less stress lies upon their shoulders as regards the competition with similar media outlets:

“Fortunately I have been working for a healthy news organization. Journalism has been in crisis long before the financial crisis, so I understand they are obviously under pressure and it takes a very brave editor to include topics that they do not find so mainstream”
(Respondent 9, p.2).

Some respondents pointed out that in the age of social media this idea of what the competitors have, has a terrible effect because there is no quality control. If for example a journalist attends an event

where the Commission does not announce anything new, there is a great temptation to create the impression that it is new. In a world of tweeting, however, a superficial but catchy title can create panic in editorial rooms: *“The business is afraid of getting out by itself. There is huge amount of distracting noise and that makes the job even more difficult”* (Respondent 9, p.3).

The main tension between editors and Brussels-based correspondents is the level of Euro-skepticism the former have, which makes them asking constantly negative news and a general negative tone on the pieces the latter are called to publish:

“The editors say, ‘oh its Brussels, ok, what do we have negative’. So journalists are really restricted to the stories they offer. They are looking only for some dirt. So already European issues are constrained by the national coverage, but then you constrain it even more by the fact that it has to be negative [...] so obviously all news will be focused on areas where is trouble or tension and that’s fine, but not everything has to fit the theme that the EU is falling apart” (Respondent 9, p.2).

All in all, when it comes to the economy of media institutions competition is a major factor increasing the pressure the editors put on the shoulders of correspondents. Media organizations undergo financial crises that influence traditional values and work routines. The editors are responsible for keeping the organization alive and competitive, thus they might reject topics that the correspondents who live and interact in the Brussels bubble find interesting. TTIP is one of these topics, especially for the national media organizations. Therefore, it is hard for the Brussels beat to trigger a discussion back home on such topics and in turn, these issues are not “Europeanized” in the ideal meaning for the creation of a EPS.

5.3.2. News demand:

After the economy of the media, it is mainly the preferences of the audience to dictate both editors’ demands and subsequently the correspondents’ work. In this section the respondents explain how this whole discussion on national debates and the national news consumption, practically influences their work.

The correspondents working for national mass media admit that a major impact on the work and the choices of Brussels-based correspondents is the news demand back home. The EU news demand in the Member-States cannot be always easily assessed by the correspondents themselves or their editors. Thus they prefer to trust their journalistic instinct or the reception of their articles on the case of digital publications, where the reaction of the audience can be somehow quantified.

One of the most senior respondents in the Brussels beat explains how volatile news demand on EU issues can be, recalling his experience over the past twelve years in the Brussels beat:

“When I came to Brussels, and that was at the end of 2004, it was difficult to place EU topics in the print version of the paper. I would find some space of course, because we have a traditional focus on EU affairs, but the pieces were mostly placed at the page 15-16 somewhere in between other supposedly more interesting things” (Respondent 8, p.7).

However, he continues, this was not always the case. For example, at some point there was a big discussion in Germany on the services directive and particularly on the policies or regulations on the free movement of labor within the European space. That happened because of fears that nationals of Eastern European countries were migrating to the West and competing with the Germans in job positions which caused a stronger demand for news about Europe. EU news demand is usually a trend that does not last longer than two or three years according with the respondents: *“after that, people loose their interest again and it changes to the worst”* (Respondent 8, p.7).

The coverage of the Greek crisis by all European media is also an illustration of the nature of EU news demand. The last three years the Greek crisis has been shaking investors’ trust in the European construction. The issue appeared in the headlines of the national press of nearly every EU member state. There was high demand from the audience everywhere. However, this was happening because the Greek crisis followed a global financial crisis, and the climate was already sensitive because of fears for a new economic instability. So the demand for what happened to be the “hottest” topic in Brussels was not related directly to the European policies, but to the fear of another wave of financial instability in Europe. The same can be said about the migration crisis, which has been met with extensive media coverage in all national media. There is seemingly an interest in the EU affairs but this is mostly because the EU citizens were faced with the consequences of a problem that was also to be dealt with at the EU level. Topics, like the “Greek crisis” or the “migration crisis”, prove that there is a strong public interest only in news carrying a lot of drama from the Brussels beat:

“The last couple of years we have the Greek crisis, we have the migration crisis so you can’t really say that EU topics weren’t on the agenda and didn’t get space on newspapers but it was very mono thematic. Sometimes it was even difficult to put in something from Brussels apart the Greek crisis, so everything else wasn’t even published or it was just published on the internet, without getting so much interest on it” (Respondent 8, p.7).

Audience's preference is a complex issue for the journalists to explain. On the one hand they understand that their readers (or viewers, or listeners) demand exclusively "hot" topics and this is restrictive for the news business today:

"British awareness in the EU is so low, it has to be something quite interesting in order for me to get it in without having to explain so many things [...] if it takes more space for me to explain than actually inform, then I know there is no point covering it at all"

(Respondent 6, p.4).

On the other hand, they realize it is also their duty to "educate" (inform) the public on topics that they do not have access otherwise:

"I always try to write my pieces in a way that somebody who has no great knowledge about the EU can also understand them. I think that is a good practice for journalism anyway; to write stories that are easy enough to be understood from someone who wants to make an effort" (Respondent 5, p.6).

In the latter case however the respondents agree that they would end up with a good share of elite audience in their readers' list. This would be also the case, especially if their reports are written in English, since most of Europeans, who are able to read English articles without being native speakers, have by default a good level of education. In addition to that, the respondents believe that those who are interested in the EU news updates, are more often than not highly educated people. In that sense, media who have an EU-wide reach are not necessarily actively trying to exclude certain readers. That however would inevitably happen, when a part of less privileged (in education or status) group of readers realizes that they need to have a background knowledge and to dedicate some time and energy in reading those pieces.

TTIP is such a demanding topic, in the respondents' view. Hence by definition it would attract an elite audience:

"The issue of TTIP is somehow boring for an average citizen of my country, who will probably skip it, if I decide to write about it anyways. And I think that this is probably the case for every member state. But when it comes to those outlets, like Politico, WSJ, FT they have a different audience, mostly international, not necessarily European only. Mostly elite readers, like businessmen are actually really interested on issues like TTIP and they want to

read less news and more analyses on the trade sector, bilateral relations (EU-US), so they can see whether there is an actual effect on their business” (Respondent 4, p.4).

The above opinion is shared equally by correspondents working for national media, but also from those working for international outlets. This perception can seriously affect the coverage of TTIP, in the sense that most of the reporters will choose not to publish anything on such a complicated trade package deal.

The conceptualization of “interesting” is important in the case of TTIP. Not all of the respondents agree on the characterization of TTIP as “interesting”, though nobody denies its importance:

“There is no TTIP coverage for two reasons: [first] because we are dealing with a really technical issue here, which is somehow boring for the average reader. Second, during the midday briefings I barely hear about TTIP. In general people are not asking, they do not seem to be interested in that [...] which amazes me because TTIP is a really important issue. And to be honest I myself have never bothered to ask about it, since I do not hear others asking plus I keep myself so busy with migration and economy that I barely bother to look for other topics to cover” (Respondent 4, p.2).

TTIP, because of its size, is hard not to be counted as a politically important trade agreement. Nevertheless, the ideology behind such a trade agreement and the steps taken towards its finalization, follow the standard Commission’s policy with regard to Europe’s economic development. As such, there is no much interest in following the debate at the national level. The respondents agreed that although the Commission issues policies, which might affect in the long term the lives of the EU citizens in many different ways, they -the respondents- are often restricted to publish pieces on politics and stories which are heavily tied with current debates in the country they come from:

“There is no interest in EU topics from my nationals, except those involving our country’s politics somehow. If I would call my editor back home and say ‘look I have three topics today from Brussels and TTIP is one of them’, for example, the editor would say ‘ok I don’t have space for that today, just give me the two and TTIP, trash it’. In general, the rule is that we do not publish anything that has nothing to do with our national debates” (Respondent 2, p.4).

In that sense TTIP, is not covered in the same way in every member state. As with every other story, the relevance for the audience has to be highlighted when covering TTIP. This is particularly important here as the topic seems relatively remote due to its complexity and the long term horizon (long lasting negotiations). Some of the respondents asserted that for finding a successful way to bridge TTIP with the national interest you can only report it having the interest of a sector in mind:

“If you are writing for a medium when you know the targeted audience fits a certain profile then yes you write a bit towards them, what you think they want to know. For example, farmers would be interested to know how the competition with the US will affect their net exports or what kind of opportunity in profit TTIP will bring to them” (Respondent 2, p.4).

However most of the journalists are reluctant to report with the interest of a particular group in mind because this could result in a biased work. As the respondent 8 puts it:

“There was a while when we - as a newspaper- had the impression that 80% of what it was reported on TTIP- in my country at least - was on the negative side and that was quite biased, because it represented only the interest of certain NGOs or groups who were against the agreement” (Respondent 8, p.11).

On a final note, what is important to know about the news demand is that the interest in the EU fluctuates according to periods of major crises. For topics other than those related to crises, the audience is not that much interested, or at least interested for long time. This can be proved tricky, because as pointed in the case of TTIP, the reported pieces tend to be biased favouring the most “popular” position, while more profound analyses are considered to address an elite audience.

5.3.3. Time constraints:

An additional practical constrain that adds pressure on the correspondents’ daily routine work, is related to the long list of EU topics they are supposed to cover and the little time they have in their possession to do that. For the news business time is money. Hence, the faster the correspondents find the information on the usual topics they cover, the sooner they get approval of the editors and find a place in the paper. However, because of the time constrains the correspondents tend to avoid covering long term projects, since investigative journalism for them is considered to be a luxury.

According to the journalists, there is a number of reasons that might influence their decision whether to report or not on TTIP. Being a trade agreement, still under negotiation between the EU

and the US administration, TTIP is by default a long term project. It involves several rounds of discussions between the two parties, where a lot of different issues need to be covered and ideally agreed upon. This fact creates the first quality challenge for the journalists, who, if they wish to gain some insight in the topic, they must dedicate a large portion of their time to follow every single announcement, attend every briefing and, in general, monitor the developments not only in negotiations, but also in the debate that takes place over the topic in civil society. Something like that would be practically impossible, according to the respondents' experience, unless one works for a specialized gazette covering exclusively trade or business topics:

“Specialized news outlets have built a network; they have the time to do so. For me there is no time, I have to cover a range of issues along trade: energy, climate change, migration to name a few, so I don't have the time to build such a network” (Respondent 8, p.5).

Normally, Brussels' based correspondents working for a daily newspaper, are busy covering a range of different topics like migration, economic crises, terrorism, environmental issues or agriculture. Therefore, for them to focus just on one trade agreement is considered not only a luxury, but also lack of professionalism.

It also happens, quite often, that the same correspondent is working for more than one medium back home. Different media assign different time and space on the same topic. For instance, TV time is very limited for hosting an analysis on TTIP: *“I have one and a half minute for live broadcasting. nobody would care if I start talk about TTIP”* (Respondent 2, p.6).

A generally shared opinion by the respondents on how time influences their job can be summarized as following: Brussels propose policies with long term effects in different sectors, agriculture, environment etc. Nevertheless, since those policies are not financial campaigns by politicians, but just business regulations, it appears that journalists never even delve into what those would mean for their audience. If a specialized medium decides to publish on those policies, most of the time the coverage is not comprehensive to the outside world. For the respondents, ideally, the key to covering Brussels, no matter what the topic actually is -energy crisis, migration etc- is to go look deep in what exists in the bureaucratic circles and then share pieces that the audience can relate to the reality they are living: *“That is time consuming, frustrating but ultimately very rewarding, this is why I have done for 20 years. If you want to cover governments not just politics and national sports (elections)”* (Respondent 9, p.4).

The Brussels-based correspondents are by the nature of their position responsible for covering a big range of European issues. Normally, priority is given to these EU-topics that would resonate with the political agenda and the audience's news demands in the home country. Since it is

very difficult, because of time limitations, for a correspondent to follow every news story in Brussels, topics such as TTIP which are not considered to be a priority, are rarely covered. An additional reason for avoiding covering TTIP is the prolonged negotiations which require a long-time investment on the side of the correspondents.

5.3.4. Specialization of correspondents:

Specialization is another key area influencing TTIP coverage. As a trade agreement, naturally TTIP's official reports and press releases come with heavy jargon and a focus on technicalities. Those are not necessarily interesting for the public, unless they are translated in plain language by the journalists. In other words, it is the journalist's duty to understand all the different aspects of a paper (or leak) on TTIP and then to connect it with the audience's reality:

“These negotiations with very hard trade language which nobody really understands, it's at the end about everyday issues. So it took sometime for journalists covering this issue in our newsroom, to actually understand what is going on and very often I sit down and read the texts again and again, just to figure out what it's all about” (Respondent 3, p.1).

To achieve that, correspondents must have a background in economics or at least, they must have tried to train themselves towards that direction. However, in the complex bureaucratic and politically driven Brussels' world, economics is not the only field one needs to be trained in. It is the knowledge of how things work, that is also indispensable. Issues such as why certain words are used instead of others in a report (political correctness), why in a conference there are no comments on an issue (controversial topic- sensitivity because of the heated debates and criticism) and why technical background briefings is the only available source of information -at times- on TTIP (not willingness for personal accountability - political costs) are important obstacles in the work of newcomers in Brussels. This means that specialization is required also for the beat, not only for the areas of interest be it politics, trade, environment or culture. For a Brussels correspondent, a global view of politics, official procedures, business practices, industry interests, and civil society movements are all crucial elements for covering TTIP. In that sense people who are less than a year in Brussels are probably going to cover TTIP either in a superficial way or not at all:

“Trade is by definition an international activity and one of the few areas where actually national journalists have a big opportunity here in Brussels, but they ignore their bias in politics versus policy. I, for example, cover all the trade issues, but the national journalists

are mostly interested in other things. The news business are always after a tension and some of these trade stories, while they are international, they are also very local. And European Union with its policies are able to regulate those tensions in a way that national politics can't. And this is why I think there is a missed opportunity with the reporting there"
(Respondent 9, p.1).

TTIP is an extremely technical project and as such it requires specialized knowledge for those correspondents covering it. Trade specialization is usually something very rare for Brussels-based correspondents working for national media. By contrast, this type of specialization comes more often with correspondents of pan-European or international media, which, however address only an elite audience, that is also more interested in TTIP than national audiences.

6. CONCLUSION

The creation of the European Union has allowed for the development of a supranational political space, moving decision making in various fields from the national to the European level. This change was not followed, however, as far as the political debate is concerned, since the latter invariably remains national. Although, traditionally, politics is being discussed within a national public sphere, one wonders what is the case for EU-led policies and whether these can be debated in a supranational public sphere. To test that, the current thesis used the case study of TTIP, as an EU-led project, and focused on how Brussels-based correspondents working for national and pan-European media outlets report on it. In particular, the thesis interviewed EU correspondents aiming to find out whether with their reporting contributes to the Europeanization of TTIP or they rather choose to present the issue through national lenses. The answer is given by exploring the journalistic practices, the impact of the Brussels environment and the influence of the home organization on the work of the Brussels-based correspondents.

6.1. Summary of results

Among the Brussels-based correspondents that participated in the interviews, four worked for German media, three for Greek media, two for British media and three for EU-wide or international media outlets. There are three major themes arising from the analysis of the data gathered through the interviews. These are the national differences, the interaction with sources in Brussels and the influence of the home organization. Each theme sheds some light on how European journalism

practically works, in particular, answering the question of whether there is space for the “nationalization” of European topics or the “Europeanization” of national debates.

National differences refer to the variation in the political culture from one country to another. From the interviews it became clear that the decision of the Brussels-based correspondents on whether to cover TTIP and to what extent, is influenced by the political and social landscape in their home countries. The culture of Euro-skepticism in the UK is the one guiding the British correspondents’ choices and reporting style, also when in Brussels. Practically, this means that the British respondents would be interested in covering any topic from which criticism towards the EU can derive but TTIP is not one of them. This is because the British public is in principle in favour of trade liberalization, and seems to be exactly a project TTIP aiming to achieve that. Thus, the paradox with British correspondents is that because they think that TTIP is a positive step undertaken by the EU, they cannot report on it because its coverage will generate no interest in the Euro-sceptic British audience. In Germany, although there is positive inclination towards free trade, the protection of middle-sized companies against the expansion of US conglomerates appears to be of higher importance. In response to that need, editors in Germany asked the Brussels-based correspondents to start covering TTIP more closely, in order to give balanced information to the German public. This did not work as it was planned because the political debate was already inundated by the criticism of NGOs and political parties with anti-TTIP stance. Nonetheless, criticism to TTIP was the outcome of a strong anti-American feeling in part of the German society rather than opposition to the EU policies. The Greek public, being overwhelmed by the financial crisis, has learned to consume almost exclusively, EU news that are related to the bail-out programs. A second EU topic that has recently hit the Greek news headlines is that of the migration crisis, for obvious reasons. In this situation, TTIP cannot be a priority for the Greek Brussels-based correspondents. It is evident, also in the case of Greece, that the political debate at the national level dictates the choices of the Greek journalists working from Brussels.

Those placing big emphasis on the EU policies are the correspondents working for EU-wide or international media. The latter are of the opinion that the Brussels-based correspondents must not carry national tensions with them to their work in Brussels. On the contrary, they believe that the latter make sure to properly highlight these EU policies that might affect their co-nationals, by not abiding to political ideologies or sensational journalism. The three countries have a different stance towards Europe in general, and trade in particular. Nonetheless, despite the differences the result is the same: TTIP is either not reported at all, or when reported, it is not “Europeanized” but rather critically presented through the national lenses.

The second theme focuses on the Brussels’ environment and how the interaction with officials, other colleagues and sources, influence the journalistic choices of the respondents. The

Brussels-based correspondents extract the basic information on TTIP from the standard information flow of the European Commission. Criticism derives from the fact that the Commission, releases the information after the end of every round of negotiations, however, without clearly linking it to previous information. This means that someone has to follow closely the developments, something that is not always practical or possible for the respondents. Another point of criticism for the Commission is that its officials interact less easily on a personal basis with correspondents who represent Eurosceptic media. By contrast, the role of the Council is very limited in the case of TTIP, since the latter is a project led by the Commission. Furthermore, the respondents find the official position of the European Parliament to be hardly any different from that of the Commission. In theory they could rely on personal contacts with MEPs to extract more information, in practice, however, the MEPs individual views serve the ideology and interests of the political party they come from.

As far as the interaction with colleagues is concerned, although the correspondents mix all together in the press briefings and other meetings they attend, they tend to exchange views only with the colleagues of same nationality. The reason behind it is not cultural proximity but rather has to do with competition at national level, where every correspondents needs to be sure that has got the same story as his competitor. Finally, besides the official communication and the interaction with their colleagues, the respondents highlight the importance of additional sources (i.e. lobbyists, NGOs) for the proper coverage of a controversial topic such as TTIP. The establishment of a network of sources is crucial also to cutting through the noise and making sense of the various aspects of a topic. The work of the respondents is influenced by the bureaucratic norms and procedures, in place, in Brussels. The standard information flow from the EU main institutions (Commission, Council and Parliament), definitely influences the correspondents coverage of an issue. However, to complete the picture, they usually resort to other sources as well. Finally, competition with media outlets back home, forces journalists to stay close to their “competitors” in Brussels too. This creates the national bubbles which operate quite distinctively within the larger Brussels’ bubble.

Lastly, the theme of the influence touches upon the practicalities of the respondents’ working environment, which are not influenced by the Brussels’ beat. Firstly, the respondents agree that strong competition, the economy of the media and perceptions about what would be interesting for the audience definitely dictate their choices. In reality, TTIP is not seen as a topic that could generate and sustain a long-term interest to the readers. Secondly, they assert that the audience’s interest in EU fluctuates depending on whether there is an involvement of EU policies in national crises. For the rest of the issues, the audience is not interested, or at least its interest is short-termed. TTIP is not considered a priority topic but one that addresses an elite audience. Thirdly, due to time

constrains the correspondents are forced to report only on priority topics and TTIP is definitely not one such topic. Investigative journalism -the category under which TTIP falls- is considered to be a luxury, nowadays, and something that can be done only by very large national or international corporations. Finally, the majority of the Brussels-based correspondents lack the specialization needed to cover highly technical projects such as TTIP.

The results of the research demonstrate that the TTIP never became Europeanised in the coverage of those Brussels-based correspondents working for national media. The Europeanisation of the public political communication around TTIP would require, according to Koopmans and Erbe (2004, p. 114) the genuine concern of all relevant actors in the EU policies. On the contrary, most of the respondents being affected by the political and social environment of the home country in which their organisations operate, choose to cover the EU topics through strictly national lenses. TTIP being a highly technical and time consuming project did not attract the interest of the respondents, despite the fact that its implementation would bring big changes in the lives of the EU citizens. Nevertheless, if the Brussels-based correspondents do not cover such EU-wide projects, it is unlikely that the audience in the Member-States becomes informed about significant EU initiatives.

6.2. Discussion

The thesis adopted as a starting point the view that the creation of an EU political space was not followed by a parallel establishment of a EPS. This is a position that is reflected in the research of the majority of scholars in the field of media studies. For instance, Abromeit (2003, p. 40-41 in Van de Steeg, 2006) asserts that the rise of a EPS is constrained by “the predominance of national rather than European character of the media”, the numerous national languages, and the difference in political culture among the EU Member-States. For his part, Statham (2008) insists that national media outlets, more often than not, cover EU issues from a national point of view, failing to instil the European perspective to the citizens of the Member -States. Nonetheless, some scholars argue that instead of speaking about the emergence of a single, comprehensive, EPS one could see signs of the “Europeanisation” of national public spheres. This could happen, when in certain occasions (specific cases) the EU “becomes more visible in national news”, in more than one EU countries, at the same time (Meijers, 2013 p. 6). Others suggest that “Europeanisation” can be vertical (top-down) with the evolution of pan-European media, or horizontal, where national public spheres open up for Europe, through the “Europeanisation” of the national media (Brüggemann and Königslöw, 2009).

The thesis used the case study of TTIP, a topic which is in principle of pan-European interest, to examine whether this has been debated in a Europeanised public space rather than the traditional national public spaces. The findings of the research do not corroborate the hypothesis of “Europeanisation” of national public spheres. TTIP attracted the attention of the public only in one country (Germany), temporarily, because it became part of the civil society criticism towards European policies. This means that the German media did not cover TTIP from its beginning, as an important EU-led project, but felt obliged to report on it when there was already a negative perception about it in part of the German public. For their part, the British media did not consider covering TTIP for the British audience which is pro-free trade anyways, and more interested in consuming news that rather criticise than praise EU policies. In Greece, the ongoing financial crisis and the role of the EU in the bail-out negotiations leave no room for any other EU-topics in the media space. Therefore, it can be assumed that, despite the fact that TTIP is a project that if concluded will bring a lot of important changes in the daily lives of the EU citizens, it was either covered from a national point of view (Germany) or not covered at all. As a result, it can be safely assumed that TTIP did not trigger any “horizontal” Europeanisation, which would require the concurrent discussion on it in many national debates and among the various national scenes.

Respondents working for EU-wide or international media outlets, consider the just representation of the EU position, in EU-wide topics, to be among the obligations of the Brussels-based correspondents. For them, TTIP is an opportunity to present to the European citizens the effort made by the EU institutions to advance and also protect, at the same time, their interests. Since, this effort is not extensively or accurately depicted in the national media outlets, it is upon the EU-wide media to do it. However, it must be noted that this does not constitute “vertical Europeanisation”, which requires the immersion of EU policies in national debates (Chapter 3.2), because it is the case that the EU-wide or international media address almost exclusively an elite audience (politicians, businessmen, researchers etc) and are not read by the vast majority of the public.

The above is directly linked to the role of journalistic practices in the production of news, which is a second major topic examined in the thesis. Theory suggests that besides the agency of the journalist (cultural background, education, professional training, personal ideas and perceptions etc) what mostly influences news production is the political economy the mass-media (big conglomerates, national, public, private etc) as well as the occupational routines, in-group relations, relations with editors and perceptions about news demands in the home organisation (Schudson, 1989). The current research showed that the Brussels-based correspondents also relate to the journalistic practices which means that the same elements influence news reporting by those

correspondents who do their job in an environment (Brussels beat) that differs from that of the newsroom at the mass media of their home country.

Although this is not something new, the important finding that derives from the research, is that contrary to previous empirical observations (Kopper, 2007, AIM, 2007), the blending of correspondents in one place (Brussels) and exposure to the same standardized sources (Commission's communication policy), do not bring about the gradual development of a "European journalistic culture" based on "growing common awareness and unique common practice" (Kopper, 2007, p. 187). In fact, as the research findings show, the major reason preventing this from happening is competition among media outlets in the home country. The advent of the Internet, and especially the social media, transformed media into a risky business. The decline in readership forced the traditional media to move into the digital space, while at the same time, it increased competition exponentially.

When survival is at stake, competition overwhelms the relationship among journalists working from Brussels for different media outlets in the home country. Instead of socialising and exchanging views on the EU policies with colleagues from other countries, the correspondents prefer to spend time with their co-nationals (competitors) in order to make sure that they got hold of the same stories and share a common understanding of the news. The latter helps them avoid unpleasant situations with home organizations, since all competitors share the same information and prioritize the same topics. Although, this puts the Brussels-based correspondents on the safe side, it leaves no space for the coverage of EU policies, which are not considered to be "hot topics". For a British or Greek Brussels-based correspondent to regularly cover TTIP would be considered as a dare move, having in mind that the home media have not the luxury to dedicate any space to issues that stir little commotion to the public.

Thus, the opinion of the respondents is that the "Europeanisation" of EU-topics cannot be neither "horizontal" nor "vertical", since it is not (or it should not be) a role assigned to the media at all. Those interviewed insisted that the media will always report on what believe to be the audience's news demand at a certain time. In that sense, the correspondents or the media could not generate the interest of the audience on TTIP unless the audience craved for information itself. Instead, the respondents assert that the creation of a "European communication space" should be the responsibility of the EU institutions, and especially, the European Parliament. According to them, the latter, if it worked properly, it could Europeanize the EU-policies by integrating them, through its MEPs, in the national media agenda. Therefore, the respondents insist that MEPs stubbornly focus on partisan politics, especially those relating to their home country, instead of advancing the EU agenda to the peoples of Europe. Although, this can be a valid argument, one can hardly believe

that the journalists and mass media in general, bear no responsibility for the lack of Europeanisation of EU-topics in national debates. In particular, their argument that they cover what the public is interesting in, without themselves influencing the news demand, appears to be a weak one. Especially, in the case of TTIP one cannot assume that the audience can actively seek for information about it if it does not become first informed by the Brussels-based correspondents on the project and what are the stakes in it.

6.3. Limitations – future research

The limited time allocated to the development and completion of the research dictated the selection of a sample of candidates that was restricted to only a few nationalities. Therefore, the results of the interviews were based on the experience of Brussels-based correspondents of only three MS (UK, Germany and Greece), in addition to correspondents working for EU-wide or international media outlets. A comprehensive research should first look at whether media outlets from all the 28 EU MS have sent correspondents to Brussels or not. That would be an additional indication on whether the basis for the Europeanisation of certain debates exists or not and under which conditions. Then, the research should aspire to interviewing correspondents from as many of the represented nationalities as possible. If the interviews of correspondents from three Member-States made it possible to gain an insight in the factors for the absence of Europeanisation of EU-topics in national debates, the involvement of more nationalities must provide more solid explanations in this matter.

In terms of future research, it must be noted that the research question could be tested with different case studies. Although TTIP is a topic that concerns all Europeans, it did not seem to generate high interest among the audience in most of the EU MS. As explained, this happened because of the complexity of the topic (negotiations based on many technicalities) but also because of the pro-free trade culture in some of the MS population. The latter meant that people in these Member-States (i.e. the UK) did not see any controversy in the finalization of TTIP between the EU and the US. Probably, the use of case studies which evidently attracted much more attention across Europe, such as the Eurozone's financial crisis or the latest migration crisis, could better examine whether certain topics become Europeanized and what the Europeanisation of national debates means for the creation of a common communication space in Europe.

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