The Implications of Europeanized EU-Journalists on the Citizens and its Government

The Brussels Bubble- a paradise for EU-journalists´ to become a good reporter?

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ABSTRACT

The national media plays a central role for European citizens by functioning as an information transmitter, ensuring fact-orientated news coverage, to ultimately fulfill a democratic role within the EU system. Not least due to enhanced EU integration, European news coverage of EU-related matters has significantly increased. This is important, as good news coverage is essential for citizens to hold their national government accountable. By conducting 26 semi-structured interviews with German and Italian EU-journalists, this research identifies EU-journalists´ exposure to Europeanization and assesses its impact on their views and framing of EU news. The research explores two potential effects from Europeanisation; a first looks at the possible detachment from the national audience while a second focuses on the quality of a journalists information network as a result of Europeanisation. The findings that Europeanization of EU-journalists improves access to exclusive information through an established quality information network thereby strengthening their accountability role. By contrast, Europeanisation can compromise journalists bridging role as they need to prioritizing the national audience´s interest when selecting EU affairs topics.

1.   Introduction

Despite the increased European news coverage of European Union-related affairs over the last decade, over a third of European Union (EU) citizens argue that most European issues are given insufficient attention by the national media of Member States of the EU (European Commission, cited in Machill et al., 2006, p. 22). This is particularly puzzling given the media's democratic role within the EU system to inform the public when reporting from Brussels on EU topics. Given the fact that most citizens permanently identify the media as their most relevant source of information for EU politics (p. 59; Koopmans & Pfetsch, 2013, p. 7), it is particularly striking that misinterpretation of EU news in national media can lead to the rise of Euroscepticism (Leconte, 2010; Anderson 2004). To prevent such misinterpretation of EU news, fact-oriented EU news coverage must be guaranteed with the objective of fully informing European citizens. To do so, EU-journalists i.e. national journalists reporting on the EU, need to be sufficiently embedded in the national system, yet they need to be sufficiently independent in terms of their sourcing to properly scrutinize the Member States (thereafter MS) that make up the EU. Thus, how long does one need to stay in Brussels before one becomes a good reporter? Can good coverage prevent the EU's democratic deficit? And what constitutes good coverage?

It is relevant to analyze EU-journalists´ central role in the framework of EU news coverage to understand how their role correlates to an accountability gap. Hence, journalists´ central position in enhancing news coverage on EU issues provides a compelling avenue for research. Therefore, the extent to which EU-journalists are Europeanized needs to be identified to analyze its effects by focusing on German and Italian

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EU-journalists´ detachment from the national audience and their quality information network. Thus, measuring the effect of the exposure of German and Italian Europeanized EU-journalists allows for valuable insights into the abilities of EU-journalists to enhance accountability. EU-journalists´ role is thus crucial for a functioning democracy. Both Member States are founding countries of the EU and central actors that make up the EU.

The importance of properly functioning EU-journalism and an informed public within a potentially emerging European public sphere has been discussed extensively (Michailidou & Trenz, 2020; Melchior, 2017; Lecheler, 2008). The origins and effects of the Europeanization of EU-journalists has also been studied by identifying an emerging collective opinion and a developed European attachment (Adam, 2012; Trenz, 2004). However, how Brussels fosters Europeanization and its implication for EU-journalists´ ability to fulfill their role in contributing to public accountability, are much less well understood. This paper thus endeavors to answer the following research question: *How does the Europeanization of EU-journalists in Brussels affect their ability to hold their national government accountable?* My research provides a new perspective by combining the literatures on EU journalism and Europeanization to ultimately assess journalists´ ability to fulfill their role in engendering public accountability. Therefore, two hypotheses are derived to assess the effects of EU-journalists´ exposure to Europeanization, detachment from the national audience, and the quality of its information network.

The paper consists of six parts. The first provides an overview of the previous literature on the importance of EU- journalism to the public and the effect of Europeanization on EU-journalists´ news coverage. Subsequently, a theoretical framework of Europeanization is outlined to explain its various dimensions and demonstrate that Europeanization can have two distinct outcomes (H1&H2). The third section outlines the research design, presents interviewing as a method for data collection, outlines the operationalization of Europeanization and both hypotheses, and explains the data analysis method. The findings from the interviews are presented in the fourth part. Section 5 assesses the effects of Europeanization by testing the hypothesis on the indicators of detachment from the national audience and quality information network. Finally, I draw a conclusion from the analysis while considering the limitations of this research.

2.   Literature review

2.1   The importance of EU-journalism to the public

Various scholars argue that EU-journalists have a responsibility to the public because they are communication agents between the EU and the public. They shape political discourse by conducting informative EU news coverage (Bijsmans, 2017, p. 75; Lecheler, 2008, p. 446; Trenz, 2004, p. 312). Therefore, EU-journalists "should be viewed as participants rather than passive mediators of European debates" (Trenz, 2004, p. 299). EU-journalists´ pivotal role enables them to establish a European-wide discourse or a so-called public sphere (Gerhards, Meyer cited in Lecheler, 2008, p. 445). EU-journalists´ responsibility has arguably been a result of the EU´s complexity, limited transparency, and unwillingness to enable the wider public´s understanding. In other words, EU-journalists must essentially dis-entangle complex matters in a way that is fact-oriented and critical, and stated in simple terms (Melchior, 2017, p. 6; Adam, 2012, p. 26; Statham, 2008, p. 417; Michailidou & Trenz, 2020, p. 1). This is mainly because the EU has failed to invest in efficient public communication (Rauh at el., 2019). Various scholars further

agree on the importance of guaranteeing democratic legitimacy by providing the public with an understanding of European affairs and allowing for informed judgments, which is achieved via EU-journalism (Michailidou & Trenz, 2020, pp. 1, 13; Statham, 2008, p. 398).

EU- journalists thus play a central role because they have privileged access to information such as through established networks to command and communicate insider knowledge (Gerhards cited in Lecheler, 2008, p. 443; Trenz, 2004, pp. 293-294). Such insider knowledge is crucial for EU-journalists daily work given the lack of resources they face to conduct their research. Regarding this, Koopmans and Pfetsch (2013) argue that EU-journalists´ information sourcing devotes limited resources not least because EU-journalists´ networks are also in the national bubble (p. 10). Meanwhile, Meyer (1999) emphasizes the increasing number of information resources in Brussels due to emerging transnational networks (see also Heft et al., 2019, p. 1186). Moreover, Norris observes the risk of an increasing disconnection between the EU and the public due to negative and even Eurosceptic EU- journalism problematising their potential contribution to the emergence of a European public sphere (citied in Gleissner & De Vreese, 2005, p. 184). The disconnection also results from increasingly skeptical and demanding national audiences (Lloyd & Marconi, 2014, p. 7). In contrast, Koopmans and Pfetsch (2013) argue that the public´s detachment from EU affairs has become an emerging attachment given the introduction of the euro, which affects their daily life (pp. 9-10). Additionally, Gleissner and de Vreese (2005) highlighted that in their reporting, EU-journalists prioritize their nation over other EU member states or EU institutions (p. 224). Yet, it remains unsolved how objective EU-journalists conduct their information sourcing and therefore, how detached they are from the public which is crucial for the emergence of a European public sphere.

Given the importance of EU-journalism to enable a public discourse on European affairs through public communication, a debate among various scholars was triggered on the potential of an emerging European public (Risse, Gerhards, citied in Lecheler, 2008, p. 445, Pfetsch, 2005, p. 3). While Machill and others (2006) perceive a European public sphere as valuable for a functioning democracy, Habermas perceives it as a phenomenon generated by EU-journalism (cited in Lecheler, 2008, p. 445). Regarding its appearance, several scholars deny its possibility (Peter & de Vreese, Gerhards, Grimm, cited in Lecheler, 2008, p. 445) while others are optimistic about its emergence because of EU news coverage to the public that is produced by EU-journalists (Eder & Kantner, cited in Lecheler, 2008, p. 446). Hence, this debate presents the responsibility role of EU-journalists who potentially enable a Europeanization of public communication through their EU news coverage to overcome the missing attachment to the EU.

Previous research has demonstrated the importance of EU-journalism as the mediator between the public and the EU given the latter´s lack of transparency. Given EU-journalists´ central position in this framework, previous authors disagree about whether EU-journalists are able to fulfill this role. The EU-journalists constraints in gathering information and an emerged detachment of their national audience results in a debate about their contribution to a European public sphere. With new data, this thesis helps to contribute to this unsolved debate by investigating by which means EU-journalists fulfill their responsible role to ensure fact-orientated news-coverage, and its means for a potentially European public sphere. It is therefore necessary to assess the extent to which EU-journalists are Europeanized when conducting information sourcing for the news coverage for the public.

2.2 Europeanizing journalists in Brussels

Europeanization is briefly understood in terms of enhanced EU and less national power (Segesten & Bossetta, 2019). Hence, previous authors focused on EU-correspondents´ changing perspectives when conducting news coverage on EU matters. Raeymaeckers et al. (2007) recognize that EU-correspondents are shifting their perspectives from a national toward a European commitment (p.114; see also Trenz, 2004, p. 297). Raeymaeckers and others (2007) argue that the time spent in Brussels affects EU-journalists´ tendency toward "reverence towards the institutions" which implies a detachment of the national perspective (p. 107, 114). Additionally, other scholars emphasize the idea that EU-journalists have developed a sense of belonging in Europe (Adam, 2012, p. 28; Gleissner & De Vreese, 2005, p. 223). As a result, several Member States have argued for a rotation principle to prevent EU-correspondents to Europeanize too much (Morgan, 1995, cited in Raeymaeckers et al., 2007, p. 114). In contrast, Gleissner and de Vreese (2005) stress that EU-journalists´ views result from the close links with "EU institutions, their home news organizations, and their perception of the audience" (p. 221).

The Europeanization of Brussels-based journalists has additionally become apparent through the propagation of opinionated pieces since plain news coverage is rarely found in any type of media (Koopmans, 2007; Koopmans & Pfetsch, 2003). Meanwhile, Pfetsch and other scholars (2010) are convinced that EU-journalists´ aim to amplify pro-European voices by prioritizing a transnational European scope in editorials (p. 36). Another effect of EU-journalists´ changing perspective is the employment of stereotypes about EU themes (Meyer, 1999, p. 622).

Notably, the reasoning behind the correlation of the location Brussels and the journalists' changing perspective is undertheorized and understudied by scholars. Previous authors also lack insights into other factors influencing that shifting perspective. Without added research on the reasoning behind their changed perspectives, we are missing the correlation regarding how and why their shifted perspectives influence their choices of sources and information. This information would enable an assessment of how the choice of sources ultimately affects EU-journalists´ ability to scrutinize the national government.

This thesis closes the gap in the literature by analyzing the effect of Europeanization on EU-journalists in their established network and attachment to the national audience to assess their ability to hold the national government accountable.

3. Theoretical framework

This chapter outlines the concept of Europeanization and further expands it to show how Europeanization can result in two opposite outcomes, which is presented through two derived hypotheses (H1& H2).
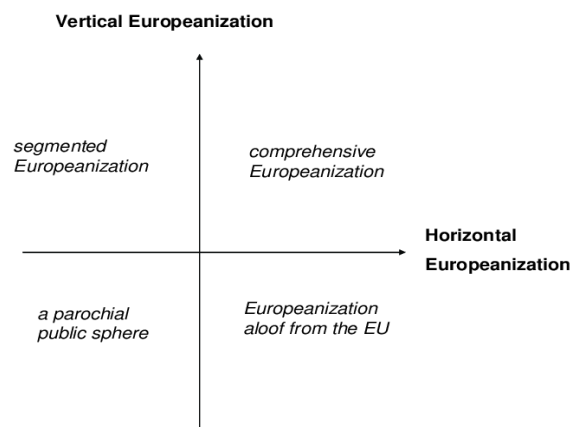
3.1 Europeanization and its effects in the field of European Union journalists

To analyze how Europeanization of EU-journalists affects their accountability role, it is crucial to establish an understanding of how to observe and measure this Europeanization. The concept of Europeanization is generally defined as "any process whereby a domestic feature (…) takes on a European dimension" (Segesten & Bossetta, 2019, p. 4). Europeanization therefore refers to enhanced attention to Brussels due to the increasing EU power. Europeanization also assumes that "transnational communications increase within the scope of Europe or the member states of the EU" (Heft et. al., 2019, p. 1185). Therefore, enhanced European integration contributes to the interdependent relationships among the member states (Büggemann & Kleinen- von Köngislöw, 2007, p. 4). Therefore, this theory sets groundwork for the

establishment of a European public sphere since the identification of an institutional setting that is coined by a balanced public communication between the media, communicators, and the public (Trenz, 2004, p. 294). Researchers have agreed that the determination of a European public sphere can be ambiguous, namely "both gradual and multidimensional", so there are question not only about the existence of such a sphere but also about its format (Peters et al., 2005, pp. 141-142). Hence, the spheres that pertain most specifically to this research question have been selected and are outlined below.

I draw on the conceptualization of Europeanization as provided by Brüggemann & Kleinen -von Königslöw (2007).

Figure 1: Dimensions of Europeanization

Vertical Europeanization

segmented
Europeanization

comprehensive
Europeanization

**Horizontal
Europeanization**

a parochial
public sphere

Europeanization
aloof from the EU

Source: Let's talk about Europe – Brüggemann & Kleinen- von Köngislöw, 2007, p. 5

As indicated in Figure 1, they distinguish between a horizontal and a vertical dimension of Europeanisation. Each of these perspectives can be linked to a specific (and opposing) impact on the ability for journalists to hold their government to account.

First, vertical Europeanization outlines the connections "between the national and the European level" (Koopmanns, 2007, p. 101). Not least because of enhanced integration, closer attention is paid to the EU level. The introduction of the euro and the enhanced transfer of power to Brussels exemplarily demonstrate the EU level effect on the daily lives of EU citizens since it has increasingly captured the attention of the media (Brüggemann & Kleinen- von Königslöw, 2009, p. 29). Vertical Europeanization can take place top-down when EU actors intervene in national matters due to European regulations, whereas bottom-up vertical Europeanization occurs when national actors address European matters (Koopmanns, 2007, p. 101). Vertical Europeanization bears the risk of detachment from the national audience as EU-journalists predominantly focus on EU actors and EU issues in their news coverage (Boomgaarden et. al., 2013, p. 611). This effect can occur in cases of the close attachment towards the European level that results in diminished understanding of national audiences´ interests. Due to the high frequency of interaction, a sense of collective identity emerges that promotes reference to "we/us," ultimately promoting a collective EU rather than a national position (Juncos & Pomorska, 2011, pp. 10-11). Therefore, vertical

Europeanization can have a negative impact on journalists' accountability role due to their detachment from the national audience. Hence, the following hypothesis was derived:

H1: The more EU-journalists are exposed to (vertical) Europeanization, the more detached from the national audience they become.

Second, horizontal Europeanization defines established connections among Member States. The national media coverage extends its focus to other Member States by including interviews, comments, and guest pieces due to their increasingly interdependent scheme (Brüggemann & Kleinen-von Königslöw, 2009, p. 29). Horizontal Europeanization appears in a weak or strong form with the former suggesting simple coverage of other Member States' discourses and the latter occurring when actors or policies of another Member State are explicitly highlighted in the news coverage (Koopmanns, 2007, p. 101). Thus, horizontal Europeanization suggests the triangulation of reporting by considering actors from other European countries in the national media that requires a variety of sources (Koopmans & Erbe, 2004; Koopmans & Statham, 2010; Wessler et al., 2008). By including other Member States in reports, perceptions become mutually noticeable in multiple national media types throughout the EU (Heft et al., 2019, p. 1185). The increasing connections among Member States in news coverage results in dissatisfaction with traditional journalism since enhanced transnational and supranational politics in the EU require horizontal Europeanization to perform high-quality news coverage and hold politicians accountable (p. 1187). For instance, the development of a transnational journalism network allows for close collaboration among journalists or news organizations; hence, it provides a groundwork for cooperation beyond borders (pp. 1187-1188). Horizontal Europeanisation can thus have a positive impact on accountability as it fosters public debate and empowers citizen's ability to scrutinize the national government (p. 1187). Given the expectation that EU journalists draw on their network almost daily to triangulate sources and include transnational information, the following hypothesis is derived:

H2: The more EU-journalists are exposed to (horizontal) Europeanization, the better the quality of their information network will be.

Finally, despite the distinct spheres of vertical and horizontal Europeanization, intervening variables are also considered. It is noteworthy that Brüggemann and Kleinen-von Königslöw (2009) build upon this idea and identify "four patterns of trans nationalization of national public spheres" (p. 29) as observed in Table 1. Comprehensive Europeanization combines high degrees of both vertical and horizontal Europeanization while a parochial public sphere is created if neither vertical nor horizontal Europeanization is established. Whereas segmented Europeanization identifies vertical Europeanization only, Europeanization aloof from the EU determines horizontal Europeanization without vertical dimensions (p. 30). These patterns are notably relevant when measuring the degree of Europeanization of EU-journalists since it is likely to identify the process that can lead to our derived hypotheses. It results in enhanced public debates on EU matters and hence greater citizen involvement (Adam, 2012, p. 29).

In sum, the concept of Europeanization is expanded and allows for an analysis on EU-journalists´ ability to hold the national government accountable through the two identified indicators derived from the hypotheses.

4. Methodology

In this chapter, I justify the case selection of EU-journalists as the driving force of this research and outline the methods I applied to gather, operationalize, and analyze the data.

4.1 Research design

This research draws on 26 interviews[2] conducted with EU-journalists[3], which is adequate for a qualitative analysis given that some national media channels in the EU support up to approximately five EU journalists in Brussels due to increasing budget constraints (Raymaeckers et al., 2007, pp. 106-108). Interviewees were selected from two member states to enhance external validity: Germany and Italy. The unit of analysis for this research concerns the EU journalist, which –we can expect- shows variation in terms of their degree of Europeanisation.

I gathered the empirical data through semi-structured qualitative interviews from mid-April until mid-May 2021. Qualitative interviewing enables the researcher to establish an in-depth context in greater complexity (Morris, 2015, p. 5) and thus is more suitable for receiving exclusive information due to an established trustworthy atmosphere unlike surveys, which are often incomplete and less detailed. Semi-structured interviews require the establishment of a topic guide[4] but allow freedom regarding in-depth explanations, follow-up inquiries, and open questions (Alsaawi, 2014, p. 151). Therefore, interviews are the most reliable way to extract subjective experience. This chosen method therefore allows for hypothesis testing, or in other words, pursuing a deductive approach (Hyde, 2000, p. 83). The opportunity to interview EU journalists personally provided a wider range of information and personal contributions in response to flexible follow-up questions and hence allowed me to explore new aspects beyond the questions provided by allowing for an inductive approach. Given the fact that each EU-journalist was asked identical questions due to a topic guide, the replicability and consistency of the collected data are supported. Applying a topic guide additionally strengthens the internal and external validity of the research since every interview focused equally on the scope of research.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews occurred virtually via Zoom or Skype in German or Italian and were recorded. They lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. 26 interviews with 11 German EU-journalists and 15 Italian EU- journalists were conducted. To collect the data, 77 German and Italian EU journalists were approached via e-mail and follow-up e-mails were sent out within a week. To enhance the representativeness of the interviewee selection, I chose six distinct types of media, namely newspapers, radio, freelancers, internet media, news agencies, and TV networks. This data collection included EU-journalists who had worked in their position for at least a year and so had been exposed to Europeanization, which was the reasoning for their selection. Thus, this data provides concrete information about the extent to which EU journalists are Europeanized and Europeanization's effect on their detachment from the national audience and the quality of their information network.

The research is subject to a risk of bias since the interviews were conducted in German and Italian and translated into English. This limitation poses the burden of ensuring identical interpretation of the wording; for instance, there is no direct translation for "accountability" in Italian. However, this limitation

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[2] Appendix A: List of all interviewed EU-journalists.
[3] My colleague Rebecca Tronci conducted the interviews with Italian and I with German EU-journalists.
[4] To be retrieved upon request.

was overcome by additionally stating the English term in the interviews. Despite the potential risk of translation inaccuracies in the data collection process, conducting interviews in interviewees' native language strengthens the accuracy and credibility of interviewees' statements.

4.2   Operationalization

How did I measure Europeanization to test its hypothesized impact? The following indicators were used to this effect: (1) physical presence in Brussels, (2) their news coverage focusing solely on the EU and national news content, and (3) the duration of their work as an EU correspondent and hence the duration of their presence in Brussels. This measurement is presented in Table 1. Therefore, a measurement scale from 1 to 3 was used to identify the participants' degree of Europeanization. 1 indicates the lowest and 3 the highest degree of Europeanization. For the sake of accuracy, we presume identical distances between the numbers of the scale. Significantly, not all three criteria per level are required to be identified in this category, but at least one indicator per level needs to be fulfilled. The determination of each level is presented as follows:

Level 1: Not in Brussels, coverage of EU and other subjects, 1+ year working as EU-correspondent
Level 2: Partly in Brussels, coverage of EU and other subjects, 3+ years working as EU-correspondent
Level 3: Fully in Brussels, solely EU coverage, 5+ years working as EU-correspondent

Table 1: Measurement of Europeanization

Europeanization (scale: 1-3)	Indicator	Operationalization
Exposure of Europeanization	(1) Physical presence in Brussels (2) Length of time working as an EU-journalist (3) Focus on EU politics	Working from Brussels or elsewhere? How long have you been working as an EU journalist? Only EU or also NATO/regional/national news coverage?

For the empirical analysis, the measurement of the expected impact was twofold. The effect of EU-journalists´ Europeanized degree was subject to measurement of the indicators on the detachment to the audience (H1) that is outlined in the upper half of Table 2 and the quality of the information network (H2) is summarized in the lower half of the same table.

Table 2: Operationalization outcomes

Vertical/ Detachment	Indicator	Operationalization
Choice of topics	Selection and Prioritization of news stories	How do you decide on which news stories to report?
Relevance of topics	Popularity of topics	What stories generally do well?
Personal preference	Interest of audience	Are there stories you found relevant to report that would likely not find an audience at home?
Horizontal/ Quality information network	**Indicator**	**Operationalization**
Personal Network	Informal information sharing/ quality of network	How difficult is it to create a personal network? People from which job sectors contribute to this network?

Methods of research	Triangulation data	Where do you get your information? Do you have a main source of information? Are the public records sufficient for general reporting?
Political pressure	Restrictions in reporting	Have you felt political pressure when reporting?
National position on EU level	Lack of access	What are the impediments you encounter in knowing which position was, for instance, taken by a politician within certain EU policy negotiations?

Source: Author's elaboration

4.3   Data analysis method

All interviews were anonymously transcribed and subsequently analyzed in the light of a qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2000, p. 254-265). The transcripts were reread multiple times, quotations were extracted, statements paraphrased, and themes generated according to the operationalization indicated above. Established tables[5] helped to resort and modify the transcript according to answer patterns by linking it to the EU- journalists measured degree of Europeanization when identifying common clusters. Common patterns make it possible to identify correlations between the extent to which EU-journalists are Europeanized and the derived answers. Furthermore, themes for discussion were chosen based on the uniqueness and commonality of answer patterns among EU-journalists.

## 5.   Insights into the work of Europeanized EU-journalists

First, this chapter presents a brief analysis of the extent to which EU-journalists are Europeanized. Secondly, it links the effects thereof to the findings from the interviews by focusing on the detachment from the national audience and their quality information network.

Figure 2 illustrates that all the EU-journalists interviewed are to some degree Europeanized. The data about all the interviewed EU-journalists (n= 26) indicates that three of the EU journalists (11%) represent the lowest degree of Europeanization, namely level 1, due to, inter alia, their limited work experience.[6] Additionally, 14 EU-journalists (54%) meet the requirements for the second degree of Europeanization while nine EU-journalists (35%) fulfil the requirements for the highest degree of Europeanization. Therefore, the average degree of a Europeanized EU-journalist is measured with a mean of 2.2. The typical EU-journalists thus does not necessarily only cover the EU but also NATO or regional coverage and is typically permanently located in Brussels. Additionally, the average length of working in Brussels as an EU-journalist is 7.5 years[7], which represents a high degree of Europeanization given the fact that a factor of level 3 includes more than five years of work experience. The identification of a typical EU-journalist is relevant to ultimately understand whether an EU-journalist can equally perform their profession with a lower or higher exposure to Europeanization.

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[5] Can be retrieved upon request
[6] See also Appendix B.

Figure 2: The extent to which European Union-journalists are Europeanized
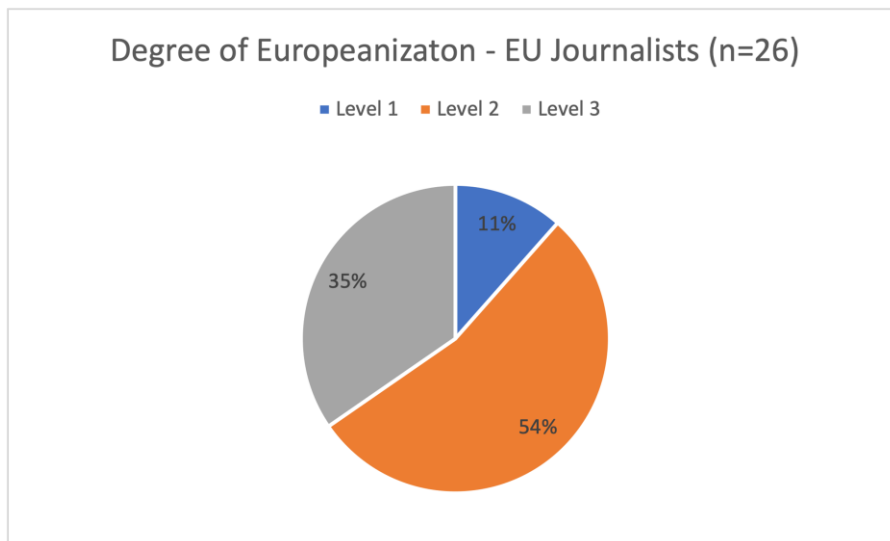
5.1 European Union- journalists´ news coverage: topic selection for the national audience

Given the home audience's general lack of interest on EU´s news coverage and their inability to recognize the direct effect of events in Brussels on their daily lives, EU-journalists prioritize topics and style of writing to capture the national audience's interest (Lecheler, 2008, p. 458; Adam, 2012, pp. 25-26). Hence, the interview results are outlined by connecting the EU journalists' degree of Europeanization to their answer patterns regarding their topic selection for the national audience.

Most interviewed EU-journalists showed identical patterns in their decisions about which news stories to report by prioritizing the interest of the national audience, regardless of the EU journalist's degree of Europeanization (see also Gleissner & de Vresse, 2005, p. 223). Generally, EU-journalists stated to have daily morning meetings with the editors to consult about topics by submitting topic proposals while also receiving the editors' daily topics´ suggestions (J1- J15, J18- J21, J24, J26). Hence, they maintain contact with the editorial board ensuring a link to the national audience (p. 228). Two EU-journalists with distinct levels of Europeanization (l. 1& 2) referred to their responsibility as a service provider to the editors which means the latter solely decide on the daily topics to cover (J23, J25). Other EU-journalists with second-degree Europeanization emphasized their great freedom in content selection because they are perceived as the experts in Brussels (e.g., J4, J16). However, EU-journalists also emphasized the importance of maintaining the balance of a national and European perspective by attending the daily editors´ meeting of the national media channel:

> The daily conversation with the editorial staff also guides as *a control for yourself* about which topic we can write. It is our job as a journalist to have the topics ready and be able to argue why I would not write about it or sometimes you also find them good and publish those suggested topics from the agencies. (J18)

The interviews yielded similar results concerning the national audience´s interest in EU coverage regardless of EU-journalists´ degree of Europeanization. All journalists (J1-26) identified present EU topics with domestic reference and driven by the national debate as considerably interesting to the national audience (Berry et. al., 2015; De Vreese, 2003). Generally, EU news coverage dominates in periods of crises and scandals hence "comes and goes in waves" (e.g., J4, J18). Several EU- journalists also consider the importance of their commercial role as J22 highlighted: "only if you have enough charisma, you perhaps can cover the apparent missing charisma of Brussels". The way of selling the articles thus is essential to make EU news coverage appealing to the reader not least because of the limited performance of the EU itself (e.g., J 24). Most journalists of all Europeanization degrees noted that the migration crisis, the pandemic, and Brexit have great domestic impacts given why they have received much attention from the media, and interest from the audience (e.g., J6, J10, J13, J22). In fact, most media coverage is dominated by EU issues with national impact (Kevin, 2003, p, 88). Additionally, the national audience generally perceives EU foreign affairs news coverage on EU-relations with Russia and China as interestingly since they particularly relate to German domestic impact regarding North -stream II and electric mobility (J16, J19, l. 2, 1). To capture the interest of the national audience it is additionally relevant "to personalize EU coverage on single Politician's such as Trump, Putin, and Erdogan through the choice of conflict topics" (J26). These topics are appealing to the national audience since they are generally perceived as irritating.

Regardless of EU-journalists' degree of Europeanization, they responded that overly technical and complex stories diminish audience interest in EU news. There is thus a need to dis-entangle complex matters to allow a simple understanding and make it more appealing to the national audience (Lecheler, 2008, p. 459). Other than that, EU journalists of various Europeanization degrees noted their capability to estimate relevant topics in terms of audience interest due to their central position in Brussels (e.g., J18, J24). Their personal preference does not conflict with the national audience´s desire for EU- news topics since topics are only of importance to the audience if they somewhat reach an equal level of importance in Brussels.

Irrespective of their exposure to Europeanization, EU-journalists emphasized the relevance to predominate the national audience interest. They hence consider it their duty to translate the EU´s complexity into simple terms, apply an appealing style of writing and select topics of relevance to the national audience that in sum illustrate themes that irritate readers.

5.2 European Union journalists´ network: the key ingredient for their research methods

EU-journalists' research methods are versatile, fluctuating, and subject to a degree of critical reflection on the information supplied. Hence, answers on the sourcing of information and impediments are presented by linking it to the degree to which EU-journalists are exposed to Europeanization.

The interviews yielded mixed results regarding EU-journalists´ perceptions of how to perceive a quality information network and their research methods by partly critically reflecting on sources and thus noting impediments. Regardless of their degree of Europeanization, all the interviewed journalists (J1–26) agree upon the considerable importance of being physically present in Brussels to establish and maintain a network. Brussels is perceived as "the place to be" to meet people through press-related and networking events (J19). An EU-journalist also confirmed the significance of being physically present in Brussels but indicated that they did not focus on establishing a network and admitted "I would advise

everyone coming to Brussels nonetheless to do so as it is crucial for receiving information and especially exclusive one" (J23).

Almost all the EU-journalists agreed that establishing a network in Brussels is easier than in their home country since they receive contact details from prior colleagues and various invitations to background briefings. Only J18, who had the highest degree of Europeanization noted that establishing a network in Brussels was much more difficult than on a national level. However, the interviews yielded mixed results on the establishment of a qualified network. Most of the EU-journalists, with various degrees of Europeanization, noted that developing networks in Brussels is subject to time, trust, and commitment because anonymity must be guaranteed (J1, J3, J6, J17, J18). Hence, an average EU-journalist states that the higher the degree of trust, the more a journalist receives exclusive information (e.g., J5). Given the importance of an established network in Brussels, an EU- journalist with the second degree of Europeanization stressed: "Your quality as a journalist depends exclusively on the network, you are worth depending on the information you manage to gather" (J14, see also J2). This notion thus is crucial to understand the importance of developing trust to conduct good news coverage. An impediment to establishing a qualified network is the size of the media company given that EU-journalists from small media channels struggle to gather exclusive information through a developed network (J2, J12; see also Lecheler, 2008, p. 459). However, distinct Europeanized EU-journalists have an advantage in establishing networks when they speak several languages and maintain contacts from prior jobs and correspondent positions such as in London and Washington (J7, J8, J15, J19, J26). In turn, language barriers hinder the ability to present several political positions because background briefings of other Member States are held in national languages (J1, J21, l. 3).

The strong national bubble in Brussels also helps to establish a network. Since EU-journalists conduct news coverage for the national media it is essential to keep close contact with the national community in Brussels (J2, J26, l. 2). Among journalists, the network also include similar job sectors, namely, stakeholders, diplomats, European External Action Service, press speakers, government officials, and non-governmental organizations and lobby groups (J1- J26; see also Berry et al., 2015). This enables EU-journalists to develop a quality information network by ensuring diversity in sourcing. A general impression from all the interviewed EU-journalists furthermore shows the sufficiency of public records. However, in terms of objectivity and exclusiveness of information such as the process of meetings and negotiations views were more critical. Hence, most EU-journalists indicated the institutions as their main source of information, which could be triangulated, and expanded with informal sources. Three EU-journalists indicated that their pivotal sources are mainly informal (J5, J8, J19, l. 2 & 1). An EU-journalist emphasizes the triangulation of information, neither from a single formal nor informal source is sufficient given the fact that national representatives, diplomats are reporting through national lenses and institutions lack transparency (J1, J2, J8, l. 3). This awareness is relevant for information evaluation to ensure fact-orientated knowledge.

Several EU-journalists (J6, J7, J10, J18-20, J22, J23 J,26, l.1-3) identified impediments to representativeness of the information from the Commission, which has become "the EU´s black box" (J22), despite its important role as an information provider (J20). EU-journalists from the lowest degree of Europeanization upward indicated a determined attitude towards the Commission:

It is controlled messaging in the Commission … as the midday briefing is a catastrophe. They are just presenting results, the only way you can receive new information is by talking to people off recording which is a dilemma for democracy. (J19)

This "vertical control" (J19) of the "propaganda event" (J23) that is the Commissions´ daily press conference does not allow for a dialogue; hence it is recognized as a dilemma for democracy (J22, J23). Nonetheless, EU journalists (l.2) refer to the press conference´s relevance due to "off-record" discussions afterwards (J16, J17) while others classify the daily press meetings of the Commission importantly (J21, J24, J25, l. 3 & 1). Since the Commission purposely leaks documents, the institution aims to spread relevant information only unofficially (J24, l.3). That way EU-journalists receive additional information informally via the institutions. Moreover, several EU- journalists of distinct Europeanized degrees noted information impediments due to the Council´s lack of transparency. An average Europeanized EU-journalist therefore illustrated the importance of the triangulation of sources through a high-quality information network and stated: "If everything is transparent, one does not need journalists to be based in Brussels physically anymore. Such personal networks are important as not everything is transparent" (J 17). Having this critical reflection on sources helps EU-journalists to report critically by not being too close to the actors from the lowest degree of Europeanization onward.

An EU-journalist summarized the concept of critical reflection in reporting by emphasizing that receiving compliments from press speakers on news coverage indicates lacking critical reporting (J20). Reporting critically means including both sides of the topic, in turn, it limits opportunities for outside pressure of readers and politicians. None of the EU-journalists have experienced any political pressure in terms of censorship; however, several Italian EU-journalists of different levels of Europeanization experience pressure through phone calls by politicians who request changes afterwards (J3, J4). Another EU-journalist added that this issue is twofold: "what the Italian Politicians say and what it is said in Brussels. When you go against what the Italian politicians say you receive several calls" (J7, l.3). Other EU-journalist´s mentioned the increased harsh feedback from the national audience on published EU coverage (J17, J20, J26, l. 2&1) and an "internal quality check" (J24, l. 3). Despite the outside pressure and criticism, it does not impact EU-journalists´ news coverage.

In sum, the established network is an integral factor for the sourcing of information for Europeanized EU-journalists due to recognized impediments of the Commission and the Council as they lack transparency. Moreover, a correlation between the degree to which EU-journalists are Europeanized and the intensity of collaboration with a network was generally identified despite J23, who refrained from networking.

6. The effects of European Union journalists´ exposure to Europeanization for their profession

It is now possible to assess the validity of the established hypotheses. Hence, the relation between EU journalists' exposure to Europeanization and their degree of detachment from the national audience (vertical Europeanisation) on the one hand and quality of their information network (horizontal Europeanisation) on the other hand is discussed.

H1: The more EU-journalists are exposed to (vertical) Europeanization, the more detached from the national audience they become.

Most of the interviewed EU-journalists experience daily collaboration with the national editors, and this anchor to their national attachment affects their news coverage regardless of their exposure to Europeanization. For instance, 20 EU-journalists of all three levels of Europeanization noted the relevance of their daily editors' meetings for topic consultations while their expertise is recognized. Another two EU-journalists below the Europeanized average perceive themselves as solely service providers, which means the editor selects the topics. The remaining EU-journalists of average Europeanization are privileged in their freedom of topic choice due to their great freedom to consider which topics are popular among the national audience.

All the interviewed EU-journalists prioritize the national audience's interest in the news coverage by covering topics with a domestic impact and those driven by national debate. Nine EU-journalists, representing all distinct degrees of Europeanization, provided examples of popular topics such as crises, scandals, and foreign affairs coverage with national relevance that ultimately ensure the interest of the national audience. Given that the interviewed EU-journalists demonstrated a unified stand regarding the harmony of personal preferences of topics and the interest of the national audience, the extent to which they are Europeanized is insignificant. Since the effect of EU-journalists' Europeanization on the selection of topics for news coverage is insignificant and does not constitute detachment from the national audience, this hypothesis is not proven.

Due to the anchor function of the national editors as well as the EU-journalists' capability in identifying topics relevant to the national audience, an attachment to them is in turn secured. Since EU news coverage is subject to the interests of the national audience, a Europeanized public sphere is developing given the fact that EU-journalists fulfill their communication role by bridging the national and EU levels (Adam, 2012, p. 30). Therefore, Europeanized EU-journalists' coverage focuses on EU decisions (p. 9). EU-journalists thus have been credited with being a central figure of an emerged European public sphere (Gerhards, 1993).

H2: The more EU-journalists are exposed to (horizontal) Europeanization, the better their quality information network will be.

To identify a correlation between the effect of EU-journalists´ exposure to Europeanization and their quality of information network, the precondition of any level of Europeanization must be met since the physical presence in Brussels is a condition to develop a network mentioned by all the interviewed EU-journalists. A high-quality information network defines the exclusiveness of information because of lacking transparency among official sources. Eleven EU-journalists who have been exposed to the effect to Europeanization at an above average level, identified *time and trust* as essential factors to increasingly receive exclusive materials. Due to the development of trust over time, the length of time spent in Brussels influences the degree of a high-quality information network.

Given the importance of the triangulation of sources through high-quality information networks because of a lacking exclusive information from EU institutions, all EU-journalists are dependent on their quality information network. Since most EU-journalists are aware of the information impediments of the

Commission and the Council, more attention is given, and effort made to manage a high-quality information network. Hence, it is relevant to fill the information gaps from the EU institutions for complete news coverage.

The considerable importance of physical presence in Brussels to establish a network that grows in terms of quality over time, the length of time spent working in Brussels as well as the physical location are all determinants of the degree of a quality information network. We can therefore infer that the more EU-journalists are exposed to Europeanization, the better their quality information network will be; thus, this hypothesis is proven. Regardless of the extent of their Europeanization, the critical reflection among EU-journalists on the information provided by EU institutions furthermore affects the idea of the quality information network. The average EU-journalist confirms the importance of triangulation of sources through a developed quality information network by pursuing an accountability enhancing role.

7.   Conclusion

This paper examines the effect of EU-journalists' exposure to Europeanization through the indicators of detachment from the national audience and the quality information network. Both concepts relate to journalists ability to hold the national government accountable. To conduct this analysis, I completed interviews with EU-journalists and derived two hypotheses based on the concept of Europeanization and its public sphere. The analysis reveals that good news coverage is subject to exclusive information through a high-quality information network. It results from EU institutions' lack of transparency regarding objectivity and exclusiveness of information that poses impediments to reporting. Therefore, EU-journalists are dependent on establishing quality information networks to receive exclusive information such as on developments of negotiations by national ministers. It then allows EU-journalists to uncover information and inform the national audience. The analysis shows that these networks are time consuming due to the necessity of establishing trustworthiness with the persons within this network, which sets the groundwork for receiving exclusive information. Since the length of stay in Brussels thus affects the quality information network, H2 is proven.

The analysis furthermore illuminates EU-journalists' relation to the national audience. To conduct good EU news coverage, an EU-journalist must be somewhat embedded in the national system by fulfilling a bridging role through transnational communication and by selecting topics relevant to the national audience. The analysis reveals that EU-journalists are in daily collaboration with national editors regardless of the extent to which they are Europeanized and their professional autonomy in Brussels is granted. Thus, one can assume that EU-journalists are sufficiently embedded without losing their independence. Since EU-journalists strongly consider the interest of the national audience in terms of topic selection, the analysis furthermore discloses the emerging Europeanized public sphere, thus H1 is not proven.

Significantly, for EU-journalists to fulfil their transnational communication and democratic role, freedom of the press is secured since none of the EU-journalists have experienced any censorship. It is worth highlighting that a slight distinction between Italians and German EU -journalists appeared in the research. While German EU-journalists experience an internal control check, Italians often receive calls from Politicians´ criticizing published coverage. This does not hinder them from providing good news coverage, but it makes it more exhausting and needs to be considered for the sake of accuracy in terms of reporting. One can conclude that the degree to which EU-journalists are exposed to Europeanization

influences their quality information network to receive the additional information they need to hold their national government accountable. Additionally, the research revealed that the correlation between the exposure to Europeanization and quality information network is essential to sufficiently inform the citizens and to bridge the national and EU level. Lastly, the research suggests that the procedure to build this quality information network is simultaneous across distinct EU-journalists´ nationalities given the precondition of an exposure to Europeanization and the significance to be physically in Brussels. This phenomenon thus suggests external validity and an incentive of generalization among EU-journalists of other Member States to fulfill an accountability enhancing role.

Although the analysis identified a correlation between the duration of their stay in Brussels and the quality information network by EU-journalists above the average, the thesis acknowledges the limitation that trust is difficult to measure as it is subject to individual experiences. This complicates the identification of a recommended minimum stay for journalists. Lastly, this research is subject to limitations regarding the correlation between critical reporting and receiving less exclusive information from informal sources. Although some EU-journalists have indicated to have experienced it at press conferences, it is not sufficient to draw a generalized conclusion, thus it requires more research. It would be interesting to consider a wider sample of EU- journalists as well as of other countries to analyze if and how they proceed with critical information distinctively.

Appendix

Appendix A:

Table 1: Italian EU- journalists

Italian EU-journalists	Start Brussels	Occupation field
J1	2011	Internet
J2	2016	News Agencies
J3	2007	Newspapers and Magazines
J4	2016	Internet
J5	2016	TV networks
J6	2016	Newspapers and Magazines
J7	2016	News Agency
J8	1985	Newspapers and Magazines
J9	2009	Freelancer
J10	2011	News Agency
J11	2011	News Agency
J12	2018	News Agency
J13	2001	News Agency
J14	2018	Internet
J15	2017	Freelancer

Table 2: German EU-journalists

German EU- journalists	Start Brussels	Occupation field
J16	2019	Newspaper
J17	2019	Newspaper
J18	2009	Newspaper
J19	2020	Newspaper
J20	2020	Radio
J21	2016	Newspaper
J22	2017	Radio
J23	2008	Freelancer
J24	2015	Newspaper
J25	2019	Radio
J26	2018	Newspaper

Appendix B: Europeanization measurement of EU-journalists

Europeanization measurement				
EU-journalist	Physical presence Brussels	Length of working as an EU-journalist (in years)	Focus on EU/Benelux/national coverage	Degree Europeanized (level 1-3)
J1	yes	10	EU	3
J2	yes	5	EU, NATO, national	2
J3	yes	14	EU	3
J4	partly	5	EU	2
J5	yes	5	EU, Benelux	2
J6	yes	5	EU, Benelux	2
J7	yes	5	EU	3
J8	partly	35 (3 y break)	EU	2
J9	yes	12	EU	3
J10	yes	10	EU	3
J11	yes	10	EU	3
J12	yes	3	EU	2
J13	yes	20	EU	3
J14	yes	3	EU	2
J15	yes	4	EU	2
J16	yes	2	EU, NATO, Benelux	2
J17	yes	2	EU	2
J18	yes	12	EU, NATO, Benelux	2
J19	yes	1	EU	1
J20	yes	1	EU, regional	1
J21	yes	5	EU	3
J22	yes	4	EU	2
J23	yes	13	EU/regional	2
J24	yes	6	EU	3
J25	yes	2	EU, Benelux	1
J26	yes	3	EU, NATO	2

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