

Communicating the EU in Europhile and Eurosceptic Spaces:
An Examination of European Parliament Information Offices in
the Republic of Ireland and Greece

by

Angelos Bakoulas

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate and
Postdoctoral Affairs in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Political Science

Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario

© 2019

Angelos Bakoulas

Abstract

This thesis examines the communication strategies of the European Parliament (EP) in member states through its information offices in EU capitals. To address the gap between public perceptions of the EP as a weak body and its real impact in EU decision-making, the ways in which it communicates itself to citizens through its offices is investigated. This is combined with an analysis of journalists' coverage of the EP and their cooperation with EP information offices. This examination is based on qualitative interviews with EP officials and journalists from Greece and Ireland. Despite the shared experiences of the two countries during the Eurozone crisis, they have diverged significantly socio-politically and in their attitudes to the EU. This thesis concludes that even though the mission of the EP is expressed quite similarly across both states a lot more specification and political will is necessary for an effective communication strategy to be established.

Acknowledgements

This thesis, and my Master of Arts as a whole, was only possible through the support of the faculty and staff of the Department of Political Science, as well as the Institute of European, Russian and Eurasian Studies. I particularly want to thank Prof. Achim Hurrelmann for his continuous and invaluable support this past year.

This research also only happened because of the EU Travel Grant provided by the Centre for European Studies at Carleton University. This generous funding facilitated my travel to Athens and Dublin and was in turn vital in producing the work presented here.

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|-----|
| Abstract..... | ii |
| Acknowledgements..... | iii |
| Table of Contents..... | iv |
| Introduction..... | 1 |
| Chapter One - Communicating the European Parliament: Elections Do Not Happen in a Vacuum..... | 6 |
| Chapter Two –Research Methodology | 26 |
| Chapter Three – Apathy or Scepticism? European Parliament Reporting Within the Irish and Greek Contexts..... | 33 |
| Chapter Four – Representing the EU from National Perspectives: “All Politics Is Local” | 56 |
| Chapter Five – “You Could Have a Whole News Bulletin Only on the EU, But Who Would that Interest?” | 70 |
| Chapter Six – Covering News and Personalities or Educating Audiences?..... | 84 |
| Conclusions..... | 95 |
| Bibliography | 101 |
| List of Interviews | 108 |

Introduction

Supranational governance stemmed from extreme wars and divisions and, facilitated by technology and globalisation, developed into vast networks. The European Union is possibly the biggest success yet in developing community and cooperation across nation states. Yet, the body is often accused of failing to communicate with its populations and of limiting their control over governance. As noted by Simon Hix (2008), “what is missing [from the EU] is a more open debate about the emerging politics inside the Brussels beltway and clearer connections between this politics and citizens’ views” (p. 5). Hix identifies a lack of engagement from member state populations with EU politics, personalities and processes. Such phenomena can be represented by the concepts of the ‘democratic deficit’ and the ‘communication deficit’ that have been identified by Marquand (1979), Weiler, Haltern & Mayer (1995) and a number of other academics (Meyer, 1999; Anderson & McLeod, 2004; Follesdal & Hix, 2006; Walter, 2015a) as key problems of the EU and, even more so, of its only directly elected body, the European Parliament (EP).

In fact, the EP is often seen as both the cause and the solution to such deficits because of its democratic and directly elected character. The Parliament has long been perceived as powerless and unimportant by the populations it represents (Meyer, 1999). Even though it has developed an increasingly powerful role in decision-making, the low turnout in EP elections and the national lens that consistently dominates EP politics seem to point to a lack of engagement from the public (Hix & Marsh, 2007; Franklin & Hobolt, 2011; Hobolt, 2012). Most importantly, possible reasons for abstinence in elections have to do primarily with a perceived lack of importance of individual votes in such elections and, secondarily, with several factors linked to perceptions of the Parliament as

inefficient, overly complex, or not communicated enough to citizens (European Parliament, 2018a).

Through such observations on engagement in elections and beyond, the EP has recognized the weakness of its connection to the citizens as a problem and has attempted to address this through a variety of strategies. One core strategy has been the establishment of EP information offices. Laursen & Valentini (2014) specifically argue that it was the rejection of the Maastricht Treaty through national referenda in the 1990s that caused the EP and the Union as a whole to focus on external communications and particularly on targeting their information distribution to local contexts, using information offices in EU member states as a vehicle to do so.

Those offices, also known as EP liaison offices, exist across capitals and other major cities of the European Union and coordinate local events, maintain communication pathways with national bodies and institutions, and manage MEPs and EP elections in each state (Directorate for Information Offices, 2012). Beyond those practical objectives, the Directorate for Information Offices (2012) of the European Parliament declares that the mission of its offices is to bring the EP “closer to European citizens by informing and entering into dialogue with them” (p. 5). Specifically, the Directorate (2012) highlights that while a common strategy exists from the Brussels office, information office activities are “adapted and tailor-made to the national and regional context in their respective Member States” (p. 5). Domestic news outlets have been considered to nationalise all stories, even when these are exclusively related to EU-level actors (Clement, 2015). That’s why information offices can facilitate coverage of the EU level by connecting journalists to European actors and bodies, thus balancing out the privileged access that national institutions have to journalists and the media simply due to geographical

proximity and familiarity of journalists with that context (Laursen & Valentini, 2014; Boomgaarden et al., 2013).

These liaison offices could then, at least theoretically, have direct influence upon the contrasts between the lack of visibility of the Parliament. Not only do they act as physical manifestations of this supranational body as close as possible to the citizens it is meant to represent, they also have the capacity to make the EP local and its news relevant and appealing for the media, without being framed solely within each national context. If then the EU's 'communication deficit' is researched through its representative body, the EP liaison offices themselves would be the first and main point of concern in analysing the European Parliament's strategies in dealing with such issues and their effectiveness.

So far, there is little research that has been done specifically on EP liaison offices. Extensive literature may indeed exist on Euroscepticism and EU reforms in the EP and beyond, yet there is very limited research on the ways in which citizens are reached by the Parliament, either through popular media or directly, and even when that topic is explored it often revolves solely around campaigning for EP elections. Particularly since the emergence of social media in campaigning, academic interest has concentrated almost fully around EP elections instead of daily operations. Anderson's & McLeod's (2004) article is one of the few detailed examinations of, specifically, EP information offices in different states where the authors interviewed press officers and other officials in those offices as well as central strategists in Brussels. They argue that, when they conducted the interviews in the early 2000s, information offices were severely understaffed and lacking organisation or a concrete plan of action, even in the case of the central Brussels office.

In addition, Anderson & McLeod (2004) underline the need to concentrate resources and policy interests to communications including the centralised, yet locally-tailored, management of local offices in the capitals of the EU and beyond. At the same time, this research did lack contextual focus since it was a broad overview of EP information office operations instead of a detailed analysis of the place of those offices in the special background of each state and, it is also a relatively older study which predated both key reforms across EP operations as well as the aftermaths of EU enlargement, the late 2000s financial crisis and the bailout programs that followed it. Media strategies should then be researched - not through social platforms but through the still dominant popular media, television and the press, and, during the Parliament's regular periods of operation instead of during election season – in order to cover this gap in literature and raise possible conclusions on the role of communication in influencing citizens' interest, attitudes, and general approach towards the EU.

Based then on this phenomenon, this thesis concentrates on the ways in which the European Parliament is attempting to communicate with the European public through its information offices and the degree in which it has been able to promote its activities and growing influence. Specifically, this thesis will attempt to answer the question “How is the European Parliament trying to inform the European public of its growing influence, and how successful/effective have these attempts been?”. By narrowing down the theme of the European Union's lack of communication to that of its directly elected body, the European Parliament, and by then focusing in on the actions of communication officials of that body in individual member states, this thesis can examine whether the delegation of communications to local offices works, and, if so, why.

Further, the information offices of two EU member states, with almost polar opposite attitudes towards the European Union, and the relationships of those offices with local media and journalists will be utilised to pursue this topic. Specifically, the countries that are examined in this project are the Republic of Ireland and Greece. This is because both countries had controversial relationships with the EU over loans granted during the financial crisis, as both states were amongst the worst hit economies in the Union. However, both socio-politically and economically, the two EU member states have had completely different experiences both in terms of cooperation with the EU over financial measures, as well as development and recovery from the financial crisis which have also produced two completely different spaces with regard to attitudes to the EU.

By examining in depth the operations of the Athens and Dublin information offices and of journalists in the two capitals, there will be an extensive analysis on the comparison of the two contexts, while also uncovering the degree of independence or centralisation in those structures and their impact upon the themes and concepts mentioned. The examination of central EU strategy and its targeting to local contexts, along with an analysis of journalistic practices across Greece and Ireland in turn aims to produce empirical evidence to cover the identified gaps in literature. This research then seeks to establish a better understanding of the ways in which information, through institutional tools and the media, can differ between EU states and the implications this could have on the perceptions of the EP. Acknowledging the power of populist leaders in Europe and beyond, this research can inform the discussion on reforming international governance to better approach and incorporate in politics those populations that feel excluded from decision-making.

Chapter One - Communicating the European Parliament: Elections Do Not Happen in a Vacuum

The relationship between the media, or even citizens directly, and the institutions of the European Union is certainly not a novel topic in academic research. The democratic and communication ‘deficits’ of the EU and its Parliament, as well as the development of a European Public Sphere (EPS) and the role of national media within it, have all been analysed in a variety of ways. Yet, as this chapter will demonstrate, such research often overly concentrates on the election processes for the Members of the European Parliament. Nevertheless, elections do not happen in a vacuum and, as will be shown through this chapter and the thesis as a whole, the coverage of the European Parliament by national media and the popular attitudes on the EP during routine periods can be even more crucial than those within election cycles, where the plethora of interests and dynamics at play can greatly skew research outcomes.

Accordingly, in order to establish the context that this research is based on, and the gaps that it is aiming to fill, four major themes will be examined here: how the concept of an EPS has been imagined, the ways in which the European Parliament has contributed to the creation of an EPS; how EU communications as a whole influence that same process, and; what role journalists could play for the European Union and its communicative aims. This will in turn lead to the research questions and categories that guide this research, highlighting, through this chapter, the role that the established concepts of the European Public Sphere could play when analysing EP information offices and, in particular, their effectiveness in the local contexts they inhabit.

Building the European Public Sphere

The EPS is a primarily theoretical concept which, as will be argued here, appears to be anchored in a replication of national spheres and their role in domestic politics, supranationally and specifically across the European Union. In response to criticisms on the lack of accountability of the European institutions and even beyond that, the need for a common forum of news analysis and debates across EU member states has often been highlighted (Marquand, 1979; Follesdal & Hix, 2006; Weiler, Haltern & Mayer, 1995; Statham, 2008; Preston, 2009; Walter, 2015b). This European Public Sphere could arise through the actions of various actors and in several different forms, but most scenarios do involve some form of the “Europeanisation of the national public spheres” (Brüggemann, 2005, p. 58). For Brüggemann (2005), such a process would involve moving national media, civil society organisations, possibly political parties, and any other actor involved in public fora domestically, to a pan-European context where there would be the same debates on issues, the same pressure groups towards legislature, and the same media and journalists ensuring political accountability of decision-making.

Walter (2015b) argues that an EPS would involve all those elements, yet she also highlights the fact that for an EPS to take effect not all of those actors need to get involved at the European level immediately, but in stages. She also underlines that any resulting public sphere throughout the EU could have several different forms, ranging from a liberal one where all social interests are proportionally represented, to a participatory public sphere which would maximise every citizen’s involvement, without at the same time involving them at every aspect of decision-making. Right now, Walter (2015b) considers, there is a very limited form of an EPS, which is nothing more than an EU civil society, where non-profits and pressure groups are approaching EU decision-

makers to push their agendas across the Union. For a real EPS to exist however, this author claims that consistent citizen contribution to democratic governance at the EU level is necessary to accompany any EU civil society elements.

For that to be achieved, several authors have argued that the media have a significant responsibility to try connecting national public spheres and thus bring their audiences into a European level of newscasting, instead of seeing every issue solely through a national lens (Follesdal & Hix, 2006; Weiler, Haltern & Mayer, 1995; Statham, 2008; Preston, 2009; Walter, 2015b). Specifically, with regard to news coverage, De Vreese et al. (2006) claim that “a European public sphere should reflect national media reporting on the same topic using common sources, including EU sources and sources from other EU countries” (p. 479). While this may appear as something that could be initiated by national media themselves, unless the sociopolitical context and demand from the audience all point towards such an approach to news coverage, as the interviews analysed in this thesis will show, the familiarity of populations with the domestic public sphere will usually surpass any initiative to expand towards pan-European media.

In fact, several conditions have been identified as necessary when examining the development of an EPS. Dutceac Segesten & Bossetta (2017) consider the “Europeanization of national public spheres” (p. 14) as dependent upon the prominence of the EU, the presence of European actors, and the discussion of truly EU issues and topics within local campaigns and electoral narratives. Yet, as with most research on EP communications in general, a lot of the literature on the development of an EPS is anchored in elections. Accordingly, these concepts and conditions of an EPS established here should be examined with regard to the research data of this thesis. Nevertheless, research on possible contribution of the EP to an EPS should first be analysed.

The European Parliament as the foundation of the EPS

In this context, the European Parliament's system of direct elections of citizen representatives could be seen as the first step in raising issues and public debates from the national public sphere to the European one. Through elections both European publics and media are called to participate in a pan-European political process of covering campaigns, evaluating candidates, and forming the agenda of the legislature of the EU. That is why the ideal and actual forms of EP elections across the European Union should now be discussed in order to evaluate their contribution to a European Public Sphere, as well as other ways in which the EP can contribute to this concept, if elections have a limited effect on the process.

Hix & Marsh (2011) envision a truly 'European' election as one where citizens are called to make decisions on shared "current policy concerns in similar ways" (p. 12), instead of one where their decisions are informed simply by their attitudes towards the EU. Nevertheless, EP elections are so dependent on the national systems that using them to create a European Public Sphere would never be an effective process unless clear pan-European issues and actors arise across member states. Reif and Schmitt (1980) discussed the European Parliament election's status as 'second-order', highlighting the national focus of election campaigns and coverage. They specifically claimed that local or national events were consistently more influential than EU-wide developments, thus underlying the crucial influence of national governments in shaping attitudes toward the EU during the only regularly scheduled directly democratic process of the Union, its parliamentary elections.

European Parliament elections are in fact often used to express discontent with a national government and frustration with the state's political scene and elites (Teperoglou, 2010). This is why Hix & Marsh (2007) described EP elections as "mid-term contests in the battle to win national government office" (p. 495). Further, even in expressing frustration, EP elections suffer limitations. Visibility, Giebler et al (2016) argue, "has an indirect effect in favour of staying loyal to government parties in the EP elections" (p. 123) due to the increased proximity of EU issues to the national government and, accordingly, its higher prominence in EP elections.

Yet the national political scene does not only dominate the election debates to further their own national agenda, since the election results in the EP can also have significant influence over national actors and governments themselves. According to Marsh (1998), national parties actually aim to frame and maintain these elections as secondary to national ones because they see them as a platform to campaign for a national advantage without risking actual offices or power in state institutions. Hence, these arguments do point towards the strong locality of EU politics even when elections are directly related to EU institutions and positions of power. They can also hint at the control of national political parties within EU politics which changes both the purpose and the result of votes on new MEPs. Nevertheless, while the ways in which citizens vote on EP elections and the prevalence of local politics within them are important findings, examining the possible influence that governing parties can have on European Parliament communications during routine periods can point towards a more long-term development of attitudes and perceptions towards the European Union institutions.

Even beyond the ways in which national politics can interact with EU ones, EP elections are 'second-order' because of their very characteristics. Michailidou (2012)

claims that the challenges that EU parliamentary elections can pose in the Union's politics are related to low turnouts and limited media attention, but they could also be linked to citizens' doubts about "the very legitimacy of the EU polity" (p. 368). If the very institutions that are electing representatives and the power and legitimacy of those representatives are questioned in a local, national, or European context there is no way for such electoral contests to be classified as important by voters or the media. Her argument could be in turn expanded to the deeper structural causes of the 'second-order' nature of European Union-level politics.

This, Schmitt & Teperoglou (2015) argue, can be demonstrated by the very fact that, during the financial crisis and amongst the rising Euroscepticism in Southern Europe, voters expressed their frustration by voting against the governing parties instead of MEPs who supported their opinions about the role of the EU in the late-2000s crisis. In fact, Southern Europe has been the focus of several studies all concluding that, despite the direct involvement of the EU in domestic affairs, voters still interact with EP elections through a national lens (Lavdas, Kotroyannos & Tzagkarakis, 2017; Freire et al., 2014; Fracasso, Grassano & Vittucci Marzetti, 2014). Even when referenda relating to the EU institutions have been called, like between 2015 and 2016 in Greece and the UK, those votes were driven by national actors and questioned solely how those bodies should behave in response to the EU, not what the public would like to express towards the European institutions involved (Casanas Adam, Kagiarios & Tierney, 2018).

Thus, it seems that both domestic politics and the lack of faith or belief in the EU structures from publics work together to maintain the 'second-order' status of EP elections. Yet, despite the clearly debatable status of EP elections for the European Public Spheres, little else has been uncovered by existing research on how the Parliament could

further influence that process. Even Anderson's & McLeod's (2004) research on EP information offices does not seem to relate those initiatives to public sphere process, instead focusing on these offices as, unorganised, understaffed and uncoordinated, news distributors and image curators for the body. At the same time, since few other EP initiatives are apparent, what has been done by the body to change the nature of EP elections should be examined.

Hence, the most notable initiative of the European Union to increase the significance of EP elections, the Spitzenkandidaten process, and its actual impact on the secondary nature of electing MEPs to voting for national MPs and government officials as evaluated by literature should now be analysed. This process, also known as list-leading candidates, was established in 2014 to elect the President of the Commission based on candidates put forward by EP political groups in order to increase the European Union's, and especially the Commission's, legitimacy through the personalisation and politicisation of the presidency campaigns (Nulty et al., 2016). This was perceived as a clear demonstration of how the Union was trying to tackle accusations of its 'deficits', yet its success has been questioned, particularly within the national contexts of member states.

For instance, Quinlan & Okolikj (2016) argue that in Ireland the Spitzenkandidaten model did not attract considerable attention despite the fact that the European People's Party selected now Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker as its candidate at its 2014 Elections Congress in Dublin, and that three candidates also visited Ireland during the campaign. In fact, as will be discussed in the next chapters, the 2014 elections in Ireland were expected to be of more interest and significance than previous ones because of the 2010 EU-International Monetary Fund (IMF) bailout. Yet, neither the

Spitzenkandidaten process, nor the election of local MEPs received more coverage in 2014 than the media coverage of the previous EP elections (Quinlan & Okolikj, 2016). This could then be linked to the strength of the 'second-order elections' model both in the Irish context and beyond.

Nevertheless, the election of the Commission Presidency through the Parliamentary political groups is not uniformly seen as unimportant or failed. According to Schmitt & Teperoglou (2015), in Greece, the Spitzenkandidaten aspect of the election received considerable coverage and attention and voters seemed more involved because of it. Yet, these authors also highlight that the Greek EP election campaign was still anchored on national politics and, in fact, even the Commission Presidency race was covered mostly with regard to the candidacy of Alexis Tsipras, now Greek Prime Minister, for the Party of the European Left (EP). So, even in this case where the media began to give more attention to EP concepts as a whole, second-order characteristics very much remained with the national personalities both driving and controlling electoral coverage. The question then extends beyond how EP elections can increase voter involvement to how citizens, as media consumers as well as voters, can focus their attention on the European level rather than the national one.

Finally, one aspect of EP activity which could relate to the EPS could be the use of social media. The European Parliament is considered by Andreica (2014) as using social media to communicate its importance in EU governance effectively since, even though it lacks online visitors compared to the other institutions, its online presence is well produced and MEPs can contribute to its visibility even without raising its visitor numbers.

Yet, even on social media, a lot of attention has been focused in recent years on the potential of those platforms during EP election cycles which is mostly described as “a unique chance for the EP and the 750 MEPs to connect and contact the citizen” (Pocovincu et al., 2013, p. 346). For Vesnic – Alujenic (2013), social media and online platforms overall can provide a unique opportunity to increase voter engagement and without any risks of damaging it. She further claims that social media can even enhance pan-European activism and contribute to the development of an EPS which aims to (or could in turn) change the status of EP elections and of the body itself.

Nevertheless, these claims have been questioned in various ways. Gausis (2017) considers that the impact of EU institutional profiles online is not particularly significant because of the lack of two-way communications in those platforms which thus hinders the possible development of civic engagement. Furthermore, both the reach and credibility of institutions on social media could be questioned, yet, as with most studies on the EP, little research exists on social media beyond electoral campaigns of MEPs. Consequently, the communication strategies of the EU as whole will be examined to establish the context within which the European Parliament operates, and to examine whether communication strategies from across the EU institutions could inform the analysis of liaison offices and their structures, mission, and operations in any way.

Communicating the EU beyond the European Parliament elections

EU communications strategies have been numerous and significantly uncoordinated, however in recent years more attention has been paid to cohesion and cross-institutional, as well as cross-national, coordination on how citizens are approached. Generally, communicating policies has been a priority for the European

Communities and later the European Union due to their expectations that the awareness over communication policies and the operations of the EU overall can provide legitimacy and public support for integration and the institutions of the Union (Horga & Landuit, 2013). But the institutional elements as structured by the EU to achieve this goals should be examined in detail.

At the institutional level, the Directorate General for Communication of the current European Commission (EC) (2016) laid out its goals in the *Strategic Plan 2016-2020*. In this document it is stated that “DG COMM, as a corporate communication service, brings Europe closer to its citizens”, with the motto “Listen – Advise – Engage” (European Commission, 2016, p. 3). This strategy also points to external factors which can impact its implementation, yet this is done in vague terms without identifying any particular issue that needs to be addressed. The need for the Commission to prioritise and professionalise such policies, as well as measure their performance, is also highlighted. These claims are then used to introduce a broad approach towards reaching national publics as directly as possible through, for instance, the local bodies of the European Commission and their regional events in order to raise the Commission visibility across member states. Further, the executive, corporate, and communication service roles of the DG COMM are underlined to justify delegation, within this body, of the production of high quality, coherent, and clear information for the European publics.

With regard to the fluidity and vagueness of the Commission’s communicative plans, Michailidou (2010) notes that this could be attributed to the institution’s desire not to be perceived as upstaging the other EU institutions, prominent political actors, or actors and bodies from national political systems. Accordingly, the European Commission instead chooses to concentrate on dialogue with citizens and in making

information accessible to the public, without implementing a more concrete and targeted approach to change its image. Bee & Bello (2009) also add that the European Commission concentrates on finding its place in multi-level governance between the other EU bodies, and national and regional member state actors to bring decision-making close to the citizens. Yet, both of these claims are based on assumptions about the aims and internal approaches of the Commission which, once again, are far from clear. In turn, what should be examined to better place the European Commission, and the whole EU's, communication strategies is how they developed historically in the years of the European Communities and the move towards the establishment of the institutions, further integration and the Union's expansion.

Historically, the European Union has been steadily building a strategy and perspective towards the how and the why in communicating itself and any developments within its institutions with the citizens of its member states. Barbu, Barbu & Negulescu (2016) present an overview of the communications development from the European Union and its predecessors, arguing that strategies of outreach were largely unilateral in the 1960s and only during the 1980s did bilateral communication and dialogue reach such strategies within European institutions. They attribute this to the European Economic Community's (EEC) desire to build a widespread, and most importantly positive, image across Europe prior to expanding beyond economic integration and reaching the level of cooperation that exists in the EU today. This is also echoed by Nesti (2010) and Terra (2010) who both claim that, even when EU communication strategies were not clearly defined, the broader sentiment of developing identification and loyalty among its citizens, was established and largely unchallenged in how the Union theoretically defined itself.

Even before this bilateral shift however, as Harrison & Pukallus (2015) point out, the European Community attempted to establish connections with citizens in two ways. Throughout the 1950s the media was used to reach the general public, ensuring that all information about the Community was straightforward and broadly accessible, while also attempting to directly reach national publics through, particularly, offices in member states, which eventually evolved to the institution-specific liaison offices examined in this thesis. Yet, seeing the limits in understanding and evaluating the impacts of the media as tools of the EU, from 1963 communication strategies focused on opinion leaders within member states, where anyone with direct access to the public of their country and associated with or interested in the European Community, like teachers and academics, were used as a multiplier of the previous passive and direct communication methods. Since then, the domination of national developments and actors in any political communication across EU member states has been seen as the main barrier to tackle through communication, in order to reach the vague mission outlined by DG COMM.

At the same time, as the separate sections on EP and EU communications showed, as well as the analysis on how these strategies developed over time, there is a significant lack of consistency in how the European institutions reach citizens. Brüggemann (2010) argues that the lack of a defined information policy which is consistently implemented across the EU bodies is what has stopped the furthering of a European Public Sphere, even while it was declared as an EU mission. With regard to the different ways in which the EU has tried to reach citizens he adds that “the only way to enhance the effectiveness of public relations seems to be to focus on media relations” (Brüggemann, 2010, p. 86). For Brüggemann (2010), only the media can multiply micro-dialogues with few citizens into topics and conversations that reach the wider European public, and declaring that the

EU can directly converse with citizens is delusionary if these conversations do not reach a broader audience and do not directly impact decision-making.

Such points are illustrated by research on specific initiatives of the EU related to how it communicates itself and which should now be presented to identify the specific issues that could arise from the Union's approach. One example would be the EU's turn to a strong social media presence coupled with marketing-type thinking within media campaigns in a wide effort to change the EU's image and connect it to its citizens more in the form of a brand than a set of political institutions (Podkalicka & Shore 2010). However, as with the presence of the EP in social media, the effectiveness of those tools is questionable and will largely depend on several variables which cannot necessarily be controlled by the institutions.

Another case which lies more in the hands of the EU bodies is that of the Europe Direct centres, which Valentini (2010) has researched and points to a key issue with their development. As with many European communicative initiatives on building direct dialogue the author sees a lack of grounded guidelines that the activities of those centres can be based upon. The Europe Direct centres were established to build relationships with national civil society organisations to collect input and citizen's participation on issues at the EU level which concern those local civil society organisations (Valentini 2010). However, this lack of guidelines caused a lack of citizens' participation across publics in member states since any such participation did not have a way to end up in EU political discussion (Valentini 2010; Bee 2010). Then, in order for any sort of communication initiative to be effective, no matter how general or specialised it is, it needs to be beneficial for the citizen to participate in it, in order to give real value to any such EU initiative.

The Broadband Multimedia Information Service for national parliaments of EU states and Europe by Satellite are two additional examples of communications platforms from the EU established to more easily reach national media and political bodies. On the one hand, the former aimed to allow Parliaments across Europe to directly reach the EU bodies, bypassing, in a way, national governments and promoting the concept of national parliaments and the EP completing each other legislatively and politically, instead of competing for control which would be extremely problematic for the EU (Morisse, Cortes & Luling, 1999). On the other hand, Europe by Satellite aims to “give a relatively objective look at the events reported” (Wilke & Zobel, 2010, p. 184) by providing journalists with as much audiovisual material and reporting information as possible directly. Nevertheless, beyond these initiatives operating centrally from the Union, regional activities within the member states are another element of communication that the EU focuses on. Specifically, Schlesinger (1999) notes that this goal further pushes the EU to build a relationship with regional media and to emphasise its local offices.

Yet, as Podkalicka & Shore (2010) point out, all of these new tools and approaches to reaching the European publics will probably fail, as they already have to an extent. These authors identify the same past flawed assumptions about EU citizens that skepticism is just a result of misinformation or insufficient knowledge and that this can be ‘cured’ by packaging the European Union and selling it as a brand to a huge set of guaranteed happy and loyal customers. In fact, this broader trend of communication at the EU level presented through these initiatives could point to the basis behind the EP information offices, and their mission of bringing the EU closer to citizens. From traditional means of political marketing to new tools, these claims have been maintained and their impact upon the effectiveness and success of information offices will be

discussed through the analysis of the research that will follow. What should, nevertheless, first be discussed, is the role of journalists and the media in the development of an EPS.

Second-Order Reporting: Can low interest in EP elections impose a second-order classification on the institution as a whole?

In the context then of the creation of a European Public Sphere and the ways in which the European Union can contribute to it, literature often highlights the importance of the media for the success of such strategies. Brüggemann (2005; 2010) notes that the development of an EPS is mainly related to the media and journalists since, as the efforts of the EU to constitutionalise and parliamentarise itself show, political initiatives from beyond the domestic level cannot sufficiently impact national public spheres. While the author does allow for the possibility that the European Parliament can help this process, he considers national media as a vital component for such initiatives to be successful.

As Cushion & Thomas (2015) argue, media and especially public service broadcasters are crucial in keeping citizens informed and that's why the "clear market deficit of second order elections news coverage" (p. 181), especially from private broadcasters, is extremely problematic. In fact, even within EP elections reporting, differences between member states show that the only shared point of reference in news is discussions on voter apathy and limited turnout on election day (De Vreese, 2003). In fact, Laursen & Valentini (2014) note that the EU is aware of the value of the media for the creation of an EPS, citing the importance of press officers in the structures EP information offices as evidence of the ways in which relationships with journalists and the visibility of the Parliament in local newscasting are prioritised within EU, and specifically EP, communication strategies.

To what extent then are journalists and the media structures they operate within willing to embrace EU-level politics and to incorporate the EP in their work? For Lloyd & Marconi (2014), the attitudes of those professionals to EP news has completely transformed across all EU countries through the years of the financial crisis and the rising Euroscepticism associated with it. They specifically consider that, before the crisis, journalists perceived such news as boring for their audiences, while after they were quickly forced to expand their work to the EU-level and to acquire new skills for that purpose leading to a significant variety of attitudes towards EP news and approaches to reporting on them.

Yet, the lack of clarity of those everchanging and foreign-seeming structures that journalists are called to work with has led to a consistent treatment of all EU developments as national ones, only enhancing the view of domestic politics as inherently superior to any EU ones. Kleinnijenhuis & van Atteveldt (2016) note that this explosion of EU news and the forced adaptation of various aspects of national public spheres and of journalists' work to the news and developments of the Union's politics, and the Parliament more specifically, only hurt the attitudes towards the EU. This is also echoed by Guinaudeau & Palau (2016) who extend the point to claim that generally the pace of integration before the crisis built an environment within which the EU consistently was expanding to more and more aspects of day-to-day domestic political and media processes, thus creating an, in some ways forced, presence across different facets of the public sphere.

Regardless, it is not solely the overflow of news that can negatively impact journalism with regard to EU news reporting. Gleissner & de Vreese (2005), Michailidou (2015) and Clement (2015) all point to the importance of domestic factors for journalists

and how proximity in itself can give an unbeatable advantage to domestic actors in the fight for coverage and ownership of issues and debates. Moreover, Preston (2009) argues that journalists consistently find obstacles when engaging audiences in EU news without the use of a national lens. Neither the ease with which domestic news are produced nor how effortlessly they received support the attempts of newscasting professionals to maintain their EU-level focus on political issues.

How then can media professionals be approached by the EU institutions to influence how coverage is done over EU issues? An attempt to answer that question will occur in this thesis. Yet, what should be kept in mind in relation to this is that journalistic practices have been found to differ both between member states and between the different levels of specialisation on the EU that media positions can carry. Price (2010) argues that nationally-based journalists are vastly different from Brussels correspondents in their approach to EU coverage, even if they mostly deal with EU-level news. Both the culture that Brussels correspondents work within and the proximity of reporters who are based in their respective member states to the country's political actors and institutions allow for a Europhile and Eurosceptic tone in news production respectively because of which actors are more accessible for each journalist and what narrative, the central EU one or the national one, is closer to them daily.

Further, Sievert (2010) notes that each national journalistic context will contain its own national variables that will significantly influence the perceptions of both reporters and audiences towards the EU so, both during the analysis of media coverage and in the development of communications strategy to reach national media outlets, awareness of the cultural factors at play is crucial for the success of any EU and EP initiative. At the

same time, as Balcytiene & Vinciuniene (2010, p. 154) point out, “the media in Europe are nationally-based and due to their inner logic to target national audiences”, there could be a conflict with the ‘citizen-centred’ approach of EU communications more broadly. Hence, when examining the relationships between the EP strategies and journalists, the numerous peculiarities and issues that could arise in their cooperation over, to an extent, different norms should be noted.

Accordingly, even though the European Public Sphere has been discussed here mainly as a theoretical solution to ‘second-order’ elections, there are factors that can expand this concept into reporting itself, thus making the development of an EPS a lot more complex. This thesis aims to fill that particular gap by going beyond electoral research while also maintaining the framework established by such works. As will be demonstrated by interview data in the following chapters, journalists respond in a variety of ways to that relatively new aspect of their work and that fact can significantly affect the processes of the development of an EPS and of the formation of attitudes towards the institutions of the European Union.

Conclusions

Therefore, beyond the general research on EU communications and the studies examined on the different aspects of communicating the Union over the media and directly to citizens, the EP is a largely unexplored aspect of research. In fact, even institutionally there does not seem to be a clear and accessible communication strategy specifically from the Parliament, even though academic and public debates over its democratic and communicative deficits are active and visible. Further, despite the extensive range of case studies on different member states, various election periods, and

different aspects of those elections, the forms in which the European Parliament both approaches citizens itself and is portrayed by the media are not necessarily clear.

This is particularly true in relation to long-term processes of attitudes towards the EU being shaped and fluctuations in the availability and circulation of information on the European institutions and the issues that concern them. Specifically, while the studies examined did review coverage of the EP and especially how much attention efforts like the Spitzenkandidaten process received, voter apathy, the ‘second order elections’ model and low election turnouts dominated such research. Hence, the success of the media strategies of the European Parliament have to be reviewed as separate to the campaigns of MEPs, the member state processes around election period, and those time periods overall.

At the same time, a few elements that were pointed out from these studies should be carried over to the research conducted for this thesis. Firstly, the domestic context seems to consistently dominate over the European one both in politics and in how the media covers any and all EU issues and news. Secondly, a pan-European public sphere has often been cited as a good solution to this issue, yet research points to cross-national differences in reporting, instead of the consistency of both the content and the sources used to convey news across member states that such a sphere would require. Thirdly, factors like populist narratives, online news and social media, and the push towards more directly democratic processes in the Union, and particularly the Parliament, should be acknowledged as key variables to how the EP’s media strategies perform, without however the impact of each of those being necessarily clear.

Accordingly, the thesis will aim to examine the specifics of the operations of EP information offices outside of campaigns and elections, and how local journalists

perceive those offices and the European Parliament more broadly. Furthermore, the trends and phenomena around the EU's possible deficits in democratic processes and communication and its efforts to resolve those, as well as rising Eurosceptic presence in the Parliament will also be considered, yet beyond solely electoral results. These concepts however will be combined with the discussed issues around the work of journalists and the role that such phenomena can have in the other aspects of this research project.

Specifically, as this discussion showed, more comparative analysis is necessary over the technical aspects of how the EP information offices work with journalists to make EP coverage visible, the importance that the development of an EPS seems to occupy for EP officials and journalists, particularly in relation to their work, the impact of second-order elections and the officials that come out of them over communicating the EP nationally and what could be done to change the issues identified here and in the analysis of the interviews conducted, presented later in this paper.

For those reasons, this thesis concentrates on the day-to-day operations of EP officials as well as journalists in Greece and Ireland in a mid-term period and on all aspects of their works and the issues they are called to deal with. Through interviews in the capital city of each country, the aims outlined throughout this chapter were pursued and will be discussed. Similarly, journalists from mainstream media with significant involvement in EP reporting will be interviewed both around their cooperation with the information offices but also with regard to their influences and the ways in which their work could be affected by the 'second-order' status of EU politics compared to the national one, and by all elements associated with it. Before that, however, the methodology used to answer the research questions previously presented, through the themes discussed here, are presented and analysed in the next chapter.

Chapter Two –Research Methodology

In this chapter, the methodological approach taken will be presented, followed by the reasons behind that choice, as well as a critical overview of the interviews process and the limitations that it could have produced. Continuing from the analysis on much of the present research on the topic examined, this chapter will underline how this specific methodology was developed to differentiate itself from past works and what the reader should expect to get answers on by the end of this text.

Further, this methodology is based on the cases of the Republic of Ireland and Greece. This is because both countries were considered part of the EU's weakest economies when the financial crisis hit and were thus under loans and reform programs through EU institutions. However, the socio-political and economic paths of the two countries since have dramatically diverged, thus making their comparison an interesting case to examine whether media strategies, information about EU affairs and overall awareness about the role of the European Parliament in the affairs of each country could have an impact on public perceptions about the European Union as a whole, or about the EP specifically.

Before discussing the specifics of this research structure however what should be noted is that no specific hypothesis was utilised to establish the main research question presented in the introduction or the detailed sub-questions discussed here. This is because this project has an exploratory character due to the lack of sufficient literature on the topic as a whole and these case studies specifically. As highlighted in the previous chapter, the EP liaison offices are significantly unexplored and, especially when combining this with the experience of journalists working with these offices and the

peculiarities of the Greek and Irish case studies, relevant past research is extremely limited. Hence, little can be assumed towards the expected results of the research and, accordingly, a hypothesis could not be established.

Data Collection

In accordance to the discussion so far and to the examination of literature presented, the following research questions were developed focusing on the daily routine of journalists and EP officials in Greece and Ireland to determine their viewpoint, influences, and motivations and the ways through which these could shape the role of those professionals in the process of communicating the European Parliament and to the broader development of an EU-wide sphere of communication and discussion:

1. How is the mission of the European Parliament information offices in Dublin and Athens realised, and to what extent are those offices local?
2. In what ways do journalists perceive the EP information offices and the Parliament as a whole and how is that reflected in their work?
3. Are trends and phenomena, including the rise of Euroscepticism in the EP and calls to address the Union's 'democratic' and 'communication' deficits, influential for these actors and their operations? If so, how?

In order to address these questions, data was collected using semi-structured qualitative interviewing of about thirty to forty minutes in length conducted by the researcher using an interview guide which contained the main questions and topics to be discussed and the order to do so. Interviewing was selected because of the need for in depth conversations with the participants and one-to-one interaction in order to uncover the entirety of their daily work and how they perceived the different concepts examined.

For the same reasons interviewing was done in a semi-structured format to allow participants to guide the researcher through the different topics without the constraints of a structured interview or a qualitative survey. While surveys could have allowed for a larger data set and more specific answers to the questions asked, quantitative analyses often rely on elections specifically because of the data availability and consistency. For those reasons, this methodology was considered as the most appropriate to approach the fluid and multi-level research questions outlined previously.

These interviews focus on the ways in which the public is reached and informed about the activities and impact of the European Parliament on local, national, and EU affairs. For the employees of the EP liaison offices, questions cover the aspects of their position, their understanding of the impact that their work has, and the feedback they get from the media and the public in each member state. In addition, both the guidelines and instructions they are given by the European Parliament and the initiatives and programs each office may undertake independently are a key part of the interviews, in order to better record the differences and distinctions in the workings of each of the two offices investigated and the amount of coordinated guidance and instruction they receive from the EP.

Journalists, on the other hand, are asked about their relationship with the aforementioned local liaison offices, and with the Parliament as a whole, as well as on the quantity and quality of information they receive, in their view, from those bodies. Moreover, members of the media are interviewed on the amount of work they do that is related to EP activities, the type of stories about the Parliament they usually work on, and the response and feedback they get, including the impact they believe their work has on the populations of Greece and Ireland respectively.

In relation to previous research with similar participants, themes and objectives, a variety of methods has been used and how they compare to this project should be examined. Anderson & McLeod (2004) used a very similar methodology to this thesis, yet, not only is their work dated, they also only researched information office employees, not journalists, across various countries thus lacking contextual focus. Further, Heikkilä & Kunelius (2006) interviewed journalists and, even though their topic diverges from this research, their comments on the benefit of discussing abstract concepts that can affect news production with journalists to map the factors that contribute in their approach to their work are useful for the planning of this study.

Statham (2008) has also conducted qualitative interviews with journalists on their reporting of the EU and noted that “given that journalists belong to a social group sharing a common orientation and ethos that affects how they see their profession, their views are a potentially rich data source” (p. 401). Cornia’s (2010) research with Italian correspondents in Brussels also points to the need to examine the background of news production but it seems to overly concentrate on the technicalities of journalistic practices instead of identifying their overall attitudes towards their work.

Yet, beyond that, most studies with journalists use news stories to analyse and examine how the EU is reported and the role of journalists and of the EU communications mechanism in that process (Peter, Semetko & de Vreese, 2003; Michailidou, 2015; Fracasso et al., 2014; Gleissner & de Vreese, 2005; Michailidou, 2012; Sonntag, 1983). Some studies have also focused on surveys, mostly quantitative and some qualitative, and used structures like the use of fictional newsgathering scenarios to gather data on journalists’ work and identify their perceptions and biases (Patterson & Donsbach, 1996; Donsbach & Patterson, 2004). Accordingly, interviews have often been

used in research around communication and news production in the EU context, yet this study combines journalists and EP information office officials with significant focus on the local contexts of operations for those professionals while still comparing between two EU member states. Hence, a lot of the elements of several previous studies are combined to produce a new data set on the intersection of concepts.

Sample

The sample interviewed included two officials in charge of press relations and public relations respectively from each EP office, as well as two Irish and two Greek journalists, resulting in eight interviews. The journalists did stem from distinct backgrounds with those from Greece working in a prominent newspaper and a major television station as editors on European and foreign, including European, news respectively, while those from Ireland were employed in a popular newspaper and a network of major radio stations as a Europe editor and a general news editor in each case. In addition, the two journalists working exclusively on European news in Ireland and Greece respectively both identified themselves as Brussels correspondent even though they were not fully based in Brussels and were working from their countries as well.

The sample is then equally divided between EP employees and journalists from each of the two case studies, all participants work in positions that are precisely relevant to the thesis and reflects a small but varied spectrum of backgrounds of the respondents. At the same time, the aim of this study is not to produce a representative set of results but rather one that can present in depth the perceptions and understandings of professionals in these areas and contexts of the European Parliament's media strategies, its successes, failures and the other factors that could be at play here.

Data Analysis

After the interviews were conducted, NVivo qualitative analysis software was used to facilitate the writing and coding of transcripts by the researcher. The transcripts were produced in the same language as the one the interviews were conducted in, English for the Irish interviews and Greek for those done in Greece. Those transcripts were then coded based on four major categories of the research to allow for the analysis of the concepts that arose, and the comparison of the different professionals and the two contexts included in the research.

The four key themes used for the analysis were: work, day-to-day operations and technicalities of the interviewee's respective position; attitudes to the EU and the EP as they arise during reporting/communicating with reporters, or through feedback from the public; obstacles that hinder the goal of communicating EP news and weaknesses that they identified in the current system of news production and overall communication and; the road ahead, particularly in relation to what could change to improve public awareness of the European Parliament.

Ethics

In terms of the ethical dimension of the research, interviewees were provided with an information sheet before the scheduling of the interview along with a predesigned letter of recruitment. After agreeing to participate, the meeting was scheduled and, in the beginning of the interview, the information sheet was provided again and discussed with the participants and a consent form was then also provided and, if acceptable, was signed by those interviewed. No sensitive or personal issues were part of the interviews and all interviewees were aware of their option to stop the interview at any time or skip any topic

that somehow made them uncomfortable. Throughout the data collection process no issues arose and all participants seemed satisfied with the documents provided and with the length, style and type of the interviews.

At this point then, the context of the two countries incorporated in this study, Greece and Ireland, should be presented both based on existing literature and using interview data, before analysing in depth the findings of this research.

Chapter Three – Apathy or Scepticism? European Parliament Reporting

Within the Irish and Greek Contexts

To initiate the examination of the two case studies established within this research, Ireland and Greece, their contexts should be examined both in terms of existing literature and with regard to the comments made by interviewees from each country about the specifics that their environment includes with regard to the media and political communication in general and attitudes towards the European Union and its Parliament in particular. The variations in both the interest that Greek and Irish media tend to have for the European Parliament, as well as the amount of controversy and political tension over EU news in each domestic scene can produce an interesting platform for the examination of this topic in order to unveil structural differences on how reporting and communication occurs both from the media and from the European Parliament in terms of local and EU-wide processes alike.

Specifically, presenting in detail the various ways in which the two contexts differ will raise the question of whether, and if so how, the information offices of the EP adapt their broad mission and periodic goals to the circumstances around them. Accordingly, this chapter will focus first on the history of Ireland in the European Union with regard to public opinion and perceptions of the Union highlighting a broader sense of apathy towards EU-level politics as shown by the interviews conducted. This will be followed by a corresponding analysis of the Greek context and the overwhelming domination of scepticism and reservation over the European institutions, especially after the late 2000s. Concluding with a comparison of the two, the ground to compare the offices and the journalists of each case study will be established for the data analysis to follow.

Ireland: “People elect MEPs and kind of forget about them.”

Ireland is seen as a state with very positive attitudes towards the European Union and its membership in it. In fact, according to the Eurobarometer (89) of Spring 2018, 54% of the Irish population trust the EU, the 6th highest percentage among member states. Further, according to the same study, trust in the European Parliament is at 64% compared to 61% for the European Commission, and 54% for the European Council, thus the Parliament is seen as clearly more trustworthy than the other two institutions or the EU as a whole. Nevertheless, such measurements could be questioned due to the possibility that trust stems from ignorance or apathy about the current affairs of the EU and its institutions. Further, some of the literature on Irish attitudes towards Europe and the majority of the interviews conducted in Ireland underline the lack of interest in most aspects of EU news.

Following its ‘second order’ position both in elections and beyond, the European Union always comes after the domestic dimension of any development or political process. Irish MEP campaigns are seen by Schon-Quinlivan & Quinlivan (2004) as very much driven by personalities and local parties instead of EU issues and agendas. Further, in Irish politics Europe has never been pivotal in shaping opinions or political trends (Quinlan 2010). If anything, according to Smith & Hay (2008), European integration was always perceived positively by Irish voters and policy makers alike, despite the possible threat that it could pose for the latter, as reflected in other EU states.

However, because of the EU-IMF bailout of the Irish banks in 2010, the reputation of the EU, and specifically the Commission and the European Central Bank (ECB), was visibly affected after “Irish people’s well-known enthusiasm for the EU

began to dampen during the bailout” (Quinlan & Okolikj, 2016, p. 301). Yet, the series of studies referenced here which investigated the 2004, 2009 and 2014 EP elections in Ireland also point to a stable concentration in regional politics and a consistent approach towards the European Parliament as secondary to the Irish government and anything contained within Irish politics.

This sentiment was further reflected in the interviews conducted in Dublin with all respondents noting in some way the power of regional politics over EU affairs, with both officials of the EP office and the newspaper journalist saying that “all politics is local” and that this immediately places everything related to the Union exclusively into the Irish context (Interview 5; Interview 6). Moreover, the radio journalist interviewed expanded this to say that, regardless of the perspective that people see EU news through, “they [don’t] really care” (Interview 7). This journalist further argued that “people elect MEPs and kind of forget about them for a while” (Interview 7). While it should be noted that this particular participant was working in the least news-focused broadcaster out of all journalists interviewed in both countries, thus reporting in a more relaxed environment and to a different audience than his colleagues, this concept was discussed in several ways by EP officials as well.

Specifically, both the official working in press relations and the one working in public relations at the Parliament’s Dublin office talked about apathy as a dominant attitude towards EU affairs and developments. The PR official specifically compared the immediate impact that local and national decisions seem to have on the daily lives of citizens with the theoretical and grand perception of EU affairs which often seem distant and far too burdened by sociopolitical balances to retain the engagement of popular opinion (Interview 6). He even stressed that this period for Irish politics is far more

focused than it would usually be on the future of Europe and on the state of European politics because of the proximity of the British exit from the EU to domestic affairs, thus pointing to an already augmented interest in EU news, which however does not seem to have overly influenced these central attitudes of the Irish public.

The EP employee communicating with the press in Ireland aligned almost exactly with her colleague arguing that her work with the media mainly involves practical issues that seem to immediately affect daily lives, as well as Brexit and the future of Europe (Interview 5). At the same time, this participant tended to frame the public's concentration to regional issues not so much as due to lacking interest but more because of long-standing confidence and trust in the EU institutions which allows the public to not be concerned about day-to-day developments. While apathy as a common Irish sentiment was mentioned by this employee too, when discussing it she referenced a historical development of positivity with regard to the Union and, consequently, the lack of major controversies about the role of Ireland in the EU (Interview 5).

Research, however, tends to highlight lack of knowledge more than either trust or apathy in relation to the Union. Elkind & Sinnott (2015) examined the 'No' vote in the 2008 Irish referendum on the Lisbon Treaty and found that these voters mostly cited "something related to lack of information, knowledge or understanding" (p. 218). Further, Baccini, Sudulich & Wall (2016) argued that this lack of clarity in the public's perceptions of the EU allows for online newsgathering, through social media and beyond, to significantly impact attitudes in a negative way since it provides "an echo chamber for anti-EU opinions" (p. 434). These authors specifically associate their findings with the aftermath of the financial crisis and raise questions on how much EU attitudes in Ireland have really bounced back as all of the interviews in this thesis, as well as Eurobarometer

data, seem to suggest. In fact, as the comparison with the Greek case will attempt to show, it could be that this perception of reinstated trust and appreciation of the EU is simply because of the contrast with the Euroscepticism in other member states and the EU more broadly.

Nevertheless, Jackson, Mach & Miller-Gonzalez (2016) do argue that positive EU attitudes in Ireland are not simply a perception out of the Eurosceptic wave in the continent. Rather, they suggest that the Lisbon Treaty vote, which occurred after immigration rates in Ireland rose due to EU expansion to Eastern Europe and during the breakout of the financial crisis that shook the EU-Ireland relationship, shows that even though anti-immigration attitudes did increase and critics of the EU did receive more attention neither of these phenomena translated to significant opposition to the European Union. Specifically, they extend this point to argue that positive EU experiences have “conditioned” the Irish public to think about the Union in a particular way thus creating a unique context in this member state (Jackson, Mach & Miller-Gonzalez, 2016, p. 503).

Yet, according to both EP officials, the crisis did seem to have some effect on public attitudes, but they do not consider that to be a major element of the EU’s perception in Ireland in this time period, or beyond. For the employee working on public relations, Ireland was indeed affected by the financial crisis and the EU-IMF bailout in terms of its relationship with the Union, yet its quick recovery and a strong realism with regard to the causes and aftermath of the crisis contained that impact and even created a new wave of support in the post-crisis era (Interview 6). The crisis was essentially framed by this participant as a difficult, but relatively short, period after which the help of the EU and the IMF was a benefit to the image of those institutions despite the initially negative connotations of its involvement in domestic affairs and its insistence on some measures,

like the full bailout of the banks by Ireland with their help, instead of a partial one (Interview 6). Similarly, the EP press employee discussed the crisis and the bailout as circumstantial and particularly unimportant for the Parliament compared to other institutions (Interview 5). In fact, both Irish EP officials did note of certain elements of their position that are affected by EP-specific factors relating to the EU in Ireland.

The domination of the European Commission in all economic and financial affairs meant, for both Irish EP officials, that the Parliament was always seen more, if not most, favourably by Irish citizens among the major bodies of the Union. The press official noted that executive power in general gives the Commission more attention in bailout and financial monitoring issues as well as any other practical matters, but this enhances the clarity that the EP is seen to have and its democratic and positive image (Interview 5). The role of the European Parliament as a “forum”, even with the inclusion of Eurosceptic and anti-EU voices is, according to the PR official, a major benefit for the EP’s reputation, since an aim of the office is not only to promote EU-level issues but to highlight the impact of the EP specifically in them and its importance in the European political process (Interview 5). Yet, this also presents a challenge for those professionals to help the public distinguish between decisions from different EU institutions and the Irish government. In fact, this apathy and lack of controversy on all EU affairs is a key obstacle in familiarising the public with EU operations and this is especially reflected in the interviews with Irish journalists (Interview 5).

Through a journalistic viewpoint, the distinctions between the Parliament, the Commission and the Council in the EU is not and possibly cannot be of interest for audiences. According to the Irish newspaper journalist interviewed, the EU institutions’ “power of co-decision at the moment is such that [MEPs] actually do matter, it’s just that

the voters don't understand it or don't care" (Interview 8). Furthermore, this respondent related the general lack of understanding or interest on EU processes to "what political scientists call second order elections, that people don't actually believe that they will make a difference" (Interview 8). It is for that reason that this journalist's viewpoint on the European Parliament specifically was less positive than that of the EP officials. Engagement, according to this Brussel correspondent, comes from high profile Irish officials more than MEPs and, particularly Commissioners, can be extremely influential for citizen engagement, especially when they hold portfolios of regional interest. However, even this distinction between sources of interest was questioned by the Irish radio journalist.

The perspective of the interviewee working in a music-driven radio station with a young audience pointed to an even more uninterested Irish public that does not even think about the processes through which policies and decisions come about on the European or even the national level (Interview 7). Any news about the EU in such media is only broadcasted if it can directly impact the day-to-day experiences of the audience, with examples being the removal of EU-wide roaming charges, new environmental and consumer regulations or programs offering funding or travel and work opportunities across the Union. At the same time, this journalist did seem to agree with the press official of the European Parliament that the historically positive attitudes of Irish citizens to the EU and their membership in it is a key factor in developing apathy and diminishing interest in related news (Interview 7). While there are both benefits and problems from this relaxed approach within Irish popular opinions towards the EU and the EP, bad press and media scepticism is not completely irrelevant for this country's realities.

The PR employee of the Parliament in Dublin noted that while Brexit did help highlight the importance of the European Union for Ireland, the British press' attitudes and stories towards the EU did affect Ireland to a certain extent (Interview 6). According to this participant, the Irish press usually does not host false or overly opinionated stories about the EU, yet the domination of British media among Irish audiences allows for voices that the Irish EP information office cannot really communicate or work with which can impact public debates (Interview 6). As Price (2009) argues, the UK Eurosceptic press can be very visible in its criticisms of the Union, thus impacting trends like Britain's vote to leave the EU. Despite all that however, the press EP employee commented on Eurosceptic press that there is a 'tabloid way' and a 'serious way' to report on the EU and that the office only responds with facts and real news (Interview 5). So, if a critical story towards the EU is done 'seriously' and factually then the office is not particularly active on it, only the Parliament itself can work in changing those stories and its image in that respect, whereas if a story is done in a 'tabloid' way then any response is simply highlighting the actual news stories in an apparent and factual way (Interview 5).

Nevertheless, the UK press and its criticism of the Union is not as black and white as 'serious news' and 'tabloid news', instead positive, neutral, and negative stories about EU affairs can be communicated both in a factual and with high journalistic value, 'serious' way, as well as in an incorrect, sensationalist 'tabloid' way (Price 2009). While this is acknowledged by the EP press official, she did not seem particularly concerned in distinguishing these news pieces and in reacting to any of them (Interview 5). Rather, her narrative concentrated on what news comes out of the European Parliament and whether what is published is factual, without distinguishing between the Irish and British media

(Interview 5). The PR official on the other hand was a bit more willing to acknowledge the existence of Eurosceptic British media and their stories which cannot really be part of the office's operations but can affect their work and Irish popular opinion on the EU (Interview 6).

Regardless, the scenario of Euroscepticism spreading because of those voices or because of negative press did not seem at all likely for either of two EP employees in Dublin. The Irish PR official claimed that:

for the vast majority of people all politics is local so that they are far more interested in how [the EU] is going to impact them in their daily lives rather than in some grand theory about development of the world in general (Interview 6).

Using the exact same expression, the EP Press Officer in Dublin echoed her coworker's point and added that, for the Irish public, the EU has never been heavily criticized and any and all reference points that citizens have with regard to the European institutions have been both historically and contemporarily positive thus creating apathy (Interview 5). Accordingly, thinking about the topic of this thesis more broadly, these particular elements of the Irish context are crucial in shaping the analysis and evaluation of EP media structures, processes, and outcomes, so they should guide any future discussion in this text and any comparison with the Greek case study.

To sum up on the Irish context, even though the country did go through a serious economic crisis in which the EU was a key player during its aftermath and which damaged the image of the institutions - as with all of the weakest economies in Europe at the time, also known as PIIGS (Portugal, Ireland, Italy, Greece, and Spain) - long term historically-driven pro-EU sentiments now dominate the Irish popular discourse (Lloyd &

Marconi, 2014). However, this in turn causes apathy, or at least limited interest, towards EU news and developments, with all research participants from Ireland agreeing that Irish citizens lack education, or at the very least interest, on all aspects of the workings of the EU, directly affecting day-to-day attitudes to reporting on the Union. While developments like Brexit can instigate discussions both positively and negatively on the EU institutions, through a greater appreciation of the EU's impact for Irish politics and through the British Eurosceptic press leaking over to Irish audiences, this established lasting positive but passive approach towards European politics can critically influence the workings of EP offices and journalists in Ireland and should be noted during the analysis of the themes in this thesis.

Greece: Eurofatigue & Distorted Knowledge

In terms of general trends and attitudes on EU affairs, Greek popular opinion towards the European Union is seen as one of the most hostile and sensitive across all member states. In stark contrast to Ireland, according to the Eurobarometer (89) of Spring 2018, Greece is the member state with the least support or faith for the Union since only 27% of its population trust it. In terms of the major institutions, 39% of Greeks trust the Parliament, while 30% trust the Commission – the lowest percentage across all member states -, and 31% trust the Council. Nevertheless, despite the very low percentages in those statistics for Greece, the population's trust in the European Parliament is considerably higher than in the Commission, the Council, or the EU as a whole, which is also the case in the Irish statistics and is a phenomenon that should be noted throughout this analysis. However, Greece cannot, like Ireland, be considered neutral or apathetic towards EU affairs, rather it is a particularly, if not the most, hostile member state, whose

context should be examined in more to detail to establish the specifics of where EP communications is called to operate within.

Possibly the most important aspect of this domestic environment with regard to EU attitudes is the EU-IMF bailout programs following the 2009 financial crisis and the involvement of those bodies in state reforms and debt agreements with Greece. This has been strongly reflected, according to Fanourgiakis & Kanoupakis (2016), in the radical changes of governments both in terms of their position in the political spectrum and in their attitudes towards the economy and the EU-IMF programs, as well as in the perceptions of the EU statistically recorded over time and the increasingly Eurosceptic MEPs that Greeks have been voting for, particularly in the 2014 elections. At the same time, this does not mean that the ‘second order election’ concept is less prevalent here because of Euroscepticism and because of the strong presence of the European institutions in domestic politics.

In fact, Teperoglou (2010) claims that the extremely low turnout of Greeks in the 2009 EP elections – 52.61%, the lowest recorded turnout for the country, according to the European Parliament (2018b) – pointed to frustration with national politics and elites more than European ones. She argues that this is because campaigns for those elections focused on domestic issues and European issues were barely part of the agenda, as all Southern European countries at the time were pro-European and EP elections were approached with apathy by citizens. Yet, while the 2014 EP elections could be expected to be different because of the ongoing crisis, turnout was still the second lowest ever at 59.97% (European Parliament, 2018b). Further, the campaigns still lacked any European dimension in Greece, even with, at the time, prominent Eurosceptic figure of the government opposition Alexis Tsipras running for President of the European Commission

with the Party of the European Left (Schmitt & Teperoglou, 2015). Across Southern Europe, as Schmitt & Teperoglou (2015) claim EP election results seemed to reflect a reaction to domestic political parties and issues by each state, instead of a statement towards the EU bodies and officials in Brussels, thus completely adhering to the ‘second order’ model.

Nevertheless, the discourses of the political, as well as public, opposition to the governments of the crisis in Greece, even though they were in fact nationally anchored, strongly featured the idea that Greek sociopolitical and financial sovereignty was simply handed to the European institutions, which mostly fell under the label of ‘Germany’ (Kotroyannos, et al., 2017; Michailidou, 2017; Plakoudas, 2016). In fact, Plakoudas (2016) highlights that those narratives involved associations with the resistance of Greeks towards Nazi Germany in the Second World War, where the involvement of EU institutions, largely ignoring the role of the IMF in the bailouts, was portrayed as a modern expression of Nazi expansionism, developed through the perceived German monopoly of influence in the Union. Such extreme political approaches were still used mainly to attack domestic parties who supported the bailout programs and the EU overall, yet a European dimension is also clear and a key part of those Greek political conflicts.

Specifically, Sternberg, Gartzou – Katsouyanni, & Nicolaidis (2018) consider the obsession of the Greek-German dimension in media coverage, as well as popular and political narratives, throughout the crisis, as an expression of the nationalisation of European politics, simultaneously with the Europeanisation of domestic affairs. By consistently connecting national identities with the crisis and raising Germany as the representation of the Greece’s issues with the EU, the media and politicians alike demonstrate how unwilling they are to treat EU angles of their realities as what they truly

are. Nevertheless, Sternberg, Gartzou – Katsouyanni, & Nicolaidis (2018) do point to a slowly rising viewpoint on the relationship of the two countries that they are shared vulnerability during the crisis and their common will to move away from that is fostering new linkages between them, especially with regard to how Germany is portrayed in Greek politics, and vice versa.

Yet, when discussing such political contexts, the relationship between the approaches of the public and of the elites to the EU and how they compare to each other should be incorporated in any and all analyses. Karyotis, Ruding, & Judge (2014) researched the congruence of austerity positions between Greek MPs and the voters of their parties and found that, for the far-leaning and extreme parties on both sides of the political spectrum (including the parties of the current governing coalition, SYRIZA and ANEL on the left and the right respectively), politicians had significantly clearer Eurosceptic and anti-austerity attitudes than voters. In addition, the article of Tsibras & Sotiropoulos (2016) on elite attitudes towards the EU, also echoed by Teperoglou et al. (2014), showed that Greek MPs seem to follow pre-crisis patterns of attachment to Europe and commitment to the concept of a European identity.

If the evidence from these projects are analysed together an image could appear of a political system, at least in the far ends of political ideology, ready to embrace Euroscepticism whenever and however it came to be. Yet, as Andreadis & Stavrakakis (2017) argue, this is not surprising since populist dialectic in general is perfectly suited to cater to frustrated voters in cases like this one and will thus arise when demand for it does. They also continue to say that such discourses can help populist political actors even when they are governing parties as in the case of SYRIZA/ANEL. This aspect of the discussion should also be noted in terms of the turmoil amongst Greek national parties

over attitudes towards the EU and the bailout programs. Hence, all of these points should be part of any discussion on political discourses towards the EU since public attitudes may not be accurately reflected from the domestic political scene and political parties may respond to them differently, even if both of these points can be true beyond Greece.

Nevertheless, beyond that point, as it was uncovered from the interviews conducted with journalists and EP officials in Athens, the EU-IMF bailout did have significant and lasting impact in the attitudes towards European institutions by the public. The Greek television journalist respondent outlined this by saying that the crisis and its aftermath have been extremely harmful for the Union's image because "all the terms and everything to do with Europe entered newscasting and Greek society in a forced way, and of course in a distorted way since it was introduced as solely as something burdensome" (Interview 3). While it could have been assumed that the involvement of the EU in daily news may have helped familiarise popular opinion with its bodies and processes, this journalist highlights that the aggressive, unorganised, negative, and distorted way that the EU suddenly entered Greek news and politics was even more damaging than simply lacking any knowledge about the Union. Furthermore, she discussed how even domestic actors, political or otherwise, who supported and argued for the EU over the post-crisis years are now being targeted, thus directly affecting domestic affairs even beyond issues relating to the EU (Interview 3).

In accordance to this narrative, the newspaper journalist interviewed agreed on the effects of the crisis by saying that the contrast between an almost complete lack of EU coverage before the financial crisis and the bailout programs and the constant and consistent coverage since caused "eurofatigue", an overload on EU news, terms, and issues which brought about a sort of revulsion towards anything across that spectrum

(Interview 4). In fact, this interviewee also emphasised the role that the domestic political systems and governments played in shaping the narrative around the European Union since, during the difficult management of the financial crisis, all Greek governments routinely blamed the EU institutions for every failure and took ownership themselves for every success, thus creating an association in Greek public opinion between the European Union and negative news (Interview 4). He consequently expanded this to argue that he has been often targeted for writing factual and neutral news piece which portray the Union at all positively, hence mirroring the other journalist's discourse about both the impacts of the crisis for the EU and for domestic actors who are associated with the European bodies in any way.

The officials of the European Parliament office in Athens that were interviewed also followed a similar line of thinking on the presence of the EU in Greece in the 2010s. The interviewee working in press relations discussed a "pattern adopted by national governments across Europe, not just in Greece, that when something is popular with citizens they attempt to take ownership, whereas when something is unpopular they often use the EU as a scapegoat" (Interview 1). He moreover expanded to say that governments do so due to their perceived lack of political cost at the EU level which drives them "to throw [the problem] somewhere in Brussels, without understanding what they mean, because Brussels is not one thing obviously" (Interview 1). The press official also noted that this phenomenon fuels a popular stereotype of Brussels as one huge incomprehensible mass, which he identified as one of the biggest problems in his office's communication. Similarly, the PR employee interviewed agreed with that perception and underlined the use of social media and events open to the public as a vehicle to fighting that problem (Interview 2).

In terms of the nationalisation of European Parliamentary elections, the EP press officer argued that lack of familiarity with EU level politics and the general lack of a European public sphere causes primarily the public but also in a lot of ways the media to rely on national discourses and systems that they are familiar with even during EU-wide political processes (Interview 1). He specifically referred to automatizations that exist within domestic narratives and political coverage, from terminology to political figures and bodies, which are still in the process of being created at the EU level and which the office is very much trying to contribute towards. The ways in which this happens and particularly the Athens EP office's digital and media strategy as outlined by participants will be explored further in the following chapter. One question that is still to be addressed though is whether this, even aggressive or negative, familiarisation has helped Greek citizens distinguish between institutions, compared to the lack of interest and consequently knowledge on the different EU bodies found in Ireland.

The European Parliament for all respondents has a special position in the Union's presence in Greece which provides it with both benefits and weaknesses. Specifically, the most pressing matter in newscasting has been, throughout the 2010s, the Greek bailout program and any negotiations, reports, or decisions pertaining to that, thus putting the European Commission, the institution responsible, along with the ECB and the IMF, for all of those matters, centerstage and simultaneously pushing the least executive and most debate-focused body, the Parliament, to the sidelines, the Greek television journalist argued (Interview 3). Nevertheless, she also noted that this was not the only issue with the coexistence of the different institutions within Greek public perceptions. The understanding of the EP as a slow-moving bureaucratic body where decisions have considerable distance to cover before reaching citizens and impacting their daily lives

compared to the immediacy of a large portion of the Commission's decision making, and even the Council creates an imbalance in the attention that is granted to each of those institutions and accordingly in any coverage about them and their activities (Interview 3).

Similarly, both Greek EP officials argued that they always try to highlight the democratic and elected nature of the Parliament, mostly through the involvement of MEPs and political groups in local activities as much as possible in order to develop a distinction of the EP from the EU's executive elements while also assigning importance to the Parliament's voice and actions (Interview 1; Interview 2). Nevertheless, both journalists and particularly the Greek newspaper's European news editor noted that this strategy is problematic because debates without any tangible impact will not aid the EP in changing its image and because of the problematic attitudes of many Greek MEPs towards their position as European representatives (Interview 4). He expanded on that to argue that most Greek representatives in the EP are very much focused on their presence and eventual return in domestic politics, since they perceive their MEP position simply as a way in, or as a break, from national office. Both journalists also highlighted that this has been considered by journalists as one of the worst classes of MEPs from Greece ever, with the newspaper editor claiming that many of those elected spent up to two years of their five-year term simply learning how the EU and the EP operate instead of fulfilling their duties due to extreme lack of preparation or qualifications for such a role (Interview 4).

At the same time, the nature of the European Parliament is not universally seen as a negative when compared to the Commission and the Council in Greece. In fact, the press employee of the Athens office underlined that their challenge as the EP office is more about emphasising its importance in the European Union's mechanisms especially

after the Lisbon Treaty through cases like Brexit, where the EP's capabilities in influencing EU politics are demonstrated (Interview 1). Comparing it to other bodies and mainly the Commission he considered it easier than having to defend a series of negative developments, particularly around financial issues and the bailout program, thus allowing the EP to have a positive position even in a country with such Eurosceptic tendencies as Greece. This was very much reflected also in the journalists' narratives with both claiming that it is much easier for the public to embrace positive news pieces about the Parliament than about other institutions (Interview 3; Interview 4). Yet, they also both highlight that such developments have less of an impact than optimistic newscasting on the Commission or the Council because of the perceived nature of the EP, as described (Interview 3; Interview 4). The problem then does become how to highlight the actual strength of the Parliament in news coverage, as well as the ways in which the EP can itself make its activities be perceived as more direct than they currently are, so strategies that it can deploy beyond communication to facilitate a change of perceptions across the EU and in Greece specifically.

Lastly, before concluding this discussion one element that should be discussed in relation to this section is whether the 'second-order' position of the EU in both elections and reporting is reflected in Greece. On the one hand, it is true that the continuously central position of the EU in Greek politics and the role that attitudes towards the Union have played even for domestic political actor and parties could point to a different balance between EU-level and national politics. However, as is particularly reflected by the discussion on political narratives around 'German expansionism' and the lack of Greek sovereignty consistently used to attack Greek pro-EU politicians, most aspects of negative EU attitudes including 'eurofatigue', a perceived lack of representation in EU

decision-making due to the weak image of the Parliament, as well as the frustration with austerity policies and bailout programs seen as stemming from those institutions were all mostly expressed in national electoral contexts and debates and as the interview with Greek journalists showed, with further discussion of that to follow, the national context, from personalities to institutions and political parties, always seemed to override that of the European Union.

Thus, to conclude the contextual discussion of the Greek case, this member state displays some of the most hostile attitudes towards the European Union and its institutions and actors, which appears to be directly linked to the role of the EU in the bailout program co-managed with the IMF after the crisis and the austerity associated with such programs. Yet, a paradox is formed within the Greek public sphere since the financial crisis caused, on one hand, the familiarisation of citizens with the bodies and processes of the EU where a lot of frustration was in turn directed, often because of the way national governments portrayed the EU and its actions. However, on the other hand, EU-level politics and EP elections remained ‘second order’ to domestic elections and debates, with Greek voters in these cross-European processes very much expressing their thoughts and frustration towards their government instead of the Union’s institutions and their officials. This paradox in turn produced a context where both the European institutions and those advocating for them domestically and across Europe have been targeted and often dismissed by the public, while distorted or even clearly wrong views on those bodies and their officials guide all reactions and approaches of the Greek public towards news and developments about the European Union.

Accordingly, the European Parliament has also been labelled in public discourses and, while attitudes towards it are generally the most positive across EU actors, it is still

predominantly seen as theoretical and distant from the realities of Greek citizens, thus causing the EP and news about it to often be dismissed and its elections to be used as another national platform in the unstable post-crisis national political scene of Greece. For those reasons, EP communications in this member state aim to develop awareness about the Parliament and its activities and to highlight its distinct democratic nature from the other institutions of the Union, while operating in a context where financial matters dominate any debate on the EU and the European Commission in turn comes first both in newscasting and in local political discourse. So, what should be evaluated in this thesis with regard to Greece is how the EP is enhanced as a political actor at the European level both in the media and in popular narratives about the EU when it cannot affect the most pressing EU issues for Greece in any substantial way.

Comparing Apathy & Scepticism

Therefore, from this outline of the two case studies certain issues and elements which can play a key role in how the European Parliament communicates and is communicated to citizens were identified and should now be compared to outline the framework through which the specifics of how EP officials and journalists operated in each country will be compared and analysed. While the two countries have had similar experiences during the 2009 financial crisis and were subject to corresponding EU-IMF bailouts, their current positions in the Euroscepticism spectrum are at polar opposites and so the reasons why that may be the case and other country-specific factors that could be more influential than this common experience should be examined.

Ireland and Greece, as the PIIGS acronym highlights, were grouped into this set of countries after the global 2009 financial crisis as the ‘problem’ countries of the EU,

and even more specifically the Eurozone (Llyod & Marconi, 2014). In fact, when discussing the history of how the EU and its Parliament are perceived in the two countries almost all eight participants reference their country's financial crisis as a key period of negative attitudes where significant damage was done in the public's relationship with the Union and its bodies. Nevertheless, as the Irish EP PR employee illustrated using the example of Greece without being prompted to do so, the recovery and post-crisis financial position of the two states have been almost contradictory with each other causing different impacts on the perceptions of the EU in them as well (Interview 6). He further noted that this also made the EU's role in the crisis perceived positively due to Ireland's growth and negatively due to Greece's economic stagnation after the crisis. At least to an extent, this could then explain the gap in the attitudes of the two members despite their common experiences with EU-IMF bailout programs.

Moreover, media coverage of the EU, and particularly the EP, and its reception by local audiences can identify other causes of the differences between these case studies. Irish journalists, on the one hand, pointed to a general apathy about EU affairs and developments, where any attention on such pieces was triggered by policies which had immediate tangible effects on citizens, like the waiving of roaming charges. By contrast, the journalists reporting for Greek media showed an obsession with EU affairs and a sudden explosion of coverage, and consequently public knowledge about the Union. Yet, the negative and unorganised way that this occurred and the overload of news about the EU which developed a sense of eurofatigue jeopardised any possible benefits from the post-crisis presence of the EU. This was also worsened by the limitation of that obsession on topics about Greece and even more specifically developments on financial affairs and the EU-IMF programs, with other topics either being ignored or dismissed because of

broader negative perceptions over all EU issues, actors and even terminology. But regardless if audience are simply uninterested or tired of European Union news and the reasons behind that, the end result may be more similar than expected.

In fact, as the ‘second order elections’ model, which seems to be very much in effect in both countries during EP elections, suggests, even when issues directly linked to the Union are top priorities, the national political sphere will also dominate public discourse and all aspects of EU politics will be contained within the respective local context. This could then render the distinctions between apathy and eurofatigue less crucial considering that both in cases where EU issues are of low interest and when they are of utmost interest, the national framework will not allow the European level to ever dominate the media or public narratives, which is perfectly illustrated by both Greek journalists and their comments about their audiences.

At the same time, one contrast between the two contexts on media coverage that should be analysed is the statement by the Irish EP press employee and the Irish radio journalist that without relevant and engaging news from the Parliament, or the EU as a whole, which can attract audience attention more easily there is not that much that the information offices or the media can do to impact the apathy of Irish populations (Interview 5; Interview 7). When compared to the pressures of EU-level developments in Greece and the trends that could have produced, including eurofatigue and Euroscepticism, such a claim can be questioned and could point to a key differentiation between EP communications in the two case studies which could be extremely impactful on the topic at hand.

In conclusion, all of these elements should guide the analysis which will follow on the EP office operations and the media processes which can influence these two contexts and EU-wide context as well. Even though not all of the factors discussed here can be empirically proven or can certainly be of importance, their presence in the interview transcripts and the correlations that were drawn between them in this chapter could point to an environment within which EP communication can be better understood and evaluated given the complex contexts they are called to operate within. Boiling down to the, almost intentional, ignorance of EU affairs in Ireland, and the overloaded Greek EU news space without basic knowledge about the operations and key elements of the EU among the public one thing becomes clear. These two contexts maintain an equally second-order context of seeing every EU development as a domestic one by ignoring the EU news that do not concern them directly. Yet, even though this produces similarities, it also appears to require a completely different attitude to the development of knowledge and interest in the EU as a concept, as well as the news that concern it.

Chapter Four – Representing the EU from National Perspectives: “All Politics Is Local”

Having discussed the general approach of the European Union as a whole towards communication within member states throughout its history, and after establishing the Irish and Greek contexts within which the EP officials and the journalists interviewed operate, the two groups of respondents should be compared across both national contexts. The Union, and the Parliament specifically, present information offices as a way to bring the Brussels-based institutions closer to the citizens and to localise issues. Accordingly, what was expected before interviewing the Press and PR officers of the EP liaison offices, was to find key similarities in their structure of operations and mission across both Greece and Ireland, combined with some form of regionalisation of that mission and a clear reflection of the peculiarities of the two national contexts. As this chapter will now demonstrate, while this was the case to a certain extent, in its essence the offices’ approach to the task at hand, bringing the Parliament closer to the citizens, did not seem to differ as much as the contexts did.

Using the grounding from existing literature presented in chapter one and the contextual analyses from the chapter three, the balance between the central EP communicative mission and the localisation of issues relating to the Parliament will be assessed. The stark differences between strong apathy in Ireland and deep scepticism in Greece towards the EU, and the EP specifically, should make such a comparison easier than for other member states, in order to then bring about an evaluation of the purpose and significance of information offices in the EP’s communication. To an extent, the local EP operations have already been introduced in the contextual discussion, and so this

chapter will essentially expand on how these operations compare and whether the clear awareness of EP officials of the national contexts around them is reflected in their work. Accordingly, firstly, the communications of the EP research participants from both Athens and Dublin with journalists are presented, followed by their interactions directly with the public and the degree of EP centralisation of both those processes.

In discussing the information offices of Greece and Ireland, their characteristics in terms of location, staff, and other technical characteristics should first be discussed as recorded from the researcher's visit to both offices. Both in Athens and Dublin the offices are located in the old city centres of each capital and are hence around major national governmental bodies. Specifically, in Athens, the liaison office of the Parliament is located across the street from the Hellenic Parliament, adjacent to the central Syntagma Square, while in Dublin, the historic Merrion Square sits next to the EP office with historic buildings all around it, and the Irish Houses of Parliament a few blocks away.

Nevertheless, beyond their location, the buildings of the two bodies convey quite varied images and impressions. On the one hand, the Athens liaison office occupies the entirety of a historic mansion with impressive architecture both externally, as well as internally with a grand hallway and staircase greeting visitors. While in the visit for this research, the side entrance was used going through the back of the building into a security office connected through an elevator to the main building, the original foyer is used for events and stakeholder visits which are held in the large halls of the ground floor, as the PR officer noted in the beginning of the interview. At one time the home of one of the first Prime Ministers of Greece, the building of the Parliament's office is part of a network of emblematic Athens landmark buildings which surround the Parliament and central squares and which now house ministries, embassies and museums.

On the other hand, the Dublin office is located in a large townhouse of the old city centre, which, while representative of the architecture of its neighbourhood, lacked the impressive characteristics and the dedicated event space of its Athenian counterpart. While the entrance used during my visit involved a similar security office as in Athens, this was in fact the main entrance of the office. Further, the European Parliament liaison office for Ireland shares its building with the representation of the European Commission, which could also justify the lack of space. In fact, during the research trip, I had the opportunity to attend an event held by the Dublin EP office, which will be subsequently discussed, yet this event was not held in the EP office, and instead the building of an Irish archival office a few meters away was used, which, to a visitor, appeared to match the impressive architectural and historic qualities of the Athens EP office.

At the same time, the staff of the two offices, in terms of numbers and positions, were extremely similar, with the Irish office having marginally more employees. As noted by the research participants in each office, at the time of the interviews, the Athens EP office employed 7 regular member of staff and one fixed-term trainee, while the Dublin office had 8 regular employees and two trainees (Interview 2; Interview 5). This may not be surprising and can potentially portray the similarities of the offices considerably more than any infrastructure can. Nevertheless, the observations on the two buildings are interesting from the viewpoint of a first-time visitor to the bodies establish to bring the Parliament close to citizens and connect it with domestic politics.

Concentrating now on the work of the staff interviewed, in terms of the day-to-day operations of the information offices, communication with journalists was a primary concern for employees, with stakeholder and issue-based communications being a close secondary task, and open events for the general public being a last key concern, but

clearly less than the rest for all EP staff across both offices. Accordingly, the details of all of these duties will be analysed, discussing their prioritisation by staff further as well.

The Press Officer for the Greek EP unit stated that the office's main regular task is to "circulate material that is produced centrally through our journalists' database or, when the topic is specialised we send material to specialised subgroups" (Interview 1). Beyond that, seminars and trips to the Parliament in Brussels and Strasburg are organised for journalists to familiarise them with the institution and with the resources it can provide. The Irish Press Officer's description of day-to-day operations, as well as the organisation of events and trips for journalists, completely aligned with the Greek official and even the leaflets and informative material presented by those officials during the interviews had the same format and content, just in different languages (Interview 5).

Specifically, as both Press Officers and all four journalists across the two countries highlighted there is an abundance of audiovisual and informative material from the Parliament available to all journalists to facilitate reporting. The details of what that material includes and how it is used was discussed mostly with the journalists and will be further analysed in the next chapter, since, while the liaison offices do manage journalists' access to that material and update the EP's record on national media and journalists, they are not involved in the production or control of audiovisual packages.

Beyond that, both EP employees working with the press agreed that, in dealing with negative news about the Parliament, it will ultimately depend on whether negative press is based on facts or not, and, if mistakes or misrepresentations on EP news are at play, then whether these are intentional or accidental (Interview 1; Interview 5). Adding to her comments on 'serious' and 'tabloid' press previously discussed, the Irish Press

Officer stated that “you provide information and the journalists have editorial freedom”, and that “real news get great coverage” (Interview 5). She elaborated that, unless stories concern real news and are based on objective representations of facts, they do not concern the office and are instead a matter of the media’s approach or of specific MEPs and EP officials’ actions instigating ‘tabloid’ stories (Interview 5).

At the same time, the Press Officer of the Athens office did appear more concerned about managing negative coverage than his Irish counterpart. On a technical level, all communications on stories which include falsehoods or lack facts will begin “in good faith”, the Greek Press Officer argued, and will begin in contacting the journalist directly and will then move to senior staff in the media outlet concerned if the issue is not resolved (Interview 1). In extreme cases, he added, there will be a sort of “protest towards the journalist or the outlet, and when it’s intentional fake news we will use our own outlets to inform citizens about the real events” (Interview 1). Such outlets, he then specified, would first be social media and the office’s website and, very rarely, an official press release. Nevertheless, even in cases of negative news more broadly, while the office cannot take any official action or position in such matters, building structures to reach out to journalists was seen as a way to contain the phenomenon of applying a negative journalistic lens on EP news (Interview 1).

To what extent however is such a lens applied to the EP in the first place? Both interviewees from the Dublin information office considered the Irish press as a whole as objective and responsible in their coverage of the EU, and particularly of the European Parliament (Interview 5; Interview 6). Nevertheless, as discussed in the context analysis, the PR official of that office did acknowledge significant ‘spillover’ in Ireland from the UK press which is something that they are always going to have to deal with, yet the

office attempts to remain apolitical and to not get involved in such issues in most cases (Interview 6). The interviewee specifically claimed that “there is a certain proportion of the population even though it’s very low in Ireland” and those groups “will of course see things differently when we do information campaigns” (Interview 6).

In that way the mission of the liaison office of the European Parliament was never heavily focused on damage control or on trying to counter Eurosceptic voices in the press and across public fora. Instead, it was more about assisting the press with EU coverage and broadly motivating the Irish to pay attention to the EU when necessary, without unnecessary interference beyond that. On the other hand, in terms of the Greek office, while the officials interviewed were not as dismissive of the existence and influence of a possible Eurosceptic lens over EP news, and while as discussed previously dealing with misrepresentations appeared more crucial for the Greek office than for the Irish one, the mission of both EP offices seemed to align almost completely (Interview 1; Interview 2).

Before however reaching a conclusion on the similarities of the mission and operations of the two offices, their activities beyond their relations with the media should be examined. While all four interviews seemed to highlight the focus on working with the media, which literature examined previously does support as an approach, the option of reaching the citizen directly was mentioned and seemed to be utilised by both offices in several ways from public events to a strong social media presence. Overall, the four employees of the Parliament taking part in this research all agreed that the main way of directly communicating with the public in a locally curated way was the organisation of public events, yet little specification was provided as to the characteristics of such events. Instead, they were simply described by the Irish PR official specifically as “public

meeting of different types, that would be public meetings for the general public where we just give general information, and so on, on a certain topic” (Interview 6).

When asked to elaborate on examples of themes and topics of those events the staff from the two offices gave similar responses but framed them very differently. According to the Greek Press Officer something organised by the office “could be a themed event or we will go in regions across Greece to inform citizens about the Parliament in a general sense or to mark a special occasion with celebrations” (Interview 1). On that point, the respondent gave the example of events on the International Women’s Day and different anniversaries of the EU and its institutions. The Irish PR official on the other hand concentrated on specialised panels and on stakeholder meetings on specific legislative issues which are either being discussed by MEPs or have been passed and are being planned, executed, or evaluated (Interview 6).

While both of those types of events are held by both offices, as further discussion with all respondents showed, the fact that these events were presented as introductory general examples of country-specific events is underlined here to question if contexts really influence the approach of each office on how to realise the European Parliament’s mission and directives. At the same time, these points also show the flexibility and fluidity of such events and the lack of a specific set of activities which are first in line for each office’s localisation strategy.

In fact, the only characteristic of such events that became immediately apparent across all interviews was the presence of, and particularly the need for, MEPs in anything directed to national publics. The Irish Press Officer distinguished between the European Parliament and the other European institutions through the former’s status as a “forum of

different points of view” (Interview 5). In that, the value of elected representatives of Irish citizens with determined constituencies and campaign platforms was very much highlighted by this respondent who essentially argued that the real reason that the EP can have its own regional communication platforms is that it has the most elements of a traditional democratic political system across the EU making it significantly more familiar to the Irish public (Interview 5).

This interviewee’s colleague working in the EP’s PR in the Dublin information office further underlined that point, noting that MEPs give both legitimacy and attract media attention for the events organised by the office. With regard to the issues covered in EP events, he noted that “the main priority really that we would have would be the interests of our own MEPs specifically” (Interview 6). Moreover, especially on specialised issues, “when you have MEPs engaging on it and when you have them taking a specific interest in particular areas then that will automatically generate a certain amount of interest” (Interview 6). Giving the example of fisheries, the Irish PR official argued that, when you have Irish MEPs being active on the Fisheries Committee of the Parliament, “fishing communities will be very much aware of the role that MEPs play”, especially because of the influence that the EP has on fishing policies and issues across member states (Interview 6). Considering then the arguments made previously on Irish apathy towards EU affairs, specialised interests can change that narrative, then again only for a limited array of issues that concern limited sections of the public and often for limited periods of time.

The Greek press officer discussed the importance of MEPs for the activities of the Parliament’s liaison office in a similar manner yet using a slightly different approach as to what these elected representatives are most useful for (Interview 1). In accordance with

his Irish counterpart, he stressed how important it is to have at least one, and ideally more than that and representing as many EP groups as possible, at all events from debates and fora on issues the EP is dealing with to celebratory gatherings for important goals being achieved, pan-European holidays, and beyond. This he argued would be primarily a matter of legitimacy, but also a key way to include as many citizens as possible and to attract coverage and visibility in national media (Interview 1).

Yet, in contrast to the Irish PR officer's claims, the employee working with the press for the Athens office did not consider the committee activities of MEPs and their role in specialised issues as an important aspect of the operations of the liaison offices. He specifically stated:

MEPs are visible in the national space in two ways: they may be communicating a specific topic they are working on [in the EP] – this however is their own choice -, yet simultaneously an MEP is also a political figure who appears in national medias with interjections in national politics as well. (Interview 1)

In fact, arguing about the importance of Greek political figures across the administration of EU institutions, while, for instance in the case of the Commission, portfolios do matter and countries will generally attempt for their Commissioners to be assigned portfolios that are relevant to their citizens, at the end of the day the presence of Greeks in any EU post will attract more attention for the liaison offices than if any other member state national controlled it. Similarly, the national political profile of Greek MEPs were identified by the EP Press Officer as the most significant in attracting national attention, both publicly and in the media, for EP issues (Interview 1).

Moreover, on EP local events, the event I attended during the research trip to Dublin should also be discussed. While a comparison with Athens is not possible as attending a similar event there was not possible, the one attended was a clear example of local EP initiatives. Generally open to the public, but specifically directed to the media, a panel on ‘fake news’, particularly online, with regard to the upcoming 2019 EP elections, was held on the 15th of June 2018 by the Dublin information office. The discussion included social media and online news experts, journalists, the head of the spokespersons’ unit of the EP in Strasbourg, an Irish MP, an Irish Senator and Irish and UK, specifically Scottish, MEPs. Hence, this structure seems to follow the idea that MEPs and other EP officials, as well as domestic actors, are always incorporated in events, and that focused and specialised issues are often preferred for EP activities.

At the same time, as the entirety of the event and the conversations it included showed, the primary task of the information office, at least in this case, seems to be to build a presence for the European Parliament domestically, and to push towards the long-term goal of a European Public Sphere. While this was not consistently apparent through the interviews, the nature of this event in relation to elections in the European Parliament, coupled with a global journalistic and media phenomenon that seems to affect public spheres internationally, point to the broader mission of liaison offices to spread the image of the EP, particularly in relation to how it can contribute to citizen representation and political processes both domestically and at the EU level. Such arguments on EP events are certainly related to the particular topic that this event involved yet, given the broader discussion in this thesis of the purpose and effects of EP offices, the experience of this event and the claims made here can contribute to that topic at least normatively.

Simultaneously however, the media-centred approach of the EP is also clear since even in

this more general and open event, the possible ways in which upcoming elections would be treated in the media and how to fight ‘fake news’ linked the event back to journalists.

Finally, a different way of bypassing traditional media and bringing the European Parliament closer to its citizen without simply facilitating its reporting, would be the use of social media by the EP’s information offices. Both PR officials interviewed were the main persons responsible for managing those accounts and both presented a straightforward plan of circulating any content about general EP activities, as well as office specific events and programs, combined with varied content on all aspects of the EU from infographics on the logistics, operations, and statistics of the Parliament, to celebratory posts about the World Cup and clips about what it means to be European and the importance of voting in EP elections (Interview 2; Interview 6).

Specifically, the employee working on Public Relations in the Athens office emphasised on the success of their social media accounts compared to those of other information offices across the EU, even evoking a light sense of competition with those other offices and a sense of pride for the size of those accounts in relation to the populations of Greece (Interview 2). When asked about what the aim of that activity was he stated that “we complement [the office’s employees working with the press], since a press release may also be on our social media”, while also some issues will only be covered in one of these two ways, and some may be covered in an official and practical way towards the press, compared to a marketing-like approach by the PR official online (Interview 2). In the case of the Irish office, the same approach was taken but was mentioned a lot more passively – mostly as a communicative avenue for events and activities of the offices alongside contacting the press and specific groups that may be

interested in each particular activity - than from those officials interviewed in Greece (Interview 6).

When asked about the possible effects of their social media presence, both with regard to EP coverage in mainstream media and independently, the two PR official were equally clear that there is no real data suggesting that social media plays any role in political communication, and especially in the performance of their offices in that area.

As the Greek EP PR official said in his interview:

Various research projects and studies say that people are influenced more and more by what they read on the internet, so to the extent that this is true I think that we would have respective results but unfortunately there are no statistics or studies that I could cite to you. [...] What I can tell you is that an advantage that we have as a body, and I know this by talking to the public, is that we are considered more objective in terms of the information that we will put out. And obviously we are careful to be objective, since we will not put out stories that we just came up with.

(Interview 2)

Acknowledging that there are some limitations of the institutional framework of the information offices when competing with news stories online, this objectivity advantage is what this respondent considered as the reason why the social media accounts of these offices are necessary (Interview 2). Similarly, the Irish PR official echoed that approach, while discussing in much less detail and not necessarily just about social media but with regard to the central communicative approach of the Dublin liaison office as a whole, which aligns with the mission and goals of the EP (Interview 6).

Hence, to conclude, the two offices, and particularly their, in total four, employees that took part in the research presented their operations and their general approaches to their work in different ways. All interviewees consistently showed that they recognised the hostility or dismissal towards the body they represented by the general public, as well as where those attitudes were coming from and how apparent and influential they were in the country they were working in. Greek officials on the one hand focused on facilitating reporting on the EU and moderating incomplete or false stories on the EP, while also helping the EP and its MEPs communicate its successes and mitigate its failures to the public. On the other hand, Irish officials stressed the need to make journalists aware of the EP and the resources that it can provide to them, and to maintain the EU as visible as possible among the Irish public, without being particularly concerned about tackling Euroscepticism or mitigating ‘fake news’ like their Greek counterparts.

Nevertheless, the core of all those narratives was very similar: bring the EP closer to the citizens it represents by promoting the institution’s media coverage, protecting its image from blatant misinformation – yet, very carefully to avoid any sort of aggressive and loud manner when doing so - and reaching citizens directly as much as possible, from specialised groups on specific issues, to the population in regions and as a whole through events and online in order to promote the broader concepts of the European Union and to introduce the Parliament more effectively into the thinking and political life of citizens across the member states represented in the EP. Even if those activities were approached in different ways or focus varied between the offices, those goals were definitely shared among both the Athens and Dublin EP information offices.

At the same time though, none of this can clearly be evaluated in any way and, in fact, no specific plan or structure which could help possible evaluations of these activities

was mentioned by any of the respondents, with all of them simply referring to a ‘central strategy’ from the European Parliament to its offices and representatives across member states. How then can the success or effectiveness of those offices with regard to the balance between context and central strategy be assessed?

This chapter has served to highlight that, while such an assessment can only be very limited, one conclusion is clear. Both offices worked primarily with journalists, and secondarily organised events and activities for the public, while also communicating and running locally any other special EP initiatives. Yet, those officials responsible for them talked about them in very different ways which, while it could hint to a different approach being taken, this is not really evident empirically. Even though analysing one-by-one events and publications of the two offices, for specialised audiences and general ones alike, could provide a better understanding of whether awareness of a context affects the offices in any real way, this research can so far argue that it does not.

Chapter Five – “You Could Have a Whole News Bulletin Only on the EU, But Who Would that Interest?”

Based on the analysis of the operations of the European Parliament liaison offices in Greece and the Republic of the Ireland, the core elements of how the EP is communicated in the two member states are similar and, even though some differences on the specific approaches and attitudes taken by the staff of those offices do exist in accordance to contextual variances between the two countries, it is crucial to examine how the journalists working in those two states perceive the EP information offices and how they and their media outlets deal with EP coverage more broadly. Doing so will allow for a better comparison of how the communication goals of the Parliament are made local from a journalistic viewpoint, but also what the challenges in media coverage could be which could in turn affect any attempt for the EP to operationalise its mission across the member states of the European Union. Specifically, this chapter will attempt to answer whether, as the analysis so far seems to suggest, journalists and the media in general are as vital for the EP liaison offices as they think they are.

This chapter will first examine the journalists’ claims on how much they cover the EU as a whole and the EP as an independent actor, as well as what themes and topics such coverage usually entails. This will be followed by the respondents’ statements on the EP office of their country and the ways in which those offices impact their work from the amount of coverage of the EP to the types of issues that are most visible in the media. Consequently, the challenges that the journalists perceive exist for EP communications in their respective contexts will be analysed, as well as the changes that the institution and its regional information offices can make to overcome such challenges. What should be

reiterated before beginning this discussion however is that the four journalists participating in this research comprised of two Brussels correspondents and two nationally based journalists, divided between Greece and Ireland. Accordingly, this chapter will conclude with a comparison of the Irish and Greek journalists between them, as well as the two Brussels correspondents and home-based journalists between them. Through those two sets of comparisons the chapter aims to uncover how both the national contexts and the professional statuses of the journalists impact their reporting work as a whole, and their relationships with the national EP offices as well.

The coverage of issues relating to the European Parliament has certainly been found by the literature previously discussed, as with all EU coverage for that matter, to be heavily nationalised and, in effect, second-order in accordance with all aspects of EU-level politics, and all journalists interviewed seemed to agree. Nevertheless, some key differences did exist both in the amount of coverage journalists identified and in the approach to that coverage that they and their colleagues seemed to take. When asking simply how much the EP appears in day-to-day coverage for instance, both Irish journalists argued that its presence was quite limited.

However, while the Dublin journalist of a music-driven station working on fast-paced snippets of news, combined with the general lack of EU coverage most days, the Brussels correspondent for a major Irish newspaper argued that being the only correspondent for that outlet with a support team in Dublin for EU coverage meant that stories on any particular institution were limited (Interview 7; Interview 8). He specifically stated that he covered “all EU institutions and European politics more broadly, huge but in effect at the moment it’s largely Brexit”, and even when the negotiations of the UK’s exit from the EU are not part of the story, focus is mostly

maintained over the Commission which has the executive power to make decisions that reach national audiences and their domestic institutions more quickly and with a stronger effect (Interview 8).

Similarly, the Greek journalists interviewed also noted that EU coverage is situational and not a daily standard, for the Athens-based journalist, or too broad to focus enough on the Parliament, for the Brussels correspondent (Interview 3; Interview 4). The journalist working for a dominant Greek TV station out of Greece described her position as International News Editor, including European affairs, while also noting that they did often prevail over other international news stories, yet they were still contained in that section of news which also limited air time, staff and resources (Interview 3). When asked when the European Parliament is covered, this journalist answered:

Only when it is dealing with issues which concern and touch upon Greece. So, in essence, it comes second after the Commission, since the Commission is a moderator of the Greek bailout program which is most often the main topic of news and coverage in the EU for the Greek media. (Interview 3)

The Brussels correspondent working for a major Greek newspaper reflected a similar approach but from a position which is a lot more specific on EU coverage. Even though he claimed that the EP plays a significant role in the news coverage that he produces due to the amount of plenary sessions and activities that come out of both Brussels and Strasbourg, he agreed with his colleague that the public and the media in Greece are still mostly concerned with the European Commission (Interview 4). “The European Parliament unfortunately still holds a negative reputation that it contributes very little in the development of [...] European legislation” he stated, adding that this in

turn does negatively affect coverage especially when pitted against the Commission, especially in relation to the bailout programs (Interview 4).

Therefore, Brexit in Ireland and the bailout programs in Greece have become key for any and all reporting within the two countries, both of which are primarily dealt with by the Commission, as all four journalists interviewed point out. This immediately creates an imbalance between the coverage of the European institutions. As the Irish Brussels correspondent highlighted: “I was a correspondent in the 90s and then I spent much more time covering the European Parliament. This time because of the pressures of Brexit I find it very difficult to devote time to the Parliament.” (Interview 8) Adding that in his previous assignment in Brussels the Union was a lot smaller and with more contained duties and responsibilities thus allowing for more coverage of, for instance, agricultural, or social policy issues that the EP is active in, this journalist underlined that the current focus on economics, trade, and foreign policy gives the Commission more attention and significance.

In any case, when the EP does appear in coverage this has to do with day-to-day stories on policies that will affect citizens directly. From the active development and implementation of the General Data Protection Regulation by the EP to joint programs with the Commission on, for instance, the abolition of roaming charges across EU member states, all four journalists identified day-to-day issues that pick up interest and which directly involve the EP, yet they collectively pointed to the limited impact and importance of any of those issues compared to mainstream EU coverage and the domination of the Commission on those matters.

Further, even in cases where reporting is clearly linked to the European Parliament and a decision with direct impact on the lives of EU citizens is taken by this institution, there is often not a clear enough distinction between the EP, the rest of the EU and national institutions. This quote from the Irish radio journalist is particularly telling of this:

Sometimes I don't think [audiences] really care you know [about what is being done at the EU level], They just hear that something's being done they might be able to tell you who's done it [between national and European institutions]. Last week there was talk about banning plastic straws, a European Parliament initiative. I'm not sure if people on the ground know where that's coming from. They kind of just hear oh straws yeah they've been banned. (Interview 3)

Using that example to answer whether the public is able to distinguish between the European and Irish parliaments in terms of decision-making and the implementation of regulations, this point alludes to the fact that everyday issues are not attracting enough attention to the EP, like often happens with issues in the Commission.

If then EU coverage is both limited and nationalised and within that framework journalistic and public interest in the EP is even further limited, what is the point of the structures on press relations of the EP information offices examined in the previous chapter? The answer may be that coverage does not simply gravitate towards the bigger domestic issues which relate to the EU and brush over the activities of, in this case, the European Parliament because that is how political developments have progressed, but that it is the role of the journalist to better manage such coverage in order to mediate

some of those issues relating to the lack of a European Public Sphere and a limited understanding of the EU and its institutions across national populations.

On a technical level, no respondent disputed the fact that the EP liaison offices are extremely helpful for all aspects of reporting on the Parliament. “It opens every door for us” the Athens-based TV journalist said, from organising access to the institutions in Brussels and Strasbourg, as well as any other EP activity or event globally, to connecting journalists with anyone in the EP and, as previously mentioned providing audiovisual content (Interview 3). Even for the Greek Brussels correspondent, whose work is often managed by offices of the EP centrally, the Athens liaison offices is key distributor of information and manager of travel, access, and any other element of being a correspondent (Interview 4).

This was also echoed by the Irish Brussels correspondent who added that the office is also vital for his team based in Dublin since they can assist those journalists with contacts and content from Brussels when the correspondent interviewed is unavailable, not in Brussels or Strasbourg or simply too occupied with work on news reporting to manage those issues for his colleagues in Ireland (Interview 8). The Dublin-based radio journalist aligned with his colleague as well, underlining the importance of the annual trips for journalists, who are not sent to the EP institutions by their media outlets, to develop a real understanding of how those bodies operate, who the people that work in them are and what their use could be for non-specialised Dublin-based journalist to make any kind of reporting on the Parliament as simple and complete as possible (Interview 7).

Moreover, this Irish journalist stressed the usefulness of the audiovisual content that the EP develops and that the information office can provide access to, for his tight

schedule and overload of content and information. In the interview he commented that the EP audiovisual service “actually write a radio script and attach radio broadcast-able audio onto it that’s sent out, we pick up on some of those because they are ready to go” (Interview 7). He continued to offer the example of offering free interrail passes to young EU citizens as a story that fit the radio station’s audience and was used without significant work from the part of the journalist (Interview 7). Accordingly, even though it is often framed in different ways, all respondents identified the benefits from working with the EP liaison offices of their respective country, even if that mainly concerned having a point of contact for people and services which exist centrally within the European Parliament.

Yet, on the reporting environment in the two countries with regard to EP and EU coverage, all journalists taking part in this research agreed in some way that they and their colleagues could do more to familiarise themselves with the European system. “We understand the local system better than the European system” the Dublin-based journalist said when justifying why coverage may sometimes rely on nationalising the issues instead of focusing on them through an EU-level lens (Interview 7). In Greece, the TV reporter interviewed claimed, this lack of knowledge and familiarity with the EU became prevalent and was especially damaging for European news coverage when, through the financial crisis of the Eurozone and the bailout programs that ensued, all EU institutions and processes, as well as key actors and leaders, were introduced to the public by a press corps with limited familiarity to those themselves (Interview 3). Moreover, “many older Greek journalists had a peculiar attitude and perception towards the EU”, which significantly weakened their willingness to learn about the institutions and to cover them in the same way that they covered national ones (Interview 3).

Now, however this is changing, and the Greek participants consider the EP office as a key contributor in such developments. “If the office did not exist, especially with this particular team of staff, I think things would be even worse on how open and comfortable Greek journalists are with what is happening [in the European Parliament]” the Athens-based TV journalist argued (Interview 3). Yet, this also seems to hint at the willingness of both the media and audiences to educate themselves and each other in terms of the EU institutions and political processes. The Greek Brussels correspondent recalls when he started reporting on the EU, then based in Athens and assigned to European news by his newspaper due to the Eurozone crisis and the extreme rise in such coverage at the time (Interview 4). Seminars and information sessions organised by the EP liaison offices were critical in his ability to manage the workload on a set of institutions and political processes which he had little training on. While he does not attend anymore, he considers such activities as more necessary as ever (Interview 4).

After being asked how EP seminars for journalists can help coverage, the Greek journalist covering the EU from Brussels pointed to the huge number of journalists who are either new in European coverage or for those who do not work exclusively on it (Interview 4). EU, and even specifically EP, issues touch so many aspects of domestic activities and thus reach all sections of news thus making it critical for most journalists to have some knowledge and understanding of the institutions and their operations. Even now, “few journalists understand – including editors, and even me that I have been working exclusively on this for eight years – few understand fully how the EU operates” he added (Interview 4). In fact, both Greek journalists agreed that, despite improvements on how familiar those working in the Greek media are with the EU, the limited or subjective knowledge that they perceive among many of their colleagues, even

themselves to an extent, can still have critically negative effects on how the European Parliament is seen by the public.

Despite the previously mentioned acknowledgement that Irish audiences are for the most part not too concerned about the bodies of the European Union and their activities, the journalists interviewed in Dublin seemed a lot less concerned than their Greek colleagues about the need to build more familiarity with the EU among those working in Irish media. Specifically, on the one hand, the Dublin-based radio journalist specifically said that “more could be done to educate the public about where laws come from and which ones are European and which ones are from here”, yet he expanded to say that, for EU-level issues to capture the public’s attention, they need to be about “things that actually affect people’s daily lives that you can clearly explain to them” (Interview 7). This journalist in particular stressed the point that the European Parliament as a body, and MEPs representing Ireland specifically, need to be more in touch with what the public’s interests are and to guide their approaches to communication in that way, instead of what political issue or development seems most crucial to them, since these topics are sometimes “very hard to explain” as he claimed (Interview 7).

While this radio reporter did acknowledge the fact that “I suppose we are guilty as well, as journalists of sort of forgetting about MEPs” due to their work being dominated by national MPs (called Teachta Dála (TDs) in Ireland), but this can be changed by making “press releases a bit more clearer and more relevant to your audience” as he said referring mainly to MEPs but also to the EP more broadly (Interview 7). In contrast, the Irish Brussels correspondent did not consider lack of clarity in press releases and the issues that are communicated as the main problem causing gaps in the media coverage of the European Parliament (Interview 8). Instead, he argued that “the

problem is the volume of stuff coming out of Europe is huge”, reiterating his previously mentioned comment on the impact of EU expansion, “so, inevitably, there is a selection of stories that don’t get out and I can’t say that there is anything in a particular category” (Interview 8). Comparing those two points about the Irish coverage of the EP and citizens’ perceptions, the impact of the journalist’s level of specialisation on the EU and the respective media outlet’s type and quantity of news content becomes apparent.

At the same time, this claim by the Irish radio journalist on the importance of MPs versus MEPs for the media hints to the possible role of elected officials in EP news, especially compared to pieces on the rest of the European Union. As mentioned in chapter three, this respondent noted that Irish citizens “elect MEPs and kind of forget about them for a while”, and in the same way the media, especially in Dublin compared to local media in rural areas, are busy and “don’t have time to sit down and do interviews with MEPs all the time you know”, as he claimed (Interview 7). Even the Irish Brussels correspondent who is also in the same location as elected officials, stated that MEPs certainly do not guide the type of news that are covered and even if they do appear in stories “the role of MEPs in all of the things that I’ve been writing about is coming out of this office rather than from me, [...] simply because I don’t have time to follow the work of the MEPs” (Interview 8). Both respondents repeated the narrative the activities of MEPs do not fit into coverage because larger issues are considered more eminent, like Brexit and other EP-wide and EU-wide issues and conversations.

Such comments however were a lot more prevalent among the Irish journalists compared to their Greek colleagues. The Greek Brussels newspaper correspondent claimed that, while he utilises European sources in Brussels and the EP information office in Athens to develop his coverage on the Parliament, he also consistently

communicates with MEPs, and even more so they communicate with him to spread their own viewpoints and issues and to have their activities included in coverage (Interview 4). At the same time, this journalist perceived the communication strategies of Greek MEPs not as a way to make citizens more aware of the ways in which they are represented in the EP, or to influence the institution's image in Greece. Rather, the respondent claimed that MEPs are only visible and familiar for the public because "they certainly want to return to Greece and [...] they promote their agendas [domestically] because they consider, for some reason, that they would be better off in Greek politics" (Interview 4). The Greek correspondent added that, based on his experience, Members of the European Parliament from Greece consider their EU position as a 'break' in their career or as a way to regain legitimacy with national audiences (Interview 4).

This viewpoint was very much supported by the Athens-based TV journalist, who argued that MEPs do appear in news coverage and, even when they do not impact the choices of media outlets on what issues to cover, they will find a way to introduce their perspective and role in the issues that are covered, or to simply interact within issues and debates of Greek domestic politics (Interview 3). She further added that it is not just the effort of those elected officials that brings them in coverage since audiences seem to pay more attention when a Greek MEP is involved in a story. This she clarified happened mostly after the introduction of the 'cross', voting for specific candidates instead of party lists in the way that Greek MPs are elected, which began in the 2009 EP elections. Since then, the reporter said:

it is understood [by the public] in some way that the MEP will fight [for Greece] in a way. But maybe it's not even that. I think that this is all based on how little

we know and how familiar we are with what is happening [in the EP]. We put all those expectations and all of our partial knowledge onto it. (Interview 3)

Expanding on that point, she claimed that, for the Greek context, elected officials can bring the political processes and decision making of the European Union closer to the arena of domestic politics and personalities that populations are familiar with and that they understand (Interview 3). Yet, since as her Brussels-based colleague noted, MEPs are more concerned with promoting their own agendas instead of that of the EP more broadly, this can have little to no impact for the institution's communicative and media profile, or for its image and familiarity within Greece.

Referring back to the chapters on the staff of the EP information offices that participated in this research, the most references on the work of MEPs came from the Irish office, while the Athens office considered them important in promoting the representativeness of the EP, but also as actors which worked independently from the profile of the Parliament as a key institution of the EU and have their own political goals that they are pursuing. It is then interesting that Irish journalists were not very concerned about MEPs and their profiles and, even when they were as in the case of the Dublin-based radio journalist, they did see them as not visible enough because they do not communicate fitting aspects of their work with regard to the interests of the Irish citizens that they represent (Interview 7). Greek journalists considered the EP elected officials as very present in the Greek public sphere, even too attached to domestic politics in some ways, thus considering that they add very little to the EP (Interview 3; Interview 4).

Accordingly, the visibility of MEPs and the eagerness of the EP offices to incorporate them into their day-to-day activities and operations do not necessarily

correspondent to each other. Yet simultaneously this may not be surprising if we consider that in the Greek context where such visibility is increased, the effects for the Parliament as an institution and, in turn, for the goals of its Athens liaison offices are limited. This could then promote the development of an independent communicative path from the institution and the utilisation of MEPs mostly to build credibility and legitimacy, which is the standard way in which MEPs are incorporated in EP strategies across both member states examined here.

In conclusion, the Irish and Greek journalists interviewed did present two contexts in both of which the respective European Parliament information offices facilitate reporting on EP issues and, even when it is just administrative support, those offices do in a way bring their central institutions closer to citizens, at least by creating a line of communication between Brussels and Strasbourg and those journalists reporting on them from the EU member states. At the same time, there are several contrasts in the specific attitudes of how journalists in each country report on the European Parliament and this could be largely contextually anchored. In fact, this could highlight possible weaknesses of the EP offices not so much in its technical services, since all journalists agreed that it was critical and extremely effective for their EU reporting, but in terms of how much they relied on MEPs, and generally how long-term normative goals of a European Public Sphere, or any form of pan-European coverage for that matter are pursued.

On the one hand, the Irish journalists participating in this research presented a context where either vast EU-wide issues, such as Brexit, dominate conversations, or coverage ends up being about day-to-day topics which can impact citizens directly and in a practical way. Yet, in the Greek context, the presence of a long-standing dominating topic of coverage, the Eurozone crisis and the Greek bailout programs that followed it,

does not seem to overshadow other EU political issues, as long as they relate to and touch upon Greece in some way, or they involve prominent Greek political figures. What instead seemed most problematic for journalists in how they perceived coverage was the lack of any representation of the EP from Greek elected officials of that very body, and the huge domestic political involvement of those officials which does not allow for them to be more strongly associated with and used by the EP to attract coverage.

At the same time, all journalists across the two countries agreed that a lot more could be done to change their attitude towards EP coverage and to allow for the Parliament to enter national media in a different way. As the reasons behind problematic journalistic attitudes towards EP coverage naturally varied across the two contexts, the end results also seemed to align with the broader sentiments over the European Parliament across Ireland and Greece. In the former, lack of understanding and familiarity with the institutions and limited coverage did not promote any interest towards developments on the EU governance level aside from those themes previously identified. In the latter, subjective or distorted perceptions and understandings of the EP and the EU from journalists themselves quickly came to the surface during the boom in coverage over the crisis and the bailouts, with the effects of that phenomenon still causing an attitude of ‘damage control’ in the relationship between the media and the EP. Therefore, while the two contexts varied and coverage of the EP also varied accordingly, similarities do exist in some aspects of issues in how the institution is reported. Nevertheless, the significant variation in the causes of those problems would also dictate the need for different solutions to them both within the media themselves and from the EP.

Chapter Six – Covering News and Personalities or Educating Audiences?

Stemming from the analyses of the previous two chapters, the European Parliament and the journalists and media outlets across member states covering it all have to make a decision about how communications on EP issues will carry on, if both the apathy and the scepticism of the Greek and Irish contexts are to be addressed in some way. This chapter will now discuss how all the interviewees of both EP officials and journalists in Greece and Ireland portrayed the future of EP communications and what they recommended in fighting key contextual issues on attitudes to the EP. Further, the broader question of what, if anything, can be done by the EP to promote the creation of an EPS should now also be examined. Consequently, claims on the effectiveness of the EP information office will in turn be made through this, mainly normative, discussion.

In terms of the EP officials interviewed, in both the Athens and the Dublin office, a standard mission to reach out to citizens as much as possible was presented but without a clear orientation of how that could be achieved. On the one hand, the Greek EP officials seemed most concerned with guaranteeing a voice for the European Parliament in the media and the Greek public space, and in promoting the democratic character of the Parliament to bring more legitimacy to the institutions and support its image within Greece (Interview 1; Interview 2). On the other hand, Irish officials appeared to focus on the EP issues, particularly specialised ones, which can significantly affect Irish citizens and how these can be best communicated through the media and directly to the public (Interview 5; Interview 6). Compared to the Athens office in fact, the Irish office appeared to be a lot less focused on how to present and explain the Parliament to the Irish public, rather choosing to deal with the issues and news at hand at each point in time. At the same time, as previously argued, those differences exist primarily on the approach

that EP officials took in the interviews, without providing any evidence that the same approach is reflected in the EP's actual activities.

Journalists across the two EU member states also diverged significantly in terms of the priorities they identified in their reporting. Specifically, both Greek journalists were very aware of issues in the perceptions of the Greek public on the European Parliament, and the EU as a whole (Interview 3; Interview 4). Further, both respondents clearly identified the position of the media in those processes and the ways in which journalists' attitudes on the EU as they began covering it more with the Eurozone crisis influenced the image of these bodies in the Greek public sphere, adding that these perceptions of journalists are now changing, as does the way in which the EU and the EP are covered. The journalists also added that activities and initiatives from the EP liaison office in Athens and the EU bodies centrally did seem to, at least partially, cause these shifts and so these processes are hopefully moving to a new direction (Interview 3; Interview 4).

The two Irish journalists also pointed towards issues that coverage of the EU and the EP in Ireland has suffered and the problems that these have caused, as well as the role of journalists in changing that (Interview 7; Interview 8). Yet, they did not, in the way that their Greek colleagues did, point towards a need for more education of journalists and their audience over the EU, as much as they argued for a strategy to promote more appropriate, relevant, and simply interesting news and issues curated for European citizens both regionally and across member states. While they did acknowledge that there is lack of familiarity with and knowledge of the EU among journalists and audiences alike, a more selective approach over what issues from the abundance of EU and EP news and developments are focused on in communications and how this is done was the main

approach they considered as the most potentially impactful and effective on dealing with apathy (Interview 7; Interview 8). Nevertheless, this national differences could also be justified by exactly that distinction between attitudes in the two contexts, scepticism and apathy.

In addition, interviewees spoke about how they perceive narratives and theories over the creation of a European Public Sphere and commented on implemented and proposed initiative from the EU and the EP aiming to contribute to that process, and their claims should be analysed at this point. Stemming from the presented arguments of the respondents, this chapter seeks to examine two main ways of communicating the EP in Ireland and Greece in the future: educating audiences about this European institution, its activities and their importance for citizens, or; the use of interesting topics, stories, and personalities to attract interest over EP news.

This dilemma was most explicitly rejected by the Greek newspaper Brussels correspondent, who argued that without further education about the EU both from the media and the European Union, no communicative initiative will be successful in the short or long term and that using stories as a driver for interest to the EU even hurts the long-term goals of the EU to create an EPS (Interview 4). However, all three other journalists also noted some type of this dilemma, pointing to the need for more education-focused media in the case of the Greek TV journalist (Interview 3), the need for more institutional educative initiatives as per the Irish correspondent (Interview 8), or the need for more relatable and interesting stories and actors from the side of the EP (Interview 7). Moreover, this dilemma seems to extend among EP officials as well, but only in terms of their opinions on the matter, and not with regard to their work.

Specifically, the two EP Press Officers diverged in their own narratives during the interviews quite significantly. On the one side of the spectrum, the Irish Press Officer concentrated during her interview on getting stories out there, and getting journalists closer to the EP to do so (Interview 5), yet while this approach was shared by her Greek counterpart, it was clearly coupled by a need to educate the publics directly as much as possible to “dissolve the solid mass that people think of when they think of Brussels” (Interview 1). Nevertheless, as both PR interviews showed, regardless of that gap in the opinions of some EP officials, the two offices pursued both strategies equally, using thus stories as much as possible while also consistently pushing EU awareness directly to the public through events, social media and, when possible, the media itself (Interview 2; Interview 6).

Therefore, each strategy would need to be examined both from EP officials’ and journalists’ perspectives to determine how possible their implementation would be and what potential they could have, both on their own and combined. At the same time, any evaluations that interviewees offered of the current approach by the EP office on those two broad tasks will also be discussed. Hence, in order to conduct this evaluation, the concept of an EPS for EP information office employees and journalists should now be presented as the basis of their views on future prospects of EU communication.

While all respondents touched upon the questions and debates over the existence or development of a European Public Sphere in some way, both the Greek and the Irish Press Officers, as well the Brussels correspondents from both countries referred to the EPS most explicitly. Yet, for all respondents and particularly the four mentioned, EPS references did not happen through a direct quote as much as they did through a general tone and attitude across a series of statements in different parts of interviews. Further,

even the other four participants, the two home-based journalists and the two PR officials of the EP offices did hint to the concept, usually by referring to the need for more cohesion in reporting across Europe and for the need for citizens to be as connected as possible to other member states, through programs like Erasmus. At the same time, the concept was touched upon the least by the Irish radio journalist based in Dublin who only approached narratives of an EPS by discussing cross-member state activities, mostly involving travel like journalists' trips to Brussels, Strasbourg, or to events elsewhere organised by the EP offices. Finally, if EPS discourses were compared nationally, the respondents from Greece overall showed a lot more knowledge and insight about it, and made the clearer connections to elements that an EPS could encompass.

While some conclusions from those general trends within the interviews, the content of those references on the EPS should be discussed in more detail. The most direct comment on the EPS came from the Greek EP Press Officer during his discussion of EP elections and possible ways to improve how they are perceived, and consequently citizen involvement (Interview 1). He noted that an issue with past EP initiatives on breaking its second-order status, in elections and beyond, was that they were premature. Accordingly, for future initiatives like the proposed establishment of transnational lists to remove national political parties from EP elections and bring EU-wide groups to the forefront of campaigns, a more developed EPS is vital. He then added that the EPS "is something that is being built progressively, the progress appears really slow but comparing now with, for instance, ten years ago, before the crisis, citizens knew far less about [EU] issues" (Interview 1). The press officer expanded accordingly that the relationship of his office with the media is playing a role in this process and, while activities directly with citizens could also have an impact, as discussed by literature in the

first chapter, the media can amplify any aspect of communication in a way that direct initiatives cannot.

This was echoed to an extent by the Greek Brussels correspondent, who pointed to the anchoring of any EU, and especially EP, coverage in Greece and beyond on the national political figures and their actions, without discussing or comprehending the structures and institutions of the Union as a whole. Pointing to coverage within the bubble of member states, the respondent argued:

The composition of the EP is not covered at all [in the Greek media]. We hear about MEPs but not about the Secretary Generals, or about key positions in the Parliament, those in the background who are the ones to dictate the agenda before the MEPs even begin debating. (Interview 4)

While the comments on who holds power are debatable and go far beyond the scope of this research, this claim could point to the role of the EPS as a general forum or base upon which European citizens could begin their 'education' about the EU prior to seeing a national and regional lens to the same issue. Furthermore, he considers that any such process needs to begin from national governments which will have to give up some of that media coverage capital to the EU institutions, for journalist to in turn be able to take any initiative in shaping coverage differently (Interview 4). This respondent in particular used the most such references without at the same time pointing directly to the EPS.

In the Irish context on the other hand, the two respondents referring to the EPS the most focused on the lack of EU issues from any sort of visibility within Ireland. In contrast to arguments over nationalisation of EP news and the usefulness of an EPS in mediating that which were key points in the Greek case, the Irish Brussels correspondent

argued that there needs to be more interest and investment to the EP first for an EPS to actually be developed and be successful, at least within Ireland (Interview 8). Reacting to the Spitzenkandidaten process of choosing the President of the Commission through the most popular party in EP elections, and the proposals of transnational lists for MEPs, he stated:

From an Irish point of view [a transnational lists system] isn't going to do anything for enhancing the visibility or the legitimacy of the Parliament, it's a bit of a red herring, just like the Spitzenkandidaten system. [...] There is an illusion that some MEPs have that somehow by having a candidate who is going to be their candidate for the presidency of the Commission, that somehow they make the Commission appear more legitimate, that is just not true. (Interview 8)

This quote reflects a general approach by this participant to such initiatives and to the ways in which the EP and the EU consider that they can influence their image among citizen by uploading as many processes as possible to the cross-national level. By rejecting the potential of such proposals completely, the overall EPS perspective in the debate over the legitimacy of the EP and the Union it operates within is rejected.

Moreover, even among Greek participants who presented the EPS as having better potentials than Irish ones did, initiatives like the transnational list system were not necessarily welcomed by all respondents. While the EP Press officer and the Brussels correspondent interviewed in Greece did express their concern about such a plan being proposed too early in the process of making an EPS, the Athens-based TV journalist was even more clear in her rejection of such a move being successful for the EP, its electoral process, and its legitimacy. If transnational lists were to be implemented, Greeks voters

would simply “go to their local MP and ask who to vote for, so I don’t know that it will have any result” (Interview 3). She further justified this claim by highlighting that, as reflected in feedback and reaction to her coverage of the EP by audiences, Greeks have very little to no knowledge about the democratic process in the EP so removing the point of reference to the national Parliament would leave a huge gap which would be then filled by the domestic political system once again (Interview 3). At the same time, an EPS is very much possible for this journalist, but there are a lot of smaller steps to be taken first on how EU citizens interact with the EP, that any form of transnational list is far too complex and currently lacks any ground for its success to be at all possible.

From this framing of the EPS in both Greece and Ireland, and in the EU more broadly, it could be argued that respondents pointed to elements of an education of the public a lot more than simply framing news in a more interesting or relevant way. Could it be though that citizens could actually be educated on the EP and the EU by structuring communications in a more relevant way? The arguments on the need for day-to-day issues which affect daily lives made particularly by the Irish nationally-based journalist, along with others in Ireland, and which were discussed earlier in this analysis then point to an expectation that the EP, and even more so MEPs according to interviewees, need to become more strategic about what issues they communicate and how. Through that claim, Irish apathy towards the European institutions could then be justified by a problematic lack of attention attracted by the EP, according to the Dublin radio journalist (Interview 7).

The Greek Brussels correspondent’s viewpoint that the development of an EPS and the move towards EU coverage being more European is at the hands of the Union, its offices, and national governments and key political actors that was previously mentioned

would point to a similar allocation of responsibility for action beyond the media (Interview 4). While this respondent and both Irish journalists which made the same argument point to almost a push of responsibility away from their professional position, the Greek Athens-based reporter argued for a different attitude from national media as possible, if not necessary, and as a way to push both EU and national political actors to also take a similar approach. But on how coverage is formed within the media she commented:

[A shift in EP and EU coverage] is at the hands of the TV stations, not the journalists. It will have to be done with some sort of basis, there will need to be coordination [between journalists and executives of one or more media outlets], and it will have to be a central decision and strategy, because, no matter how willing and how knowledgeable I am in order to pursue that if it is not decided by the executive team to have EU news from a European lens on a daily basis [...] there is no point [in one journalist doing anything]. (Interview 3)

Yet, she also added that if such an approach were to be taken by the media, what should mostly be included would need to be educational content. “You could have a whole news bulletin only on the EU, but who would that interest?” she asked, to underline that, unless you frame it in an educational manner to familiarise audiences with processes, actors, and major issues at the EU level, there would be no other way to get attention to those bulletins and those stories on the EU and the EP. (Interview 3) Accordingly, for all respondents individually and as groups either per country or per profession, their perspective of an EPS is far from clear cut and with so many elements involved in this concept and its development, there cannot be one guaranteed way to successfully construct it.

What should be noted at this point however is that, despite how vocal EP officials were for the most part in aiming towards and slowly building structures for an effective EPS, the specific approaches that should be taken to achieve that were very much missing from any EP official's discourse. The only concept that all EP information office employees interviewed really mentioned was the aim to bring the European Parliament and its decision-making process as close to the public as possible. As discussed, the ways in which they envisioned this varied, but no EP official argued for education or promotion of stories and personalities specifically. Rather, especially the two Press Officers, stressed that material and resources are made accessible to journalists and that they are both aware of them and how the institutions that distribute them operate (Interview 1; Interview 5). Yet, beyond that, all kinds of visibility and news, particularly for those working in the Irish EP information office, seemed like good news.

Regardless, the question of what approach should be pursued between educating audiences and promoting stories and personalities to aid that process most effectively should still be addressed. Based on the arguments and analyses that all participants offered over what an EPS would look like, what its benefits could be for the European Parliament and how it can be, in turn, created, there is an understanding that an EPS is indeed possible and 'under construction'. Nevertheless, how this will specifically happen is not particularly highlighted by EP officials as a question, and journalists, for the most part, do not consider that they have the primary responsibility to coordinate and manage any such process.

Still, to the extent that journalists consider that they can contribute to the development of an EPS through their reporting of the EU, educating audiences appears crucial since, as illustrated by points on the abundance of EP stories which are not

addressed by national media across the EU, understanding what powers the EU has and how the citizens themselves can utilise those powers is crucial in constructing an EPS. At the same time, accordingly with this, such a shift of communicating the EU to the education of publics would also need to take into account the factor of attracting interest in the stories in the first place. Using both relevant issues as first in the line of communications and reporting of the EP, as well as attractive personalities to build an interesting context for citizens to get involved in it, it is then possible to move into more of an educative role of those very stories to explain the structures of the EP and the role of citizens in them.

Thus, to conclude, no one approach can encompass sufficient interest and information on the European Parliament without applying both selectiveness in what stories are most promoted for coverage and where and how this is done, as well as a clear approach of explaining the structures of the EU and ‘training’ citizens and journalists alike to develop the intuitiveness that they have with domestic news and to apply that to the European level. The concept of consistent EP coverage, from an EU lens, on national media discussed earlier can then be one way through which these two approaches are merged and are accordingly combining their effects for the achievement of the broader goals of the European Parliament. This would be one of the few ways that the EU could both communicate itself and be communicated, yet neither direction of that approach has been sufficiently implemented, observed, and analysed to provide more information about its actual correlation to more citizen involvement and a shift in how the EP is understood.

Conclusions

This thesis set out to discuss the ways in which the European Parliament communicates itself to citizens, and is communicated by the media, both in the broad context of the European Union across member states, national populations, and sociopolitical trends and in the small, localised context of the Athens and Dublin liaison offices of the European Parliament, their day-to-day operations and the position of journalists and the media in such processes. Basing a discussion then on all of these singular, local, and EU-wide elements which are at play with each other in the cases examined, the question of the ways in which the European Parliament is trying to inform the European public of its growing influence, and the degree of the success and effectiveness of those attempts is set out to structure such an examination.

Through the analysis of existing literature on the development of the EP communication strategies, and the EU ones as a whole, both historically as well as in a contemporary context, the key values, aims, and missions of those policies over time are highlighted. This quickly raises the issue of vagueness across EU communications and the lack of any specific approach to tackle its ‘communication deficit’, beyond generic mission statement like that of bringing the European institutions closer to their citizens. In turn, the concept of a European Public Sphere as a theoretical framework for such initiatives to operate within is introduced to point to the nationalisation of any and all EU issues by member states as a trend which began with second-order EP elections being engulfed by the national political system and all other aspects of the European Parliament facing similar problems when being communicated within member states.

Building off existing research on the EPS, and the role of the EU institutions, and particularly the Parliament, within member state contexts then underlines the gap left by previous studies not only on the peculiarities of the EP's position in national communicative contexts, but also the separation of studies on journalists and the role within the EPS from the research on the institutions. Accordingly, comparing the work of EP officials in member state contexts between each other, as well as how local journalists perceived that work in each context is set out as the strategy of this research in order to address this very gap.

Contextually, Greece and Ireland are selected as two extreme opposites in terms of attitudes towards the European institutions, especially when considering that during the Eurozone crisis the two countries were often grouped together as part of PIIGS, the countries most affected by the financial crisis and the ones requiring the most support from the EU. Further, as previous research has shown, EU communications and their success often depend on adapting to local contexts, which is why these two diverse cases are ideal to test localisation and, accordingly, answer the questions of the thesis. The extreme divergence of the attitudes in the two states since then makes them then ideal to uncover how similar or different the approaches of the EP in member states are, and what impact those differences can have. This is further highlighted through the contextual discussion on the two countries based on existing literature as well as the interviews conducted which found that while the Greek context was dominated by scepticism towards any communication initiatives from the EP or the EU, in Ireland the same initiatives were treated with apathy.

The most impactful aspect of the data collected in this research however would be that on the similarities and differences of EP officials and journalists as professionals

in each of the two countries respectively. On those working for the EP information offices it was found that, unsurprisingly, while there is a degree of localisation in relation to the events organised by the offices and what issues are most communicated publicly and to the media by those offices, generally both the content and the approaches to how it is treated and distributed seemed very centrally anchored in both Greece and Ireland and was generally identified as very similar in the two contexts. While some differences did exist on how much, for instance, MEPs were emphasised in the offices' work and in the attitudes of the EP official towards how necessary it was to increase coverage in its country, for the most part the vague communicative mission of the EP to bring as much information to the public and the media about the institution and to allow for the national actors to dominate in communication beyond that was clear across both offices.

In contrast, overall both the approach and the actual reporting of journalists in the two states differed quite significantly, while attitudes on the EP offices of their respective countries were quite similar. Reflecting their audience's coverage demands, all journalists interviewed treated EU news through a clearly national lens, yet Greek reporters seemed a lot more inclined to discuss how this could change and to identify the benefits of the media taking a new approach to how it treats the EU institutions. Irish reporters on the other hand were clearly motivated by the public's interests which mostly involved EP legislation that can be immediately impactful for Irish citizens, or larger issues like Brexit. While bigger EU issues like the continuous developments of the Greek bailout programs were also extremely important for Greek respondents, the willingness in their attitude to examine how shifts in coverage can occur hints to the push towards change in the visibility of the EP that scepticism in Greece could have produced.

While it should be noted that, particularly for journalists, such phenomena could have been caused here by the limited sample of media outlets examined for each country, the general approach by academics analysing the two contexts does seem to fit with the claims made here about journalistic attitudes. Specifically, focusing on education of audiences in Greece more than Ireland could be a direct product of the fact that attitudes towards European institutions in Greece are not positive, or even neutral as in Ireland, but are clearly negative and scepticism about EU coverage consistently dominates Greek media, as the interviewees pointed out as well. That being said, caution does need to be taken on these claims since, unlike EP offices themselves, media approaches can vary extremely between journalists and media outlets and so the sample can have a significant impact on any such conclusion.

Furthermore, the ways in which the prospects of a developing European Public Sphere are perceived in the two countries also differs significantly. While all journalists and EP officials acknowledged the EPS' development as an ongoing process, only those in Greece clearly identified their role in that process and how they can cause the EPS to progress further. Accordingly, even though broadly in the two countries EP officials had similar professional approaches and journalists generally differed in key points, they all differed per country in their eagerness to discuss concepts of a European Public Sphere and the prospects that it could have for EP and EU communications and the perceptions of those bodies by citizens in each country.

So, how is the EP informing its citizens about itself and how effective have such attempts been? The European Parliament has consistently expanded its communicative approaches across several different fields from media relations to direct dialogue and marketing. Nevertheless, as the combined data from interviewing journalists and EP

officials show, the ways in which the body is portrayed in mainstream media is crucial for the attitudes towards it across different member states. In addition, there is a significant need to create common reference points across the coverage on the EP on an EU-wide scale which only seems achievable through steady progress towards a European Public Sphere. From the analytical categories established in this thesis, two major points can be made on this.

Firstly, and most importantly, the European Parliament offices do not appear as if they have been given the appropriate independence, or the right central strategy, to be able to adapt to the contexts and challenges around them. Even though all EP employees interviewed identify in detail what the attitudinal and sociopolitical contexts of Greece and Ireland in relation to the EU and the EP were, their activities, material, day-to-day tasks and general approach to their goals were virtually the same. Any differences reflecting contexts that could be identified in practice only concerned adapting to the domestic current affairs in terms of what topics are emphasised from the EP. Nevertheless, this still did not seem to create a sufficiently distinguishable approach between the two offices considering how different EU attitudes are and the key distinction between scepticism and apathy to EU news that accompanies those attitudes.

Secondly, the media clearly are a priority for information offices and this is fully justified by the literature on the consistent dominance of traditional newscasting in forming and shifting political attitudes. While public events, social media, and other alternative initiatives are pursued by the offices, journalists in practice remain in the center of the liaison offices' operations. However, journalists are not necessarily willing to take on the task of introducing, or reintroducing, the public to the European Parliament and, so, a form of second-order reporting emerges which, especially in the Irish case,

appears to be expecting changes in the nature and form of the European Parliament and the type of news that it produces in order for their attitudes to EP news to also change. Even in the Greek case where a need to initiate change can be identified among journalists this is still conditional to changes in the EP, and an institutional will from the media executives to pursue such a process as well.

Therefore, it appears that, not only are European Parliament information offices currently unable to fully adapt to the peculiarities of the Greek and Irish realities, but even if they did, there seems to be a need for several other conditions to also be fulfilled for that localisation to have a real impact on EU attitudes in member states. The development of a European Public Sphere could be the main and ultimate such condition, yet right now this should be preceded by political changes in the EP and changes in the approach of the media, but, most importantly, for these conditions to actually occur the attraction of interest in EU and EP news without scepticism or dismissal across member states is vital. This, in turn, seems possible either through educating the public about the European institutions, developing a sense of virality in EP stories and personalities, or combining the two. This could already be happening as some of the data presented here seem to suggest, yet it is certainly at an extremely early stage and changes are most likely necessary for it to continue, at least with regard to Greece and Ireland.

Bibliography

- Anderson, P. and McLeod, A. (2004). The Great Non-Communicator? The Mass Communication Deficit of the European Parliament and its Press Directorate*. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 42(5), pp.897-917.
- Andreadis, I., & Stavrakakis, Y. (2017). European Populist Parties in Government: How Well are Voters Represented? Evidence from Greece. *Swiss Political Science Review*, 23(4), 485-508. doi: 10.1111/spsr.12255
- Andreica, A. (2014). The European Parliament in Social Media. *On-Line Journal Modelling The New Europe*, (12), 122-135. Retrieved from <https://search-proquest-com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/docview/1621398749?pq-origsite=summon>
- Baccini, L., Sudulich, L., & Wall, M. (2016). Internet Effects in Times of Political Crisis. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 80(2), 411-436. doi: 10.1093/poq/nfv055
- Balcytiene, A., & Vinciuniene, A. (2010). Assessing Conditions for the Homogenisation of the European Public Sphere: How Journalists Report, and Could Report, on Europe. In C. Bee & E. Bozzini, *Mapping the European Public Sphere: Institutions, Media and Civil Society*(pp. 141-158). Farnham: Ashgate Publishing.
- Barbu, C., Barbu, I., & Negulescu, M. (2016). Key Moments in the History of EU Communication from Unidirectional to Bidirectional Communication. *Journal Of Advanced Research In Economics And International Business*, 4(5), 9 - 12. Retrieved from <https://journals.aserspublishing.eu/jareib/article/view/1233>
- Bee, C. (2010). Understanding the EU's Institutional Communication: Principles and Structure of a Contested Policy. In C. Bee & E. Bozzini, *Mapping the European Public Sphere: Institutions, Media and Civil Society* (pp. 83-98). Farnham: Ashgate Publishing.
- Bee, C., & Bello, V. (2009). A European Model of the Public Sphere: Towards a Networked Governance Model. In J. Harrison & B. Wessels, *Mediating Europe: New Media, Mass Communications and the European Public Sphere* (pp. 128-149). New York: Berghahn Books.
- Boomgaarden, H., De Vreese, C., Schuck, A., Azrout, R., Elenbaas, M., Van Spanje, J., & Vliegthart, R. (2013). Across time and space: Explaining variation in news coverage of the European Union. *European Journal Of Political Research*, 52(5), 608-629. doi: 10.1111/1475-6765.12009
- Brüggemann, M. (2005). How the Eu Constructs the European public Sphere Seven Strategies of Information Policy. *Javnost - The Public*, 12(2), 57-73. doi: 10.1080/13183222.2005.11008888
- Bruggemann, M. (2010). The Information and Communication Policy of the European Union between Institutionalisation and Legitimation. In C. Valentini & G. Nesti, *Public Communication in the European Union: History, Perspectives and Challenges* (pp. 67-92). Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

- Casanas Adam, E., Kagiarios, D., & Tierney, S. (2018). Democracy in Question? Direct Democracy in the European Union. *European Constitutional Law Review*, 14(2), 261-282. doi: 10.1017/s1574019618000160
- Clement, A. (2015). Reporting on the 'ever closer union': narrative framing in national news medias and resistance to EU integration. *Eastern Journal Of European Studies*, 6(1), 123-135.
- Cornia, A. (2010). The Europeanization of Mediterranean journalistic practices and the Italianization of Brussels: Dynamics of the interaction between EU institutions and national journalistic cultures. *European Journal Of Communication*, 25(4), 366-381. doi: 10.1177/0267323110384255
- Cushion, S. and Thomas, R. (2015). Reporting different second order elections: A comparative analysis of the 2009 and 2013 local and EU elections on public and commercial UK television news bulletins. *British Politics*, 11(2), pp.164-183.
- De Vreese, C. (2003). Television Reporting of Second-Order Elections. *Journalism Studies*, 4(2), pp.183-198.
- De Vreese, C., Banducci, S., Semetko, H. and Boomgaarden, H. (2006). The News Coverage of the 2004 European Parliamentary Election Campaign in 25 Countries. *European Union Politics*, 7(4), pp.477-504.
- DG Communication. (2016). *Strategic Plan 2016-2020*. Brussels: European Commission.
- Directorate for Information Offices. (2012). *A Presentation of the European Parliament Information Offices*. DG Communication, European Parliament.
- Donsbach, W., & Patterson, T. (2004). Political News Journalists: Partisanship, Professionalism, and Political Roles in Five Countries. In F. Esser & B. Pfetsch, *Comparing political communication theories, cases, and challenges* (pp. 251-270). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dutceac Segesten, A. and Bossetta, M. (2017). The Eurosceptic Europeanization of public spheres: print and social media reactions to the 2014 European Parliament elections. *Comparative European Politics*, pp.1-19.
- Elkink, J., & Sinnott, R. (2015). Political knowledge and campaign effects in the 2008 Irish referendum on the Lisbon Treaty. *Electoral Studies*, 38, 217-225. doi: 10.1016/j.electstud.2015.02.003
- European Commission (2018). *Eurobarometer 89*. Eurobarometer. [online] European Commission. Available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/STANDARD/surveyKy/2180> [Accessed 10 Sep. 2018].
- European Parliament (2018b). *Results of the 2014 European elections - Turnout*. [online] European Parliament. Available at: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/elections2014-results/en/turnout.html> [Accessed 10 Sep. 2018].

- European Parliament. (2018a). *Democracy on the Move: European Elections - One Year to Go*. Brussels: European Union.
- Fanourgiakis, J. and Kanoupakis, E. (2016). An Assessment of the Results of European Parliament Elections in Greece and European Union Under the Shadow of Economic Crisis. *International Journal of Health Services*, 46(4), pp.642-655.
- Follesdal, A., & Hix, S. (2006). Why There is a Democratic Deficit in the EU: A Response to Majone and Moravcsik. *JCMS: Journal Of Common Market Studies*, 44(3), 533-562. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-5965.2006.00650.x
- Fracasso, A., Grassano, N., & Vittucci Marzetti, G. (2014). The Gravity of Foreign News Coverage in the EU: Does the Euro Matter?. *JCMS: Journal Of Common Market Studies*, 53(2), 274-291. doi: 10.1111/jcms.12182
- Franklin, M., & Hobolt, S. (2011). The legacy of lethargy: How elections to the European Parliament depress turnout. *Electoral Studies*, 30(1), 67-76. doi: 10.1016/j.electstud.2010.09.019
- Freire, A., Lisi, M., Andreadis, I., & Leite Viegas, J. (2014). Political Representation in Bailed-out Southern Europe: Greece and Portugal Compared. *South European Society And Politics*, 19(4), 413-433. doi: 10.1080/13608746.2014.984381
- Gaušis, E. (2017). European Institutions On Social Media – Shaping the Notion of European Citizenship. *Economics And Business*, 30(1), 27-39. doi: 10.1515/eb-2017-0003
- Giebler, H., Kritzinger, S., Xezonakis, G. and Banducci, S. (2016). Priming Europe: Media effects on loyalty, voice and exit in European Parliament elections. *Acta Politica*, 52(1), pp.110-132.
- Gleissner, M., & de Vreese, C. (2005). News about the EU Constitution. *Journalism: Theory, Practice & Criticism*, 6(2), 221-242. doi: 10.1177/1464884905051010
- Guinaudeau, I., & Palau, A. (2016). A matter of conflict: How events and parties shape the news coverage of EU affairs. *European Union Politics*, 17(4), 593-615. doi: 10.1177/1465116516662716
- Harrison, J., & Pukallus, S. (2015). The European Community's Public Communication Policy 1951–1967. *Contemporary European History*, 24(02), 233-251. doi: 10.1017/s0960777315000077
- Heikkilä, H., & Kunelius, R. (2006). Journalists Imagining the European Public Sphere. *Javnost - The Public*, 13(4), 63-79. doi: 10.1080/13183222.2006.11008925
- Hix, S. (2008). *What's Wrong with the European Union and How to Fix it*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Hix, S. and Marsh, M. (2007). Punishment or Protest? Understanding European Parliament Elections. *The Journal of Politics*, 69(2), pp.495-510.

- Hix, S. and Marsh, M. (2011). Second-order effects plus pan-European political swings: An analysis of European Parliament elections across time. *Electoral Studies*, 30(1), pp.4-15.
- Hobolt, S. (2012). Citizen Satisfaction with Democracy in the European Union*. *JCMS: Journal Of Common Market Studies*, 50(1), 88-105. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-5965.2011.02229.x
- Horga, I., & Landuit, A. (2013). Communicating the EU Policies beyond the/Its Borders. *Eurolimes*, (Supplement), 5-22. Retrieved from <https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=37206>
- Jackson, J., Mach, B., & Miller-Gonzalez, J. (2016). Attitudes about EU expansion and zero-sum thinking. *Economics Of Transition*, 24(3), 481-505. doi: 10.1111/ecot.12097
- Karyotis, G., Rüdig, W., & Judge, D. (2014). Representation and Austerity Politics: Attitudes of Greek Voters and Elites Compared. *South European Society And Politics*, 19(4), 435-456. doi: 10.1080/13608746.2014.977478
- Kleinnijenhuis, J., & Van Atteveldt, W. (2016). The Impact of the Explosion of EU News on Voter Choice in the 2014 EU Elections. *Politics And Governance*, 4(1), 104. doi: 10.17645/pag.v4i1.471
- Kotroyannos, S., Tzagkarakis, I., Mavrozacharakis, E., & Kamekis, A. (2017). Utopian Left-Wing Expectations and the Social Consequences of the 3rd Memorandum in Greece. *European Quarterly Of Political Attitudes And Mentalities EQPAM*, 6(2), 55-66.
- Laursen, B., & Valentini, C. (2014). Mediatization and Government Communication. *The International Journal Of Press/Politics*, 20(1), 26-44. doi: 10.1177/1940161214556513
- Lavdas, K. A., Kotroyannos, D., & Tzagkarakis, S. I. (2017). 7 from authoritarianism to europeanization? paths to a contestable european future in greece and poland. *European Quarterly of Political Attitudes and Mentalities*, 6(2), 94-107. Retrieved from <http://proxy.library.carleton.ca/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/docview/1895290468?accountid=9894>
- Lloyd, J., & Marconi, C. (2014). *Reporting the EU: News, Media and the European Institutions*. New York: I.B. Tauris.
- Loukis, E., Charalabidis, Y., & Androutsopoulou, A. (2014). A Study of Multiple Social Media Use in the European Parliament from an Innovation Perspective. *Proceedings Of The 18Th Panhellenic Conference On Informatics - PCI '14*. doi: 10.1145/2645791.2645840
- Marquand, D. (1979). *Parliament for Europe*. London: Jonathan Cape.
- Marsh, M. (1998). Testing the Second-Order Election Model after Four European Elections. *British Journal of Political Science*, 28(4), pp.591-607.

- Meyer, C. (1999). Political Legitimacy and the Invisibility of Politics: Exploring the European Union's Communication Deficit. *JCMS: Journal Of Common Market Studies*, 37(4), 617-639. doi: 10.1111/1468-5965.00199
- Michailidou, A. (2010). Vertical Europeanisation of Online Public Dialogue: EU Public Communication Policy and Online Implementation. In C. Bee & E. Bozzini, *Mapping the European Public Sphere: Institutions, Media and Civil Society* (pp. 65-82). Farnham: Ashgate Publishing.
- Michailidou, A. (2012). "Second-Order" Elections and Online Journalism. *Journalism Practice*, 6(3), 366-383. doi: 10.1080/17512786.2012.663601
- Michailidou, A. (2015). The role of the public in shaping EU contestation: Euroscepticism and online news media. *International Political Science Review*, 36(3), 324-336. doi: 10.1177/0192512115577230
- Michailidou, A. (2016). 'The Germans are back': Euroscepticism and anti-Germanism in crisis-stricken Greece. *National Identities*, 19(1), 91-108. doi: 10.1080/14608944.2015.1113242
- Morisse, K., Cortes, F., & Luling, R. (1999). Broadband multimedia information service for European parliaments. *Proceedings IEEE International Conference On Multimedia Computing And Systems*. doi: 10.1109/mmcs.1999.778662
- Nesti, G. (2010). The Information and Communication Policy of the European Union between Institutionalisation and Legitimation. In C. Valentini & G. Nesti, *Public Communication in the European Union: History, Perspectives and Challenges* (pp. 23-48). Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Nulty, P., Theocharis, Y., Popa, S., Parnet, O. and Benoit, K. (2016). Social media and political communication in the 2014 elections to the European Parliament. *Electoral Studies*, 44, pp.429-444.
- Patterson, T., & Donsbach, W. (1996). News decisions: Journalists as partisan actors. *Political Communication*, 13(4), 455-468. doi: 10.1080/10584609.1996.9963131
- Peter, J., Semetko, H., & de Vreese, C. (2003). EU Politics on Television News. *European Union Politics*, 4(3), 305-327. doi: 10.1177/14651165030043003
- Plakoudas, S. (2016). The debt crisis and Greece's changing political discourse. *Byzantine And Modern Greek Studies*, 40(02), 307-314. doi: 10.1017/byz.2016.10
- Pocovnicu, D., Manolache, M. and Epuran, G. (2013). A Framing of Future European Parliament Elections 2014 in a Social Media Context. *Studies and Scientific Researches Economics Edition*, (18).
- Podkalicka, A., & Shore, C. (2010). Communicating Europe? EU Communication Policy and Cultural Politics. In C. Valentini & G. Nesti, *Public Communication in the European Union: History, Perspectives and Challenges* (pp. 93-112). Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

- Preston, P. (2009). An Elusive Trans-National Public Sphere?. *Journalism Studies*, 10(1), 114-129. doi: 10.1080/14616700802560591
- Price, J. (2009). 'Beyond the Eurosceptic/Europhile Divide: Towards a New Classification of EU News Coverage in the UK Press', *Journal of Contemporary European Research*. Volume 5, Issue 3. pp. 356- 370. Available at: <http://www.jcer.net/ojs/index.php/jcer/article/view/148/163>
- Price, J. (2010). A Tale of Two Cultures: A Comparison of EU News Reporting by Brussels-Based and National-Based Journalists. In C. Valentini & G. Nesti, *Public Communication in the European Union: History, Perspectives and Challenges* (pp. 217-236). Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Quinlan, S. (2010). The 2009 European Parliament Election in Ireland. *Irish Political Studies*, 25(2), pp.289-301.
- Quinlan, S. and Okolikj, M. (2016). This time it's different ... but not really! The 2014 European Parliament elections in Ireland. *Irish Political Studies*, 31(2), pp.300-314.
- Reif, K. and Schmitt, H. (1980). Nine Second-order National Elections - A Conceptual Framework for the Analysis of European Election Results. *European Journal of Political Research*, 8(1), pp.3-44.
- Schlesinger, P. (1999). Changing Spaces of Political Communication: The Case of the European Union. *Political Communication*, 16(3), 263-279. doi: 10.1080/105846099198622
- Schmitt, H. and Teperoglou, E. (2015). The 2014 European Parliament Elections in Southern Europe: Second-Order or Critical Elections?. *South European Society and Politics*, 20(3), pp.287-309.
- Schön-Quinlivan, E. and Quinlivan, A. (2004). The 2004 European Parliament Election in the Republic of Ireland. *Irish Political Studies*, 19(2), pp.85-95.
- Sievert, H. (2010). Not Europeanised after All? European Journalism and its Differences within the EU Member State. In C. Valentini & G. Nesti, *Public Communication in the European Union: History, Perspectives and Challenges* (pp. 237-268). Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Smith, N., & Hay, C. (2008). Mapping the political discourse of globalisation and European integration in the United Kingdom and Ireland empirically1. *European Journal Of Political Research*, 47(3), 359-382. doi: 10.1111/j.1475-6765.2007.00728.x
- Sonntag, N. (1983). Media Coverage of the European Parliament: A Comparative Study*. *European Journal Of Political Research*, 11(2), 215-222. doi: 10.1111/j.1475-6765.1983.tb00057.x
- Statham, P. (2008). Making Europe news. *Journalism: Theory, Practice & Criticism*, 9(4), 398-422. doi: 10.1177/1464884908091292

- Sternberg, C., Gartzou-Katsouyanni, K., & Nicolaïdis, K. (2018). *The Greco-German affair in the Euro crisis*. London: Palgrave Pivot.
- Teperoglou, E. (2010). A Chance to Blame the Government? The 2009 European Election in Southern Europe. *South European Society and Politics*, 15(2), pp.247-272.
- Teperoglou, E., Freire, A., Andreadis, I., & Leite Viegas, J. (2014). Elites' and Voters' Attitudes towards Austerity Policies and their Consequences in Greece and Portugal. *South European Society And Politics*, 19(4), 457-476. doi: 10.1080/13608746.2014.983306
- Terra, A. (2010). From Information Policy to Communication Policy: First Steps towards Reaching European Citizens in the 1970s and 1980s. In C. Valentini & G. Nesti, *Public Communication in the European Union: History, Perspectives and Challenges* (pp. 49-66). Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Tsirbas, Y., & Sotiropoulos, D. (2016). Europe at the Epicenter of National Politics: The Attitudes of Greek Political Elites Towards the European Union and the Economic Crisis. *Historical Social Research / Historische Sozialforschung*, 41(4 (158)), 86-105. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44062864>
- Valentini, C. (2010). The European Union, Europe Direct Centres and Civil Society Organisations: An Enchanted Partnership?. In C. Valentini & G. Nesti, *Public Communication in the European Union: History, Perspectives and Challenges* (pp. 139-164). Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Vesnic-Alujevic, L. (2013). *Members of the European Parliament Online: The Use of Social Media in Political Marketing*. Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies.
- Walter, S. (2015a). Explaining the visibility of EU citizens: a multi-level analysis of European Union news. *European Political Science Review*, 9(02), 233-253. doi: 10.1017/s1755773915000363
- Walter, S. (2015b). Three Models of the European Public Sphere. *Journalism Studies*, 18(6), 749-770. doi: 10.1080/1461670x.2015.1087815
- Weiler, J., Haltern, U., & Mayer, F. (1995). European democracy and its critique. *West European Politics*, 18(3), 4-39. doi: 10.1080/01402389508425089
- Wilde, J., & Zobel, J. (2010). Europe by Satellite: Independent News Agency or Public Relations Instrument for the European Commission?. In C. Valentini & G. Nesti, *Public Communication in the European Union: History, Perspectives and Challenges* (pp. 165-190). Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

List of Interviews

Interview 1: Press Officer, European Parliament Athens Information Office. 5 June 2018:

Athens, Greece.

Interview 2: Public Relation Officer, European Parliament Athens Information Office. 5

June 2018: Athens, Greece.

Interview 3: International News Editor (Athens-based), Greek Free-to-Air TV Station,

Radio Station & News Website. 9 June 2018: Athens, Greece.

Interview 4: European News Editor (Brussels-based), Greek Weekly Broadsheet

Newspaper & News Website. 31 May 2018: Athens, Greece.

Interview 5: Press Officer, European Parliament Dublin Information Office. 13 June

2018: Dublin, Ireland.

Interview 6: Public Relation Officer, European Parliament Dublin Information Office. 14

June 2018: Dublin Ireland.

Interview 7: General News Editor (Dublin-based), Irish Radio Station Group. 15 June

2018: Dublin, Ireland.

Interview 8: Europe Editor (Brussels-based), Irish Daily Broadsheet Newspaper & News

Website. 15 June 2018: Dublin, Ireland.