ROLE CONCEPTIONS OF BRUSSELS CORRESPONDENTS FROM THE NEW MEMBER STATES

SOPHIE K. LECHELER
MALTE C. HINRICHSEN

Abstract

Journalists working in Brussels are commonly perceived as different from traditional foreign correspondents. However, their isolation from their home offices also renders them distinct from domestic political journalists. Consequently, studies of Brussels correspondents have come up with their own viable types of "political journalism in Brussels." With the ongoing enlargement of the European Union – and a growing number of post-communist new member states – we need to re-define current typologies of Brussels journalism. Prior findings indicate that post-communist journalists have not yet evolved a fixed set of professional roles, norms and values. Thus, their work in Brussels may be characterised by a different approach towards correspondent journalism. As part of a study on Brussels correspondents, role conceptions of correspondents from post-communist new member states were examined. In-depth, semi-structured interviews with 14 journalists from different new member states show that explicative, objective and rapid information-gathering are the most important constituents of political journalism in Brussels. As a consequence of the highly-complex subject matter of EU reporting and declining support from home offices, journalists see it as their highest goal to explain the EU and make the EU decision-making process in Brussels better understood. Along this line, other forms of political journalism, such as investigative and critical reporting, are neglected.

Sophi K. Lecheler and Malte C. Hinrichsen are PhD candidates at the Amsterdam School of Communications Research, University of Amsterdam; e-mail: s.k.lecheler@uva.nl; m.c.hinrichsen@uva.nl.

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Introduction

Journalists from EU member states working in Brussels are commonly perceived as different from traditional foreign correspondents, because they are reporting on political processes that their home country is playing a role in and is subject to. However, their isolation from their home offices also renders them distinct from domestic political journalists (see e.g., Lecheler 2008; Terzis 2008). Thus, studies on Brussels correspondents from EU member states come up with their own viable types of "political journalism in Brussels," characterised by distinct role conceptions (e.g., Morgan 1995; Baisnée 2002; Meyer 2002; Drehkopf 2006). Following Weischenberg (1992), journalistic role conceptions inform a journalists' work environment and – consequently – news production. However, in the light of the latest enlargements of the European Union with twelve new member states, we need to re-define what we know about Brussels journalism.

The 2004 and 2007 enlargement rounds incorporated a number of new member states, whose media had undergone profound changes over the last fifteen years, with a shift from communist media control to a democratic media system. The transition of the media in those countries gave rise to a potential for the "birth of a new journalism profession" (Coman 2004, 45) with differing role conceptions. While there are great differences between countries, post-communist journalists are generally described as opinionated, highly politicised but often inaccurate in their reporting (Gross 2004, 123). Yet, many of them perceive themselves to be true representatives of the fourth estate – watchdogs who "best serve a transition by being partisan, an attack dog, a 'counter power'" (Gross 1996, 161). Once arrived in Brussels, post-communist journalists are integrated into the press corps, where differing journalistic traditions can impede their work (e.g., Morgan 1995). Thus, it is the purpose of this article to draw a first picture of post-communist journalistic role conceptions in Brussels and compare those to existing typologies.[1]

Political Journalism in Brussels

Brussels correspondents are agents of Europeanisation, wedged between complex European issues and national public spheres, privileged in terms of information supply, geographical proximity and social networking (Gerhards 1993; Baisnée 2002; Siapera 2005; Lecheler 2008; Terzis, 2008). However, with their focus on highly complex EU subjects and close interaction with colleagues from different news-gathering traditions, journalists working in Brussels are commonly perceived as different from traditional foreign correspondents. Their isolation from their home offices also renders them distinct from domestic political journalists (e.g., Baisnée 2002). Thus, most studies on Brussels correspondents come up with their own viable types of "political journalism in Brussels."

Baisnée (2000; 2002) identifies three approaches to EU news coverage, based on his analysis of French and British correspondents: firstly, institutional journalists act as "pseudo-officials," documenting European affairs on a daily basis but neglecting interpretation. To Baisnée, institutional journalism represents an original form of Brussels correspondence, dating back to the beginnings of the European press corps during the 1960s. Today, institutional journalists are those who have been in Brussels for a long time and they are "veterans of the press corps" (ibid,

12). Veterans are respected for their "in-depth knowledge on European affairs and their analytical ability."

However, institutional journalists have become deeply embedded in the system; they want to be "part of the game," so to speak, and part of the institutions themselves – a change labelled by the author as "self-assimilation" (Scully 2006). Secondly, the opposite end of the spectrum is populated by investigative journalists. They are younger and have not been in Brussels for very long. Yet, they have at their command a wide knowledge of European affairs and a viable network of contacts in Brussels. Investigative journalists aim to re-define the post of the Brussels correspondent according to the (normative and practical) standards of investigative journalism; they want to be critical, in-depth and independent.

Thirdly, Baisnée refers to a type of journalism that is similar to investigative journalism and has been developed by some British newspaper journalists. The main difference between the former and the latter is a "'nationalisation' of EU news" (Baisnée 2002, 124). British journalists link EU issues more closely to national political debates – a difference Baisnée attributes to differing perceptions of European integration in France and Great Britain. While French public opinion is characterised by a wide consensus on the fundamental roles and responsibilities of European Union membership, these same responsibilities are still fiercely debated in Britain. Table 1 displays the three attitudes towards political journalism in Brussels as elucidated by Baisnée.

Table 1: Three Types of Attitudes Toward Politicisation

	Institutional Journalism (F)	**Investigative/ political journalism (F)**	**Politicisation through national politics (GB)**
Age	Older, in Brussels for more than 15 years	Younger, arrived in the 90's	4 or 5 years in Brussels
Relationship to sources	Self-assimilation to the institution	Distance and reliable sources	Professionalisation of the journalist-source relationship
Perception of task	Intellectual and political project	Professional project	Editorial project
Primary focus	Protection of the institution	Scandalisation	Scandalisation through national politics

Source: Baisnée 2000, 20; F= France, GB=Great Britain.

On a similar note, Meyer (2000; 2002) discusses two types of (political) journalism in Brussels, "mouthpiece journalism" – similar to Baisnée's institutional journalism – and "investigative journalism." On the basis of his examination of journalistic control in the case of a number of scandals in the European Commission, Meyer concludes that there is indeed an embryonic form of permanent investigative journalism present in Brussels. The author identifies a number of endogenous and exogenous factors that have triggered the upturn of investigative journalism in Brussels, including the rising importance of European news coverage, coupled with a rise in information supply and co-operation but also competition. Meyer argues that journalists from northern European countries in particular take a

more critical view of EU affairs, thereby amplifying the increasingly critical tones of the Brussels press corps. Drehkopf (2006) focuses on German correspondents, examining the journalists' self-perception in the Brussels microcosm on the basis of an analytical framework provided by the adaptation of a previously-used multi-dimensional model (e.g. Donsbach 1987; Weischenberg 1992; Krupitschka 2005). This adaptation, contrary to previous models (e.g. Donsbach 1987), emphasises the importance of societal influences on the journalists' role perception. Moreover, it takes into account the interdependence between these societal factors and other factors (contrary to Weischenberg 1992), such as influences of the medium the journalist is working for or institutional factors in a non-hierarchical form. Based on this model, Drehkopf identifies four types of news journalism in Brussels (Table 2), ranging from the critical sceptic to the "ombudsman" and the "euphoric" supporter of European ideas.

Table 2: Types of Correspondents in Brussels

Types of Correspondents	Characteristics
"Explaining ombudsman"	• truly pro-European • bring EU closer to its citizens • explain the EU • motivate opinion-forming
"Neutral service provider"	• pro-European • wants to be as objective as possible • fast news-gathering, less background
"Sceptical observer"	• rather pro-European • wants to be critical and independent • opinionated coverage
"Euphoric promoter"	• truly pro-European • wants to create a positive picture of EU • opinionated coverage

Source: Drehkopf 2006.

Among the German correspondents interviewed, the type of "explaining ombudsman" emerged as the most prominent. This type of correspondent is very pro-European and puts great emphasis on explaining complex European matters to the audience at home. The "ombudsman" finds it less important to transport his own opinions in his news coverage, but strives to stimulate opinion-forming and debate among the public. The "euphoric promoter" on the other hand, who was represented by only two journalists in the study, attempts to convey his pro-integrationist, federalist attitude in the coverage and therefore delivers opinionated news (Drehkopf 2006, 116).

New Member States' Journalism

The 2004 and 2007 enlargement rounds incorporated a number of new member states into the EU, whose media had undergone profound changes over the last fifteen years, with a shift from communist media control to a democratic media system. While there are national differences, the media in post-communist states are by and large diverse, have the potential to fulfil democratic functions, and can operate in a market-oriented world (Gulyás 2003; Lauristin et al. 2005). However,

post-1989 media systems have not yet finalised their transition. Generally, the media in post-communist countries still lack the "establishment of the system of institutions, norms and values through which Western journalism was built and imposed" and which can only evolve over time (Coman 2004, 47). Apart from these similarities, there are of course as many cultural, political and historical differences between the different new member states, as there are between old member states. Still, a broad comparison of the "old guard" of Western European Brussels correspondents and the potential "newcomers" of countries that have just joined the EU is potentially fruitful. In Brussels, correspondents from post-communist new member states are potentially impeded in their work by the growing heterogeneity of the press corps, which reduces the relative importance of journalists from new member states and leaves them at disadvantage in the news-gathering process. Moreover, still volatile and tense media markets in the new member states, paired with little interest for EU affairs in these countries constraints the journalists' news performances, leading them to stress national angles of European topics (Lecheler 2008).

The transition of the media in post-communist new member states gave rise to a potential for the "birth of a new journalism profession" (Coman 2004, 45) with differing socio-demographic characteristics and role conceptions. Today, journalism in the post-communist new member states is dominated by young journalists who have only come into the media after 1990. This generational change has built up a divide between the bulk of younger journalists and the few remaining older journalists; younger journalists see themselves as "an antithesis to the old guard," assuming that "those who have not worked in the communist media were not touched by communist ideology" (Coman 2000, 43). According to Coman, these young journalists, since they lack defined role conceptions and journalistic education, promote "professional self-sufficiency based on the idea of a "mission" in the name of which they have chosen the press, a mission which does not require any critical self-evaluation, nor journalism education and training" (ibid). Furthermore, younger journalists have higher educational standards than the older generation and usually possess a University degree, although often not in journalism specifically. Surprisingly, few have attended formal journalism training, while most have learnt their trade on the job, as journalism training in post-communist countries continues to be characterised by a lack of practical manuals, modern equipment for the development of journalistic skills and experienced teachers (Gross 1999; 2004; Coman 2000).

The social position of journalists in post-communist countries differs in some respects from that of Western journalists. On the one hand, they appear to enjoy a "prestigious status" and to be highly regarded by their national societies. On the other hand, they are under pressure from the political arena and the so-called "barons" (former journalists, now powerful business men). Coman (2000, 45), while arguing from largely Romanian evidence, suggests generally that the "great majority of journalists are not protected against the abuses of bosses, not by law, not by clear conventions, not by a professional tradition". And, specifically in reference to Romania, he later states that most journalists had "lost control of this profession and are in quasi-total dependence on the bosses" (Coman 2004, 55).

Role conceptions differ considerably from Western equivalents. For instance, Weischenberg (1992) suggest that German journalists see themselves as informa-

tion-gatherers, responsible for explaining complex subject matters to their audience. Conversely, post-communist journalists are described as opinionated, highly politicised and often inaccurate in their reporting (Gross 2004, 123). Yet, many of them perceive themselves to be true representatives of the fourth estate – watchdogs who "best serve a transition by being partisan, an attack dog, a 'counter power'" (Gross 1996, 161). This leads to the production of news coverage that sacrifices comprehensiveness, objectivity and professionalism to the partisan mission (Gorban-Klas 1997). In a more recent study, Lauristin et al. (2005) found that Estonian journalists had quickly internalised "Western values" and the "formal criteria of news writing" but repeatedly compromised such standards in favour of sensational journalism. This growing sensationalism and "tabloidisation" of media products is stressed by a number of authors (e.g. Hiebert 1999; Splichal 2001). Pisarek (1998 cited in Coman 2000, 45) found that Polish journalists can be divided into three groups: "The *militant* (preoccupied with shaping opinion and influencing the public); the *disk-jockey* (centred on entertainment and "infotainment") and the *artisan* (careful to respect the professional values)." In his survey of Romanian journalists, Coman (2004), however, argues that journalists considered information-gathering and the analysis of social and political problems at the top of their professional agenda. Coman explains this with "double standards" among the journalists: high aspirations of the upper echelon of the journalistic profession characterised by objectivity and careful analysis stand in stark contrast to social reality, where sensationalism is the prevailing standard, together with

> *entertainment or at least infotainment, within the rapid rhythm of commercials and videos. Media are characterized by an explosion of subjectivity and even intolerance (racism, xenophobia, religious intolerance) to individual and national catharsis. […] The social characters of communist society were replaced by new characters related to human, symbolic and material capital, such as the reformer, the conservative and the fundamentalist* (Rowenta-Frumusani 1999, 41).[2]

Research Question and Method

This study provides first insights into role perceptions of journalists from post-communist new member states in Brussels. Previous studies have credited the Brussels press corps with developing forms of journalism that are distinct from traditional types of foreign correspondence or political journalism (e.g. Morgan 1995; Baisnée 2002; Meyer 2002; Gleissner and de Vreese 2005; Drehkopf 2006). This development has been attributed to the difficult situation of a Brussels correspondent trying to translate the highly complex subject matter "EU" into forms appropriate to the national audience's limited interest and knowledge, coupled with the overlapping relationships in Brussels between correspondents from different journalistic traditions (e.g., Morgan 1995). Studies have found their own viable types of "political journalism" that centre around the journalists' attitudes towards European integration, work ethics, journalistic functions and social status (Baisnée 2002; C.O. Meyer 2002; Drehkopf 2006)

However, post-communist journalists are believed to possess norms and beliefs different from those of most member states of the EU (e.g., Gross 1996; 2004;

Lauristin et al. 2005; Lecheler 2008). For instance, what is their attitude towards investigative or adversarial journalism in Brussels as it is suggested by Meyer (2002)? Moreover, following Baisnée (2002), do all journalists in Brussels over time get almost too integrated into the Brussels microcosm, thereby losing their professional distance? Consequently, this research attempts to explain what *role conceptions Brussels correspondents from post-communist new member states have.*

Interviews

To investigate the proposed research question, 14 semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted in May 2006 in Brussels, with journalists from new member states working as correspondents. Previously, a number of studies have applied such qualitative interviews to examine (political) journalists (e.g. Baisnée 2000; Drehkopf 2006). However, other studies have relied partially or entirely on quantitative research methods (e.g. Weaver and Wilhoit 1986; Köcher 1986; Schneider et al. 1993; Weischenberg 1992). Qualitative interviewing enables the researcher to portray a context in greater complexity and depth, thereby allowing individual opinions and attitudes to surface. Exactly for these reasons, exploratory or provisional studies mostly apply qualitative methods (see also Minichiello et al. 1990; Esterberg 2002; Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2006). A semi-standardised interview format was chosen, which required the design of an interview guide but allowed freedom for open questions and follow-up enquiries. This format was selected to ensure that all research dimensions were covered, while allowing adequate freedom for the respondents to generate useful information, as appropriate for an exploratory study. For example, journalists were asked to discuss their attitude towards "European integration" as well as their general idea of "journalistic functions" in Brussels and at home. In the interview guide, those factors were approached through open questions, in order to allow respondents the fullest opportunity to answer individually (Berg 1998). For example, the factor "main journalistic objective" was worded as "*In your opinion, what are the main objectives of political journalism today?*"

Sampling

Studying new member states' correspondents recommends the selection of journalists across the new member states of the EU[3]. Here, in its selection process, this study followed the practice of choosing "typical cases," cases that appear to adhere to the broad general patterns provided by the analytical framework (Möhring and Schlütz 2003). Thus, journalists were chosen for interviewing who appeared as typical according to the discussion of the Brussels press corps, while having to take into account the limitation of acquiring journalists for long in-depth interviews during a relatively brief enquiry period. This selection incorporated two primary selection criteria. An initial criterion was that the journalist was (1) stationed permanently in Brussels as a correspondent (under contract or freelance) and (2) that he or she was reporting to media from new member states. The second criterion was that the study aimed for maximal variance in attempting to acquire both female and male journalists from all new member states, of all age groups, working for a variation of mass media (press, TV, radio, agency, and internet) in their countries.

Table 3: Sample of Correspondents

Case	Nationality	Media	Length of Interview
Journalist 1	Latvian	Radio	53 min.
Journalist 2	Polish	TV	53 min.
Journalist 3	Polish	Radio	41 min.
Journalist 4	Estonian	Radio/Press	40 min.
Journalist 5	Hungarian	Press	38 min.
Journalist 6	Estonian	TV	59 min.
Journalist 7	Lithuanian	Radio	45 min.
Journalist 8	Hungarian	Press	41 min.
Journalist 9	Polish	Press	54 min.
Journalist 10	Czech	Press	46 min.
Journalist 11	Polish	Agency	30 min.
Journalist 12	Czech	Press	53 min.
Journalist 13	Czech	Agency	50 min.
Journalist 14	Polish	Press/Radio	30 min.*

* This interview was conducted by telephone.

Taking into account the above criteria, the sample eventually comprised 14 journalists from a number of new member states (see Table 3). Even though the study aimed at providing a general picture of journalists from all relevant new member states, there were no journalists from the Slovak Republic and Slovenia in the sample. This fact, together with a country skew in the sample, can largely be ascribed to difficulties in recruiting the relevant journalists from a number of (smaller) member states. Some of these member states do only have a very limited number of correspondents stationed permanently in Brussels, of which – in turn – some did not consent to participate in interviews during the data collection period. However, the sample was well balanced in terms of gender (1:1) and media types and included correspondents working for the press, TV, radio, news agencies and also internet media. Thus, while not representative, the composite of the sample allows first insights into role conceptions of Brussels correspondents from bigger and smaller new member states, from different media outlets and of different experience and expertise.

Data Analysis

The interviews conducted were recorded and subsequently transcribed. The transcripts were analysed according to the method of qualitative content analysis introduced by Mayring (1983; 2000). From initial readings of the transcripts, statements were extracted, paraphrased, set into context and explained when necessary. The shortened transcripts were subsequently sorted according to dimensions and re-read several times, with subsequent modifications and resorting. For example, in a number of cases, statements dealing with the main objective of the journalists'

work in Brussels were inextricably linked with statements concerning the attitude towards classic functions of political journalism. In those cases, the dimension taking up more space of the selected statement was favoured. The analysis thus kept the same sorting procedure as quantitative content analysis, while allowing for a more organic generation of content categories (Mayring 1983). Topics were chosen for discussion in the results section based on commonality of response, uniqueness of response, or explanatory power. Remarks on the frequency or uniqueness of those responses accompany the results listed below.

Results

As suggested by Weischenberg (1992), role conceptions inform a journalists' work environment and news production. In this study, when correspondents were asked about their political attitudes and about the role of political journalism in Brussels and at home, the majority of the correspondents were pro-European – supporting earlier work on attitudes of Brussels correspondents (e.g. Drehkopf 2006). Contrary to some speculation about the opinionated journalism of new member states (e.g. Gross 2004) correspondents considered it their primary goal to explain, inform and guide their audiences at home through the complex maze that is EU politics today.

An overwhelming majority of journalists are content with their position in Brussels. An Estonian correspondent said that as a correspondent in any other press corps, he "would have to know a lot more about specific stuff," while being a Brussels correspondent gave "much space and fewer rules, fewer traditions" (Journalist 4). A Latvian colleague stated that she felt a lot freer from editorial pressure in Brussels (Journalist 1). However, some journalists expressed their regret for leaving their families and friends behind, while others said that there were sorry to miss "important moments" for their homeland while being abroad (Journalist 9).

Most journalists in the sample are pro-European and thought that their home country has been able to benefit from EU membership. A Polish journalist explained:

> *I am very positive. One can describe me as a supporter of the idea of the European federation and common, liberal market. Anyway, it is better to like the EU, if you work here* (Journalist 14).

Veteran journalists who had served in Brussels for more than five years rarely expressed anti-European sentiments. However, some correspondents, particularly those who had recently arrived in Brussels, criticised EU processes ("cumbersome bureaucracy and obscure decision-making," Journalist 8) and some of its policies ("they are wasting money," Journalist 12). One Hungarian journalist offered her own opinions on how this dichotomy emerged:

> *I always had the feeling that people, who came here, had a sort of brainwash and got more and more pro-European. […] I think it's very healthy, if you leave Brussels after a time. The media needs a fresh look and a fresh brain"* (Journalist 8).

A young Czech newspaper journalist even referred to a long-time Brussels correspondent as "another institution in Brussels" and mockingly remarked that "if they built a new building somewhere here, it should be named after him – he is so institutionalised" (Journalist 10).

A number of authors suggest that role conceptions among post-communist journalists are characterised by expectations of being a watchdog or "fourth estate" and by a certain lack of objectivity and professionalism (e.g. Gorban-Klas 1997; Pisarek 1998; Gross 2004). In a study on Romanian journalists, Coman (2004) found that post-communist journalists had evolved high – *quasi*-Western – standards of objectivity and rapid information-gathering. However, these standards are not reflected in media content and are often compromised in favour of sensationalism and "tabloidisation" (e.g. Splichal 2001). Yet, the interviews in this study indicated that the Brussels correspondents have indeed adopted high journalistic standards. Here, an overwhelming majority of correspondents stressed the importance of informing the public as well as explaining complex topics to their audience:

> *The main function is to try to understand what's going on and then try to explain it as good as you can to your particular audience. There can be no other function* (Journalist 4).

> *A journalist first has to understand and then make understood* (Journalist 5).

> *It is to inform our readers about the developments of political life* (Journalist 14).

> *Most respondents identified most strongly with the role of a neutral information-gatherer – stating that good political journalism (in Brussels) did not necessarily need to be opinion-based but it should instead give audiences the opportunity to form their own attitudes. On the other hand, other concepts of journalism, such as innovative or investigative journalism were less popular among respondents. While most journalists did not deny the importance of investigative, critical or innovative functions, most did not rank them as highly as objectivity. Other functions, such as advocate journalism were soundly rejected.*

Most journalists thought that being a political journalist in Brussels was significantly different from working in their home offices. A Latvian correspondent remarked that, in Brussels, journalists were significantly closer to politicians and officials, sometimes blurring the line between professional and personal relationships (Journalist 1). This sometimes undermined critical journalism, especially for journalists from smaller member states:

> *It's very tricky. As we are a small community here, you cannot really say much, because you need these people as experts for your next story. Of course, we do not hide information about MEPs, but the situation is definitely more difficult* (Journalist 1).

Journalists from small new member states such as the Baltic States felt the greatest differences between the scene at home and in Brussels. Not only were the number of national references in Brussels small, journalists were also accustomed to gathering their news from a much smaller information pool. Many journalists found it overwhelming to sift through the vast amounts of information available to them in Brussels:

> *I apply universal standards. […] But, I have the feeling our situation here is different. Brussels is not about being a specific correspondent; it's being*

everything and nothing at the same time. We have more information, more dimensions to cover than the average journalist […] so, maybe the very political commenting is less present in Brussels. It's more about information-based stories (Journalist 10).

Just as Coman (2004) in his work, a number of journalists indicated that their profession was more highly regarded at home. A Lithuanian correspondent, for example, said that at home "journalists are seen as a fourth power in the state" (Journalist 7).

When asked whether they saw themselves different from journalists from "older" members, correspondents from post-communist states referred to the relatively young tradition of the free press in their home countries. As explained by a Hungarian correspondent, post-communist journalists were still in a learning process. Fifteen years were not enough to live up to the standards of English, German or French journalism and thus, new member states' correspondents today still lacked self-confidence in contact with officials and politicians (Journalist 8).

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to provide a first and preliminary insight into the role perceptions of correspondents from new member states in the Brussels press corps. In-depth interviews with 14 correspondents from different new member states provided a limited but nonetheless rich collection of data for analysis. The interview responses were analysed within the context of the findings of similar studies focusing on journalists from old member states such as France, Germany or the United Kingdom. The Brussels press corps have been credited with being the brokers of a new Europeanised public sphere (Gerhards 1993). In an enlarging EU, the correspondents from new member states play a special role to impact this newly emerging communication space (Lecheler 2008).

Prior findings indicated that post-communist journalists had not yet evolved a fixed set of professional roles, norms and values. Coman (2004) characterised post-communist journalists as having high standards concerning their news production but only limited success in implementing these in a market which is characterised by sensationalism and "tabloidisation." Respondents in the study found that explicative, objective and rapid information-gathering were the most important constituents of political journalism in Brussels. Although it's not clear if this opinion represents the emergence of a professional norm, it closely coincides with findings made by Drehkopf (2006) on the journalistic type of the "explaining ombudsman" beloved of German correspondents: as a consequence of a highly-complex subject matter and declining public support at home, journalists see it as their highest goal to explain the EU and make the EU decision-making process in Brussels better understood. Other forms of reporting are not as highly emphasised. For instance, new member states' journalists in the sample did not show much interest in investigative or critical reporting, a fact that might also be connected with the fact that new member states' correspondents feel at disadvantage in the news-gathering process compared to their colleagues from big and powerful publications (Lecheler 2008).

Interestingly, a majority of respondents found their work in Brussels very different from home, not only because of its lack of editorial offices but also because of

its lack of oversight, allowing them to work freer from editorial pressure and topic advice. Lastly, and contrary to the portrait of the self-sufficient post-communist journalist proposed by Coman (2004), correspondents from new member states gave the impression of even lacking self-confidence in their daily work: "when I sit next to these big names," a Czech correspondent explained, "I listen to their questions and then to mine and compare myself" (Journalist 10).

Thus far, the complex subject matter of EU affairs and press work leads them to adapt an explicative but also rather uncritical view towards EU news reporting. In conclusion, common perspectives are eschewed in favour of national interest and international and transnational dialogues are hindered by uncritical reporting, impeding the emergence of a Europeanised public sphere, according to the normative and empirical standards adopted by a number of scholars (e.g., Risse 2002; Machill et al. 2006).

There are a number of caveats to this study. The relatively small number of interviews in the study limited the analysis in a number of ways. First of all, it could not provide an exhaustive insight into the journalistic life of correspondents from all new member states. Also, the generational gap expected between older and younger post-communist journalists in Brussels could not be analysed adequately. Along these lines, national comparisons within the group of new member states were neglected to guarantee a broad overview of the workings of Brussels correspondents from new EU member states. Future studies should zoom in on specific new member states and their journalistic culture. They must also address other constituents of contemporary political communication in light of a growing European Union, the sources of information (EU institutions), the actual products of news coverage (TV footage, newspaper articles) or the recipients of these products (the audience in the news coverage) must be subject to continuous research.

Notes:

1. The results presented in this paper stem from a larger study on "Brussels correspondents from the new member states," parts of which have been presented on previous occasions.

2. For a description of role conceptions of Bulgarian journalists, see Krasteva (2007); on Hungarian journalists, see Kovats (1998).

3. Since, among the new member states, Cyprus and Malta did not undergo a post-communist transition, these were excluded from the analysis. The interviews were conducted in May 2006, before the accession of Bulgaria and Romania.

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