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The Journalistic Information about the European Union

The Journalistic Interest of the European Matters in Three European Countries Media: Poland, Romania and Spain

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Abstract: Three European research teams from the academic field meet to study the interest of media in matters concerning of the common European space. The results show that the European Union and its member countries do not constitute, at the moment, a usual priority issue in informative agendas of analyzed media in Poland, Romania and Spain. These results can be deduced of the analysis of the indicators of journalistic interest, such as, for example: the priority use of routine news to cover the European events; the low media interest in the Europeanist debate; the insignificant percentage of European news that media highlight on their front pages or summaries; the reduced length or extension of the majority of European news, the lack of an accurate knowledge by citizens of who is behind the spread news.

Keywords: European Union; media; informative agenda; indicators of journalistic interest

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1. The Disinformation about the European Union

The EU is, without a doubt, the most successful of the supranational integration organizations, with vocation and interest in economic, social and, of course, political sectors, and we cannot forget, besides, its achievements in the field of citizen rights and also in the external relationships. [Translated to English language]

These words of Cabezuelo Lorenzo (2004, p. 411) are significant because reflect well the feelings of many defenders of the Europeanism. Many intellectuals from diverse fields of knowledge (History, Sociology, Law, Economy...) claim, by an historical nature, the existence of a common European space. But to get the consolidation of this common space, in an institutional and civil level, it is necessary that information flows free and reach to all the EU citizens, to get that society knows clearly what is the meaning of being a member of the European Union and what the effects of this condition in their lives are.

From 1950 (year of the *Declaration of Schuman*, countersigned by Jean Monnet in 1952), the EU has tried to keep an open informative policy in its actions, holding on a complex structure of institutional community communication, reflected on periodical publications (Official Journal of the European Communities, Bulletin of the EU, Eurobarometer, Euro-stat...) and many databases (CELEX, BACH, Eurybase, OEIL, SIMAP, TED...).

These publications and databases which constitutes, as Cabezuelo (2004, p. 424) says, “only a parcel of the activity developed by agents of the diverse European institutions to create in the public opinion an image or vision favorable to the institutions of the EU”, have an inconvenient: its limited projection on citizenship. In other words, such publishing and databases are not often consulted by all the citizens, but only by a select group of professionals and researchers who need to get new information about the progresses in the diverse issues treated or covered by the European Union. In this way, the information about the big work done by the European institutions to make real a European common project overlooks for the big part of Society, and it impede the flowering of an “Europeanist feeling” among the European citizens.

Having in mind this effort and volume of documental production, there is no doubt that we cannot attribute to the EU a lack of worry by an approximation to citizens and let them know the daily task of this supranational organization. However, we can reproach to the EU its incapacity, observed until now, to create successful common policies which reach to all citizens.

There is a prove of this affirmation in the results of the Euro-barometer 2011, where it is said that exist among the community citizens a majorly feeling (73%) of lack of a good level of information about the European matters. And this lack of information can cause, as a direct consequence, the deterioration of the Europeanist feeling of citizens and a tendency to forget or neglect the European matters in pro of the national matters. This reality, besides, is usually linked to the circumstances, so it can be increased in periods of crisis (as the actual economic crisis), being even possible “to favor to the anti Europeanist movements” (Fournier, 2013).

But it exist also other signs like these. For example, studies of opinion developed in Spain by the Center of Sociologic Research (CIS) about the anti Europeanist attitude of Spanish citizens, show the progressive deterioration which is suffering the interest of Spanish citizens in the matters concerning on the EU. In this way, for example, while on the *Barometer about the EU* in 2000 the 56.1% of the survey population think that news about the EU has a low or lacking interest for them, in the exploration developed after the elections to the European Parliament in 2009 the percentage of population which has this same opinion increased until the 57.7%.

Equally significant is the contrast in the percentages between 2000 and 2009 about the Europeanist attitude or the conscience of being a European citizen: in 2000, only a 6% of the survey population in Spain feels as European citizens. And this low percentage decreased more progressively until the 5.2% in 2009. From this data we can conclude it is evident that: firstly, the interest of Spanish citizens by the European matters is low; and, secondly, few Spanish citizens feel like European citizens. And this reality crash head on with the fact that decisions made in a European field influence decisively in the daily life of citizens from any European country.

Therefore, in this context, it seems that something go wrong in the European construction, maybe not much in a political level, but in the social one. The European Union do not get to penetrate in people in spite of its informative machinery, so it must look for new formulas if it want to reach to the public opinion and to get citizens, and not only the political stratum, feel and defeat the European common project as a project of neighborhood and siblinghood among people. And, in our opinion, one of those new formulas must be supported in the decisive role played by media in society. In this regard, Sotelo González comments (2004, p. 430):

Without a doubt, media intervene unquestionably in the social processes and, in this case, also the informative treatment of the community matters. The paths of deepening in the process of European integration opened by political authorities have brought new scenarios which media have had to respond to and are still doing it. [Translated to English language]

To reach to citizens, it is unavoidable necessary the collaboration of media, as Muñoz Torres explains (2002, p. 271):

Media build, almost imperceptibly, in a ‘macro’ scale the vision of the world by means of their daily decisions about what will be published and the way of do it [...] It urges to recognize media build sense in each step; besides, they are the main source of sense for the current man. [Translated to English language]

In reality, are media which have the capacity of activate the public opinion by means of their journalistic messages, as the *Hahn Report*, presented by the Legal Commission of the European Parliament (Sánchez, 1989, p. 19), recognized in 1982. This report says, among other things, that:

The European unification will not be achieved without the will of Europeans, what suppose a European conscience, impossible without the appropriate information, nowadays tributary of national media. [Translated to English language]

In the words of Sánchez Bravo (1989, p. 31): “Without European information there is not European community”. But if, on the one hand, we are affirming citizens do not have enough information about the EU and, on the other hand, we tell media play a significant role in this sense, what it seems to be deduced of our words is media are currently collaborating with Europeanist project, but they are not journalistically ‘interesting’ in doing it. And this is a delicate affirmation which needs to be proved.

2. Objectives of Research

Precisely to check this hypothesis about the relative interest media currently show about the matters concerning to the European Union and its member countries, our three European research teams from the academic field. A media interest, in our opinion, insufficient – as we will demonstrate in this work –, but which, however, does not seem as perceived in this way by citizens if we pay attention to the

Eurobarometer 2011. According to this exploration, most European citizens opine different media (press, radio and television) spread news about the EU and, besides, they do it objectively. In this way, citizens forgive media because of their lack of information about the European Union's matters. But why this discrepancy between our observations and the perception of citizens?. Perhaps the response we will find it in the fact that, as many authors consider, Fontcuberta (1993, p. 35) among them:

Media have converted into the main instigator of the circulation of knowledge. Citizens of the actual civilization coexist with them and media are for them a very important point of reference. People talk about what media talk about and they ignore the events which happen further than an immediate environment, which have not received the description of newsworthy. It have been even said that anything is not in media, does not exist or it is not important. [Translated to English language]

And, without a doubt, that is right. If media, the most direct link with citizens to let know the current affairs, do not give enough journalistic interest and do not convert into newsworthy the duties of the European institutions to reinforce the Union, citizens can understand – as it happens currently – that *everything* what is important it is talked about the EU. We cannot forget that many people give to media an exaggerated credibility, glimpsing them as resources of information with an unquestionable authenticity and frankness.

Before continuing, we consider important to require two things: firstly, given the big number of variables we have observed in our exploration of media, it is not possible for us the collection of all our results and conclusions in an only paper. That is why, in this occasion, we focus our attention only on the indicators of informative interest which media show about the European matters. Secondly, with our research, we do not pretend to do an exhaustive study which is representative of all the European journalistic universe, but just to contribute, a bit more, to studies about the journalistic diffusion to citizens of the important matters which concern them in a European level and, most of all, we do not want people forget the big social responsibility media have in this issue.

3. Methodology of Research

As we indicated before, our three research teams from the academic field meet to compare data and results obtained from media of our respective countries. The participant universities in the research were: the University of Silesia, in Katowice, the University of Bucharest and the University of Seville.

To accomplish this joint research, some basic methodological patterns were agreed. Thus, we decided, to cover the major quantity and variety possible of population, to analyze one media for each journalistic format: press, radio and television. Besides, we decided, to analyze the journalistic messages which reach – and persuade – to people in a major measure, to study media with a national diffusion and with the highest levels of audience at the beginning of our research, independently of the business group these media belongs to. And, finally, we also agree the period of the research along one month, so the corpus of collected documents is significant and it gives us enough information about the objectives of our study.

Thus, the three teams analyze in our respective countries, along 32 days (from the 21st January to the 21st February 2013), the following media:

- Poland: the newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza*; the television channel *Fakty TVN*; and the radio station *RMF FM*;

- Romania: the newspaper *Adevărul*; the television channel *ProTV*; and the public radio station of Romania;
- Spain: the newspaper *El País*, the Spanish public television channel *TVE1*, and the Spanish public radio station *RNE*.

Finally, we consider also convenient to indicate that, in the case of television channels and also in radio stations, we decided to explore the news programs at *prime time*, that is the programs which reach to a collective more numerous of citizens.

4. Indicators of the Informative Interest of Media in the EU and Its Member Countries

To examine the informative interest which events about the EU and its member countries awaken in analyzed media, we consider important to have in mind four basic indicators, such as:

- Predominant journalistic genres;
- The preferential or not location of news inside newspapers and television or radio programs;
- The length dedicated to news about Europe;
- The journalistic sign on news about Europe.

4.1. Journalistic Genres of the Pieces of Information about the EU and Its Member Countries

According to the first indicator, the journalistic genre which media use to cover the European matters, we focus our attention on the classical informative genres (news, interview and report) and also in the traditional opinion genres (editorial and comment). We also observe the presence of other journalistic genres in the coverage of the European information as, for example, the chronicle or the letters to the Editor. But given the low presence of these other genres in news with a European content, we decided to collect them under the name of “other genres”, focusing thus on the main genres: news, interview, report and opinion.

As we can observe in the next figures (**Figures 1a, 1b and 1c**) the results show that in Spain and in Poland, the most used genre by all media (press, radio and television) is news, to the detriment of other informative genres such as the interview or the report, being more significant these data in Spain than in Poland. The same happens with the Romanian press, but not with its television channel or radio station, which use the report as the main genre. Nevertheless, in this last case, we consider important to clarify that, instead of authentic reports, they are news based on reports made by a correspondent or a journalist from the media. As these pieces of information are between the news and the report, we decided finally to collect them in the report category, because we thought there is a documentation and an investigation work not usual inside the routines of the news production.

According to these results, it is evident that – except the Romanian audiovisual media – in Romanian press, in all Spanish media and also, although to a lesser extent, in Polish media, the European matters do not seem to have enough journalistic importance to “waste” in them all the investigation display that an in depth report requires. But it is also probable that the use of the news as the main predominant genre does not mean a negligent conduct by these media to the European information, but the current tendency of these media to cover in their daily informative agendas a wide spectrum of contents to satisfy the informative expectations of an audience more heterogeneous every day.

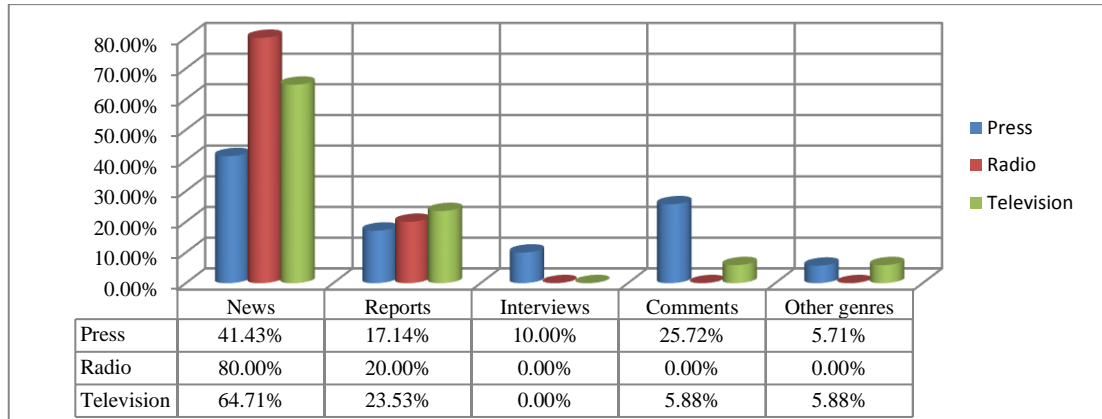


Figure 1a. Journalistic Genres. Poland

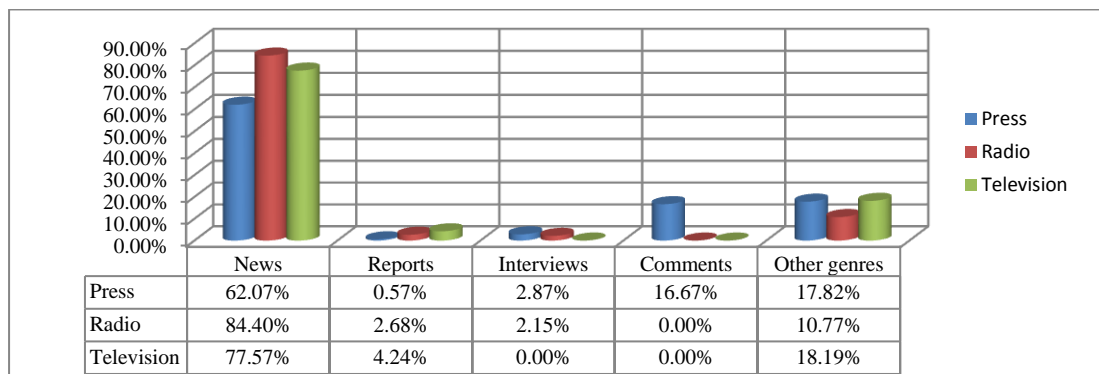


Figure 1b. Journalistic Genres. Spain

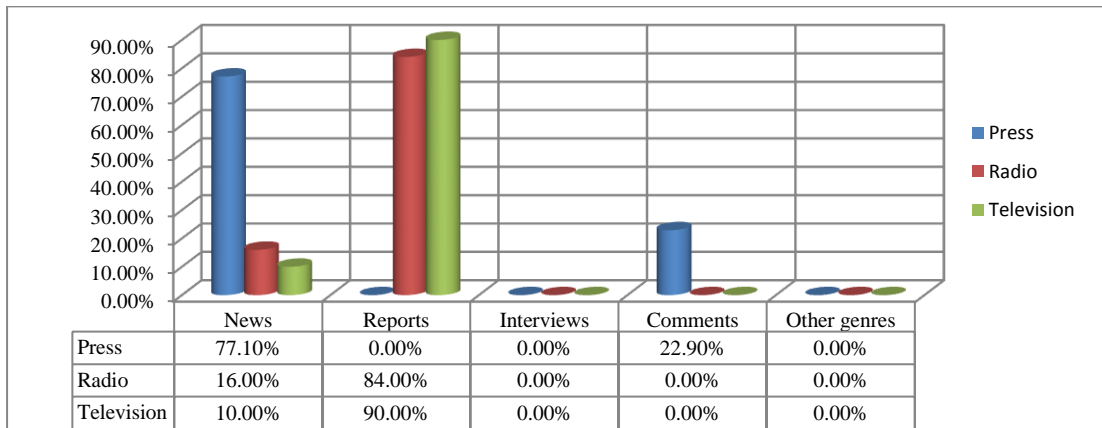


Figure 1c. Journalistic Genres. Romania

It is true that media cannot inform about ‘everything’. In fact, they cannot even cover the most newsworthy events. They have necessarily to select a piece of reality, their piece of reality, building an own symbolic environment where their audiences participate in it. But, in our opinion, this symbolic environment should not be built, systematically, over the basis of the thematic dispersion, but it should have informative areas in which the journalistic quality takes precedence over the quantity. As a Spanish proverb says “who cover a lot, squeeze little”, but the European information is too much important for our citizens –because it affects to their lives- and it should not be treated in a fast and superficial way.

Another significant result, common for the three countries, is the limited – or, even, inexistent – number of interviews made to figures linked to the European Union. The interview is the most optimal way to present in society to the responsible figures who manage the EU institutions. Thanks to the interview, citizens can know in a more direct, more personal and in a closer way these public figures who drive the helm of the European ship. The knowledge of who are these figures (whose names resound), how they think about, what they do for the European common framework, what they are worried about, etc. is a way to familiarize the audiences with our European responsible politicians.

This low percentage of interviews detected in media has a double possible reading: on the one hand, it can denote the low journalistic interest in giving “humanity” to the cold and dark entity which supposes the “European Union”; on the other hand, it can denote the low interest of the own EU politicians in the knowledge of them in their condition of individual by European citizens.

A last consideration about the journalistic genres which has powerfully attracted our attention is the priority that newspapers, television channels and radio stations give to the informative genre to the detriment of the opinion one. In this sense, in Spain and in Romania we can find comments about the EU and its member countries just on newspapers and in a low percentage. Just in the case of Poland we have occasionally (5.88%) observed the use of the opinion genre by the Polish television channel to cover issues concerning of the EU or its member countries. About radio, data are devastating: none of the researched radio devotes to opine publicly about European matters in their daily news programs.

These data can suggest: on the one hand, that media prefer an impartial and apparently objective discourse when they cover the European information; or, on the other hand, that media do not give to the news about the European common space a necessary journalistic interest to value them and to convert them into issues of debate in the public opinion, as Sotelo González suggests (2004, p. 433):

The absence of debate about very important community matters shows a very significant fault. There is a lack of debate, confrontation of ideas and dialectic confrontation, elements which are a big basis of progress, in the field of the European construction.
[Translated to English language]

4.2. The Location and Extension/ Duration of News about the EU and/ or Its Member Countries

In our opinion, another two significant indicators about the importance that the analyzed media companies in our respective countries give to the information about the EU and/ or its member countries are those related to the location on their covers or summaries and within its pages and news, and also the *extension / duration* of the news.

Regarding the first indicator mentioned, that is the *location* on the cover or summary, we can observe (**Figures 2a, 2b, 2c**) the low percentage of news about the EU or its member countries that the explored media stand out in a preferred place of their media (newspapers or news).

Undoubtedly, the most notorious case is the Romanian television, *ProTV*. Over the 32 days of analysis has not broadcast any news regarding the common European space. In this sense, it is remarkable the tiny percentage of news about the EU and / or its member countries that the analyzed European newspapers show on their covers: the Polish newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza*, only 11.76%, the Spanish newspaper *El País*, 8.62% and the Romanian one, *Adevărul*, 12%.

If we consider the covers of the newspapers, as well as the summaries of the television and radio news, as the “window” used by the media to present to their audiences the most relevant information of each

day, it is clear, based on data, that news concerning to the common European space are barely given priority in the daily news agendas of the Polish, Spanish and Romanian analyzed media.

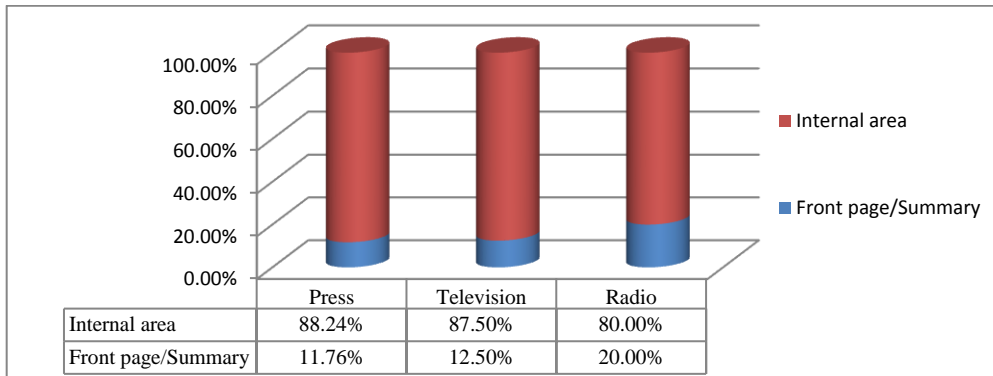


Figure 2a. Location on Cover/ Summary of EU News. Poland

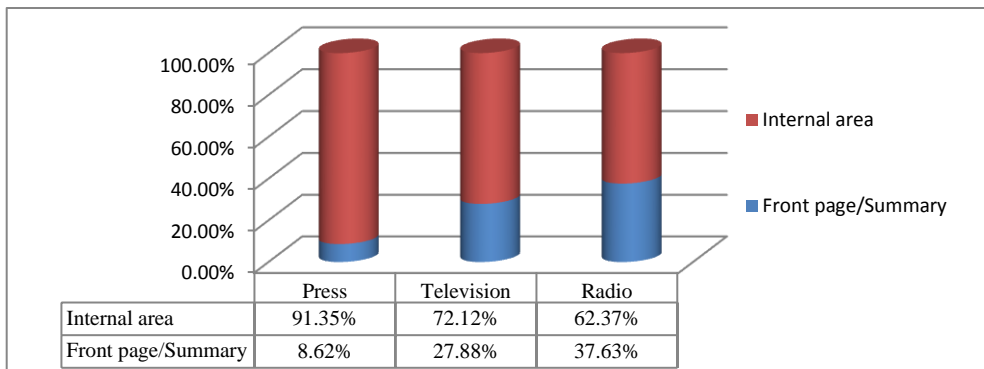


Figure 2b. Location on Cover/ Summary of EU News. Spain

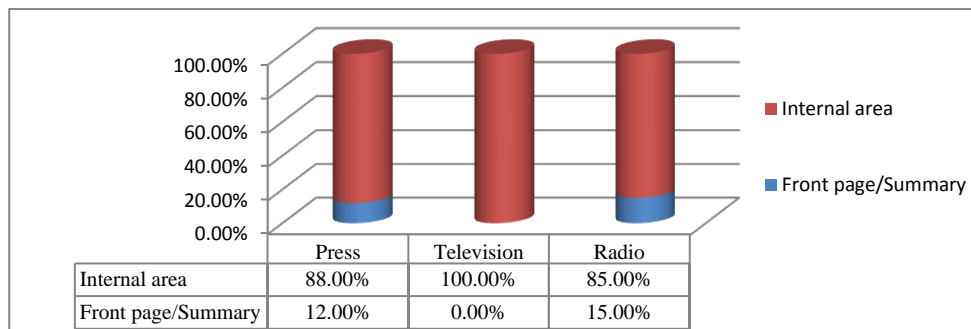


Figure 2c. Location on Cover/ Summary of EU News. Romania

On the other hand, focusing on the disposal of the European news within the internal body of the journalistic support, the results reveal that, in the daily press of the three countries, the news are most commonly located on the first pages or central ones-coinciding, assiduously, with the *International* section, and, rarely, in the last pages. However, in the radio stations in the three countries, as well as Polish and Spanish televisions, the European news have no fixed location, but they are located at any time of the news, where they are more suitable for its thematic content. The most significant case is the *ProTV* Romanian television, always placing the European news in the last section of the news, *International* section, preceded by social news and followed, in turn, by entertainment news.

These data suggest that open debate in journalism about whether European information must be provided or not as a specialized area of journalism (Sánchez Martínez, 1994,p. 81), has not yet reached the professional field of mass communication, which, in most cases, tend to identify issues touching

on the EU and / or its member countries as 'foreign' news, even though such news are associated, especially in the case of radio and television-like already noted-, to other specialized sections as politics, economics, events, courts, environment, culture, sports, etc.

That happens because, according to Sotelo González (2004, p. 434), “in community affairs all specializations are covered, so the Community information is a set of informative specializations not subsumed to a single specialty.” For this reason, “the margin left for the appearance of a proper and specific specialization in community affairs is minimal”.

However, agreeing with this statement, we also think that to continue addressing issues as international news itself may involve the risk that European citizens do not ever identify and recognize themselves as members of the common space. If “our European news” is located within the same context, and at the same level that news concerning European countries suburbs, as may be Russia or the United States, the nationalist feelings of the European citizens will continue taking precedence over European feelings. From the journalistic field, we must try taking steps to create a stage of collective European entity that permeates audiences. In other words, to start generating a common social identity to all citizens of the European Union, which reach far beyond politics and economics, as nowadays.

Finally, the indicator of the *extension/ duration* of the EU news and/ or its member countries show, depending on the journalistic support, that:

- *Press*: In the Polish newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza*, a significant percentage of the published news (46.27%) have quarter of a page area, while in the case of Romanian newspaper (*Adevărul*) and Spanish (*El País*) the highest percentage of news corresponds to those that have an area that ranges between half a page and the three-quarter page, although this percentage is more pronounced in the Spanish newspaper (85.06%) than in the Romanian one (52%). Rarely, we have found news that exceeds the length of a page. The general rule in the field of print news seems to be the use of news that offers to the readers timely information about what is happening at European level, without going deeply into the various issues narrated;
- *Radio*: Most of the news broadcast on Polish radio station *RMF FM* and Romanian public radio have duration of between 25 and 70 seconds. The Spanish public radio station (*RNE*) often provides more time to the European news, placing most of them in the time interval between 90 and 120 seconds. What we have been found in the three radio networks explored is that all of them rarely devote more than 120 seconds, or more than two minutes, to information about the EU and / or its member countries. This fact matches with what we have seen before in the press, suggesting also that the radio informs about European affairs without going into depth on them;
- *Television*: Finally, in the Polish network *Fakty TVN*, the average length of the news ranges between 120 and 300 seconds, while in Romanian *ProTV* channel, most of the EU news has a transmission time of about 100 seconds. Regarding the Spanish channel *TVE1*, the higher percentage of European news corresponds to those having duration of between 60 and 120 seconds. We see that, except for Polish channel, Romanian and Spanish television follow the same path set by the press and radio to broadcast on their news only basic data for that the audience feel informed of the main matters falling under the common European space.

Summarizing: first, the media do not highlight European news; and second, the media give to European news a *distant* focus (*International* section) as if they were something distant to their readers

or audiences; third, the media do not elaborate European news in depth (which is deducted from the limited extension or duration of most of them). We can conclude that the media draw current European Union and its member countries with a fine brushwork, without giving them greater importance, reaffirming our initial hypothesis: the analyzed media companies in the three countries provide little attention to events that take place in the European sphere to which we belong, paying more attention to the national information.

That was observed, for example, by our Romanian team in *ProTV* Romanian television, where community news in which Romania was not the main protagonist lasted a minimum time (between 20 and 62 seconds), while, by contrast, the pieces where Romania itself was the central theme were given the maximum possible time.

It is clear that, in general, the Polish, Romanian and Spanish analyzed media do not care about contextualizing the information coming from our European geopolitical environment and explaining to their audiences in depth what does it mean to be a European citizen and what means to be within the framework of the EU.

4.3. The Journalistic Authorship of the European Information

A final indicator that shows the interest that the media give to information on Europe, are the journalists who sign the news spread about the common European space.

The results (**Figures 3a, 3b and 3c**) show that the percentages of European news appearing signed in the media analyzed (Polish, Romanian and Spanish) are high. Although this information is very valuable and positive, we have to handle it with caution. The firm is not necessarily always synonymous with “ownership” of information.

The degree of responsibility of the journalist in the news will be determined mainly (López-Hernández & Domínguez-Delgado, 2012, pp. 791-792) by the fact that:

- First, it was he himself who has covered and written information, so that the authorship of the piece is clear and obvious;
- Second, although the news has not been covered personally, the journalist has contrasted, verified, contextualized and / or completed the information, research effort that makes the journalist, explicitly or implicitly, to make its mark in the information;
- And third, the degree of responsibility is also determined by the fact that the journalist was involved only in the syntactic correctness of the text to avoid duplication with other media. This often occurs when news is served by the agencies or the communication offices. Naturally, in this case the author cannot be considered a journalist, but a mere transcriber. As Felix Ortega argues (2008, p. 236): “Journalists, in this case, become mere disseminators of ideas created by others, so that their role is reduced to the same that performs any bureaucrat within a corporation.”

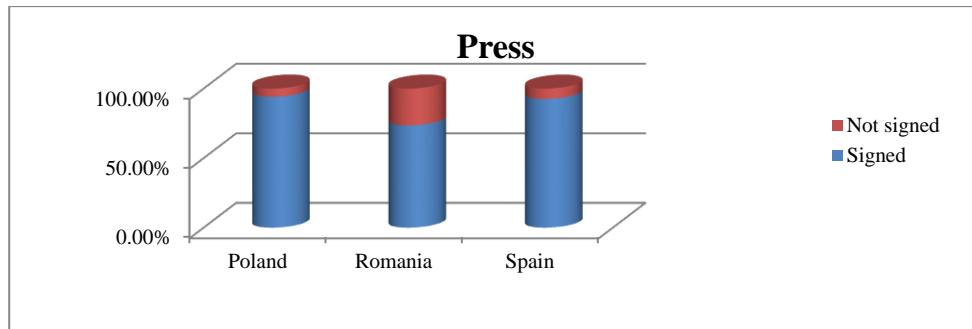


Figure 3a. Journalistic Signature of the European News

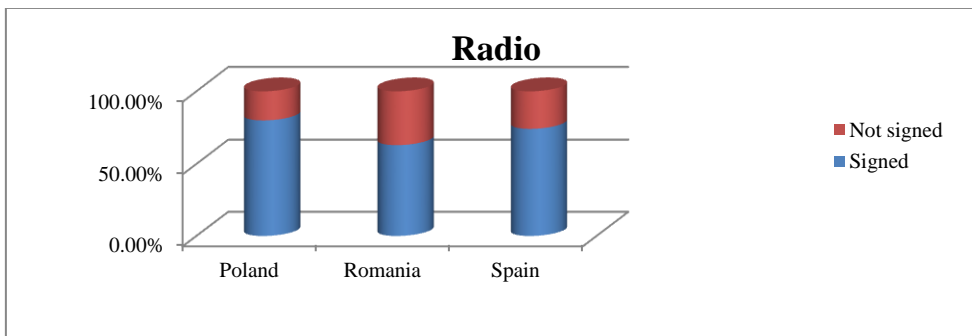


Figure 3b. Journalistic Signature of the European News

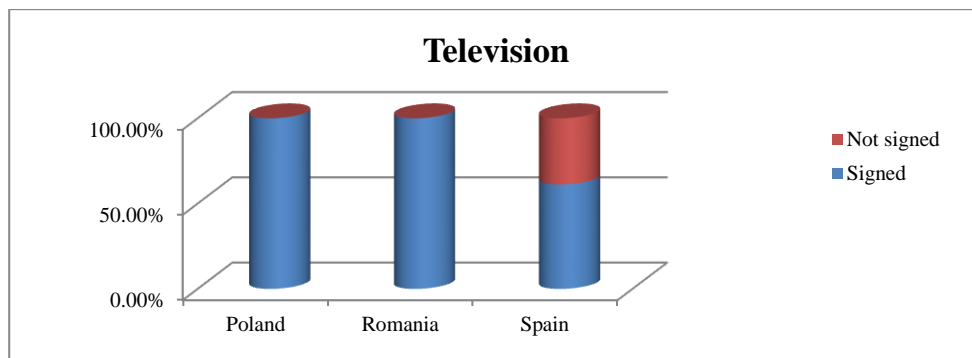


Figure 3c. Journalistic Signature of the European News

Logically, if the media uses several times the term “agency” or the name of the institution or organization whose cabinet has forwarded the information, citizens end up thinking - and not without reason- that the information provided by the media is a rather poor job. In addition, the lack of journalistic signature depersonalizes, causing the reader or the audience to see the event narrated as impersonal, of what can and cannot trust, because they do not know who is telling it. Thus, whether he/she is the author or not, it is always advisable that the news appears signed by a journalist. The problem which then arises is: who is really behind community news? Romanian researchers could ensure that the almost all EU news broadcast on *ProTV* were taken from international news agencies, what, in their opinion, ratify the lack of interest of this chain for the community affairs.

Given the impossibility of knowing the responsibility degree of journalists to sign European news, we decided to observe the frequency of the journalists’ signature over the 32 explored days. This variable helps us to find out if the media has journalists working assiduously with information from the European Union. If so, we could deduce the degree of specialization of journalists in different European themes.

Having journalists who are responsible for European news is very important for citizenship. The assiduous journalistic firm in European news is a prerequisite for developing a closer to the citizen - journalism, with which the audience can feel identified and sure to be well informed. That is, the press coverage of European affairs requires not a “giant headless” but ethical journalism to say, with clarity, openly, who is behind the news.

However, certain media does not seem to share our own point of view, as can be seen from the results obtained in our research. The most striking case is, undoubtedly, the Spanish media (**Figure 4**), in which the percentage of journalists who sign only once during the entire month is significantly high (above 60 %) and also, surprisingly similar in all media.

The results of the Polish press and television, but not the radio, are close to those obtained in the Spanish media, although their percentages (47.82% and 45.45% respectively) are not as categorical. Still, they are significant as they show that almost half of European news published in the 32 days analyzed is signed by casual or sporadic journalists.

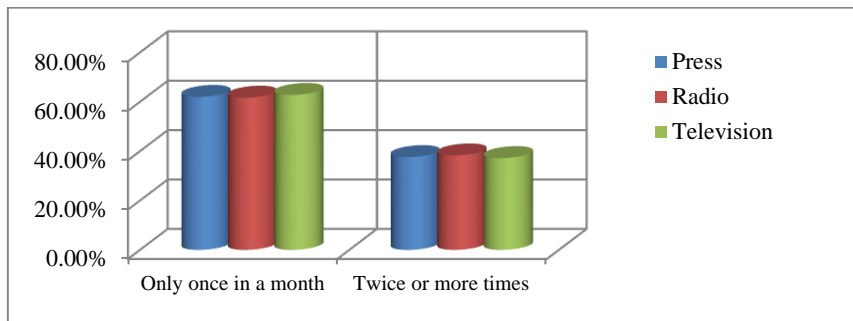


Figure 4. Frequency of Occurrence of the Same Firm Journalism. Spain

This data may be telling us that many of the European news published or broadcast by the media are “canned news.” That is, news that is not covered by its journalists personally, but from agencies or institutional press offices. If this were the case, citizens also have the right to know it, because if all media rely on news agencies to reflect European news, there is a high risk of homogenizing the information landscape and provide one distorted image, or at least not entirely truthful, suggesting that all the same news broadcast because “there is nothing more important to tell.” And this would explain the results of the Eurobarometer 2011, to which we referred in the Objectives section research, and in which, as we recall, it was said that European citizens believe that the different media (press, radio and television) broadcast enough news about the European Union and, further, that such items are dealt with objectivity.

Finally, on the Romanian press and radio investigated, the most notable are their opposing positions:

- In the newspaper *Adevărul*, the fact that a high percentage (73.49%) of the articles were signed by columnists or well known public figures, as Ion Ioniță, Elena Dumitru, Crăciun Andrei Andrei Pleșu, etc..., demonstrates the interest of the media to strengthen its influence - or even their indoctrination capacity;
- However, the Romanian Radio seems to act more like a “headless giant,” as we noted before, not usually detailing publicly the name of the journalists on their retransmissions, except when they write reports about European matters dealt.

5. Conclusion

With the results of this work, seems to be more than obvious that, except for the specific exceptions to which we referred in the text, the European Union and/ or its member countries are not, for the moment, a priority in the news agendas of the media analyzed in Poland, Romania and Spain.

And this is evident in the observed newsworthy indicators, such as: the preferred use of current news to cover events in Europe; the low interest of the media in the European debate; the insignificant percentage of European news that media stand on their first pages or summaries; the small size or duration of most community news; the lack of a clear and accurate understanding by the public about who is behind the news, etc.

The media should grasp that keep the audience informed of events taking place in the European community -to which we belong-, is not just a matter of interest (journalistic or otherwise), but also a matter of right to information and journalistic ethics.

In the case of the member countries of the European Union, the social responsibility of the media extends beyond one's own nation, if we consider that decisions taken at European level influence the daily lives of our citizens. For this reason, it is an obligation -and not a devotion- of the media to keep us informed – well informed- about these community decisions.

Despite our pessimism about the obtained data in our research, we prefer to close this work positively, using one of the conclusions reached by the Polish team: “Fortunately, the Polish media are becoming increasingly an echo of the views expressed by many of the leaders of the European countries”. Hopefully– and desirable- this media advance could spread...

6. References

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