

# **UACES 44<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference**

**Cork, 1-3 September 2014**

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# Covering the EU : Alone or Together ? Cooperation Patterns of Brussels Press Corps

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*Paper prepared for the 44th UACES Annual Conference - University Association for Contemporary European Studies, Cork, 1-3 September 2014*

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## **ABSTRACT**

Brussels features one of the biggest press corps in the world. Its multi-cultural character mirrors the very nature of the EU. However, inequalities exist. Smaller and newer Member States tend to have fewer correspondents in the European capital than their bigger and more influential counterparts. For most of the post-2004 countries, media outlets often have to rely on a single person to cover all EU politics. This isolation from the home newsroom may be a strong rationale for greater cooperation between correspondents. Do Brussels journalists cooperate or do they compete for scoops? Are New Member States' journalists equal partners to their Old Member State's colleagues? As many content analyses suggest, national perspective remains central in the coverage of European matters. It adds an angle to the supposedly dry and abstract EU news. Thus, cooperation might be restricted to the sole group of compatriots. What are the nodes of cooperation at work? Are they nationally defined ? Organized by media types or subregional groupings sharing a common history? The paper applies qualitative content analysis on a series of interviews with foreign correspondents, complemented by an observation period in the Brussels newsroom. Its central hypothesis posits that there is indeed strong cooperation across nationalities in Brussels that is however experienced differently by various national groups. This variance can be explained by the overreaching power hierarchies existing on the European level (impact of the date of accession but also size, influence, history etc. of different Member States).

## **INTRODUCTION**

According to O. Baisnée, Brussels newsroom is the only place in Europe where one can currently observe a version of what might be a European public space (Baisnée, 2000). The practices of information gathering of Brussels-based correspondents indeed point to some transnationalization of information flow and opinion formation about European issues transcending solely national perspectives. There is a latent potential that this limited European public sphere might eventually stretch to include also larger European publics. Increased circulation of information across national boundaries as we see it in the press corps might be mirrored in the final product of the news.

It is exactly for its potential as a laboratory for European public space formation that this paper focuses on Brussels journalistic community. Baisnée's main idea was derived from observation of the practices of collective brainstorming during the daily press conferences, a

formalized encounter between the press corps and one of its main political interlocutors : the European Commission. In our paper, we'd like to take this idea further and study the contact between journalists in all its different facets. Contact and cooperation are one of the pre-conditions of any community formation. It is through transnational cooperation that transnationalization of the press corps (and potentially the news) happens.

By cooperation we mean a voluntary arrangement between two or more persons that 'engage in reciprocal, preferential, mutually supportive actions' (Soeters, 1993). One of the main aims of such contact is exchange of information.

Our interest in the journalistic elite rests on the main neo-functionalist assumptions stipulating that frequent contact between elites (mainly within one professional group) may lead to a feeling of solidarity and eventually to community formation (Haas, 1958). This form of community building may spillover to other groups and fields spreading the common we-feeling across Europe (Risse, 2005). In this process, journalists have potentially a key role to play, as the works of K.Deutsch and their recent update by N.Fligstein have demonstrated, because they can act as multipliers of contact with the realities of other nationalities via the content they produce (Deutsch, 1953). This enables even the disadvantaged groups of population that don't have enough resources to enter personally in contact with fellow Europeans, to gain in knowledge of the Other and develop a feeling of mutual trust based on their better understanding of what's going on in fellow European countries (Fligstein, 2008). This is the very condition of the formation of a larger European community of which the already existing Brussels-limited public space described by Baisnée may be a first step. Correspondents' daily work in Brussels may be a cornerstone for the formation of a new imagined community (B. Anderson, 2006) that is no more national but transnational, European one.

Brussels press corps is a truly multinational community with more than 60 nationalities present. Even though we limit our focus on the sole correspondents coming from the Member States, this group still presents great varieties and is a great laboratory for studying the forms of contact and cooperation between EU-nationals and the potential for transnational community formation within this specific professional group.

Brussels<sup>1</sup> features one of the biggest press corps in the world. Its multi-cultural character mirrors the very nature of the EU. However, inequalities exist. Smaller and newer

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<sup>1</sup> When referring to "Brussels", we mean the materialization of specific institutional and professional milieu, defined in geographical but also cultural terms as the capital of EU. Indeed, a rather limited part of the city is included in this definition, leaving apart the conception of Brussels as the capital of Belgium.

Member States tend to send fewer correspondents than their bigger and more influential counterparts. For most of the post-2004 countries, media outlets often have to rely on a single person to cover all EU politics. This isolation from the home newsroom may be a strong rationale for greater cooperation between correspondents. Do Brussels journalists cooperate or do they compete for scoops? Are New Member States' journalists seen as equal partners by their Old Member State's colleagues? All those interrogations are encompassed in the central research question of this paper that may be formulated as follows : What are the underpinning factors of intra-professional cooperation between Brussels correspondents<sup>2</sup> ?

In the paper a particular emphasis will be put on the study of power hierarchies and their role in cooperation strategies, linking the present paper to the discipline of political science. We'll be mainly interested in the inequalities and perceived differences in cooperation patterns between the so-called Old and New Member States (from 2004 onwards), but also within those two groups, as far as their contact with colleagues of other nationalities is concerned.

Our core hypothesis stipulates that while cooperation is an essential part of correspondents' job, there are differentiated patterns of cooperation between various national groups. The intensity of contact, its structure and aim vary. This variance can be explained by the overreaching power hierarchies existing on the European level (impact of the date of accession but also size, influence, history etc. of different Member States).

The structure of the paper will be the following : we will first briefly present the research methodology and than move to the main results, answering one by one all interrogations presented in this short introduction.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The method used in this paper is qualitative in nature. Its aim isn't to quantify or point at the most frequent patterns of correspondents' behaviour but to constitute an inventory of cooperation practices. It is based on a content analysis of interview transcripts complemented by a period of observation in the Brussels newsroom (mainly European Commission, observation in other settings is planned for the later research). Qualitative semi-directive interviews were conducted with Brussels correspondents from various Member States

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<sup>2</sup> By correspondents we mean staff journalists but also freelancers based in Brussels, working for any type of media outlet and covering on regular basis and as their principal activity the news beat about the EU and its institutions.

following a loose topic guide centred on networks, cooperation patterns and cognitive schemes regarding the different nationalities that form the Brussels press corps. Even though a topic guide was used, in-depth interviews and extensive prompting (especially on cognitive issues) aimed at allowing for new insights to come up.

Average time spent with each respondent varied as other themes were also dealt with, but overall at least 20 minutes per interview were dedicated to the topics that are relevant for this study. Most of the data was gathered in February and May 2014, with a smaller part dating back to spring 2012. The interviews were conducted by the same researcher in three different languages : English(18), French(9) and Czech(4), according to the language preferences of the respondents. In total 31 people were interviewed (see the following table of respondents).

<b>Old Member States correspondents</b>	
<b>NATIONALITY</b>	<b>TYPE of MEDIA</b>
German 1	weekly
German 2	regional TV
German 3	TV+radio
French 1	daily
French 2	Radio
Spanish 1	daily
Spanish 2	radio
Italian 1	TV
Italian 2	daily
Austrian 1	agency
Austrian 2	radio+TV
Danish 1	online
Danish 2	radio
Dutch 1	various print media
Dutch 2	agency

<b>New Member States correspondents</b>	
<b>NATIONALITY</b>	<b>TYPE of MEDIA</b>
Slovak 1	agency
Slovak 2	TV and radio
Czech 1	TV
Czech 2	radio
Polish 1	daily
Polish 2	agency
Polish 3	TV
Slovenian 1	TV
Lithuanian 1	TV
Bulgarian 1	daily
Bulgarian 2	TV
Croatian 1	agency
Hungarian 1	weekly
Hungarian 2	agency
Hungarian 3	daily
Hungarian 4	TV

As far as the sampling is concerned, several techniques were used simultaneously. Respondents from Old Member States were selected by purpose sampling that took into account the nationality of respondents, in order to get a variety of country nationals represented. The aim was to encompass countries with different historical and geographical realities (size, common borders, date of accession to EU), as those might influence the behaviour of their nationals (Hooghe and Marks, 2001). No sampling was performed on individual basis where convenience sampling method was used combined with frequent snowballing at the end of the interviews. No pre-selection of countries was deemed necessary for the journalists from New Member states as they form a much smaller group. All of them were thus contacted.

However, even if the selection of specific nationalities has sometimes yielded interesting insights (mainly as far as the EU countries perceived as most influent are concerned, i.e. France and Germany), the total number of people interviewed didn't allow any generalization on the basis of nationality. Any national patterns of cooperation weren't thus identified, which is one of the limitations that comes with our choice of methodology. However, this isn't anyhow problematic knowing that qualitative method doesn't aim at representativeness and generalisation but in-depth description of complex phenomena (Silverman 2011).

The global interview design was completed by a short observation period, taking place mainly in the premises of the European Commission during its various press events. It took place in February 2012, after the first set of interviews was already collected and it was followed by another series of intensive interviewing in the following months.

## **RESULTS**

### **Intensive cooperation as a distinctive feature of Brussels**

The very starting question that needs answering before we move any further is simple : do Brussels correspondents cooperate? We need first to establish if there is any actual contact between Brussels correspondents, let it be across national groups or within them.

The answer is definitely positive. Intensive networking is one of the distinctive features of Brussels „milieu“(Suvarierol, 2009). For most correspondents the possibilities of cooperation are one the main assets of Brussels post, compared to other locations. They tend to contrast it to other situations they have known. Thus, when compared to the functioning of most national media systems, Brussels appears as more open and informal. This is mostly

explained by the scarcity of information present in national setting and resulting competition between various media outlets. The same secretive character is also ascribed to international settings. According to the respondents, being a correspondent in a foreign country is generally a lonely job where journalists work most of the time isolated. There is no real ground for cooperation with others as journalists are scattered around a town or a country with no natural meeting point and no common topics to cover as they remain dictated by national interests. In Brussels, on the contrary, cooperation seems to be flourishing. Why is it so?

Firstly, cooperation is made possible by material conditions. The geography of the European quarter and of Brussels newsroom is characterised by a high degree of concentration (Bastin, 2002). It is located on a single square kilometre where the three main EU institutions form a triangle within walking distance. This “Schuman-city” (Calliez 2004) might be even more concentrated in reality if we take into account the fact that for a large part of correspondents the Parliament remains only a secondary source of information (Anderson & McLeod, 2004) and the two remaining institutions are just across the street one from another. Moreover, two main press buildings are also strategically located : the International Press Center and the Residence Palace where a big number of media outlets have their offices are mingling places, right in the center of the institutional quarter. Those who don’t have an office in one of them work mostly in the fully equipped press centers inside the European Commission and the Council. All this points to an extreme concentration of journalists, who work together and meet daily in the same places and on the same occasions.

The main meeting point remains the Midday briefing, as already shown by the literature (Baisnée, 2001; Bastin, 2009; Pavy, 2003). It is a daily press conference that starts at noon at the premises of the European Commission. Its purpose is to keep the press corps updated about the decisions taken, upcoming events and the Commission’s views on any relevant matter. Our study confirms the main findings of the existing literature that has shown how in those meetings the channel of information has been displaced from the spokespersons to the journalists themselves (Raeymaeckers, Cosijn, & Deprez, 2007). Thanks to the daily question and answer session at each Midday Briefing, it becomes an arena of information exchange and brainstorming between journalists. This institutionalized encounter is not particularly valued by the journalists for the official information it provides, rather, it is seen as a platform performing the following functions: « hub of information », « reality check » and « networking » (Sobotova, 2013). These functions reveal one of the strongest mechanisms taking place in the Brussels information world : the intensive cooperation between the press corps.

On more occasional basis, another institutional arena plays a similar role as the daily gatherings at the European Commission : the various Council and European Council meetings. At those periodical events, a large proportion of correspondents' time is dedicated to waiting for political decisions to come to life. To spend the time as efficiently as possible, journalists engage in active networking and exchange of information while waiting. Partial and preliminary results of political negotiations that filter from behind the closed doors are shared with colleagues of confidence and the interpretation of those bites and pieces is frequently subject to collective brainstorming (Cornia, Lonnendonker, & Nitz, 2008). The understanding of the facts that will form the news is therefore constructed in multi-national discussion. This might have important impact on the nature of the news that will be produced by individual journalists who become de facto co-authors and co-interpreters of the news. As the time spent waiting stretches, exchanges of views about the topics of negotiation and their potential underpinnings let space to a more social and personal type of discussions. However this time is rarely considered as wasted by the participants that get to know new colleagues and nurture their existing contacts. The social function of some exchanges is seen as useful as it might form a basis for future professional cooperation.

Last but not least, a similar role is played by the press trips organized twice a year by the rotating presidencies. Those who participate in them admit voluntarily that the leisure and informal nature of such activity, as well as the fact that the trip's participants spent most of this time together, is favourable to the formation of social contacts where one gets to know other journalists on a friendly basis.

There are other factors that explain the intensity of contact between journalists. A powerful one is the isolation of most correspondents from their home newsroom. A large part of journalists are sent to Brussels alone. In need of social contact and lacking the editorial support from their colleagues at home, correspondents tend to recreate the same work dynamics they have known previously. This leads them to search for social and professional bonds outside their media outlet and often compensate the lack of infrastructure that goes in hand with scarce editorial resources by collective practices and greater propensity to enter in contact with other Brussels colleagues.

Thirdly, the intensive cooperation is also made necessary by the complexity of issues to be covered. European affairs being a huge and ever-evolving story with a multiplicity of episodes, cross-checking is often needed to verify if information is understood correctly, but also to neutralize some of the complex net of interests of the variety of people and institutions that provide journalists with information. In this sense, cooperation is a way of ensuring

greater objectivity. It is also a tool of benchmarking - to see what's relevant for others is useful to angle one's own stories.

To the variety of stakeholders actively targeting journalists is also related the next rationale for cooperation. The news about the EU is transnational in nature, dealing most of the time with more than one country. Therefore, there is a need to gather information about other countries' positions on policy issues, about the potential impact of planned political decisions on them etc. This information is available through various channels but fellow journalists are an important source in this regard, as they provide a useful shortcut to the summary of a country's position and realities. Thus, colleagues are often contacted on the grounds of their nationality, as experts on their home country. It is materially impossible for a single person to always gather all the 28 national viewpoints. Moreover, as we already mentioned, correspondents are most of the time working on their own<sup>3</sup>, so any shortcut is welcomed. In addition, the information one gets from a fellow journalist is supposed to be already crosschecked, as there is a tacit understanding that all Brussels correspondents share the same deontological standards<sup>4</sup>.

As we've just demonstrated Brussels offers a fertile ground for journalistic cooperation. Its forms remain varied. Regular social contact is its most frequent example. Indeed, daily contact and informal discussions on various matters that are not even necessarily related to professional life form an integral part of the networking process that might lead to subsequent cooperation. However, the contact between journalists is not only limited to this most basic form and includes various cooperation scenarios that depend on personality of people involved and on their material (editorial infrastructure, type of media outlet<sup>5</sup>) as well as symbolic resources (prestige, time spent in Brussels). It includes exchange of information on bilateral basis but also through various informal press clubs (ie. the club of main European dailies), the above-cited brainstorming, sharing and exchange of missing soundbites or sharing of resources at disposal of some journalists (borrowing a car or sharing a hotel room when going to Strasbourg Parliamentary sessions).

### **Choice of cooperation partners : nationality remains central**

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<sup>3</sup> While this is true for nearly all New Member States' media outlets, in the case of Old Member States it depends on the size of the country and media.

<sup>4</sup> To be more precise: all Member States' correspondents were seen as equally professional by their respective colleagues while the non-respect of ethical rules was sometimes attributed to the correspondents from non-EU and candidate countries, that still „have to learn how it works in Brussels“.

<sup>5</sup> Ie. some have more time and space for cooperation such as weeklies.

The reasons behind the cooperation-friendly character of Brussels newsroom have been depicted in the previous part. We shall now move to uncovering the logics that dictate the choice of cooperation partners. Who cooperates with whom and why? Do any international affinities or animosities play a role when it comes to the contact between correspondents? Here, the focus of our study isn't to establish the intensity of contact between various national groups (to this end a quantitative research design would have been more suitable) but to uncover the reasons that lead the correspondents to choose one nationality over another and more globally the justifications that are given of any cooperation choices and preferences.

As many content analyses suggest, national perspective remains central in the coverage of European matters (AIM, 2007). It adds an angle to the supposedly dry and abstract EU news. This might be a strong reason for a cooperative behaviour that would be restricted to the sole group of compatriots. This part of the paper will try to answer the question of nodes of cooperation. Do journalists cooperate more within their national groups or with colleagues of other nationalities?

All journalists agree on the relative absence of competition in Brussels as one of the main factors making any cooperation possible. Given the fact that national public spheres remain largely isolated one from another, there is virtually no competition with foreign journalists. International cooperation can thus exist freely. On the other hand, slight degree of competition keeps affecting one's relations with compatriots. It is however described as much smaller than the one that reigns at home. As such it doesn't prevent regular contacts with nationals. National group remains the main point of reference and social contact for most journalists, as they meet regularly in the same settings, interview the same people and cover the same topics that are of interest for their national public. This contact is social but also professional one, as the two of the oft-mentioned activities performed with compatriots were brainstorming and mutual assistance (sharing a car or a camera etc.). As we'll show later, the main form of cooperation with foreign colleagues is on the contrary exchange of information.

While the co-nationals form the first „natural“ circle of social contacts, they rarely remain the only one. International colleagues are contacted with almost the same frequency as compatriots. Some of the interviewed journalists even admitted that they consciously try to keep away from their own national group and seek rather the contact with foreigners. By doing so, they voluntarily take a position of an outsider within their own national group. This behaviour can be more frequently observed in big national groups from mainly Old Member States countries such as Spain or France that have a reputation of strong cohesiveness. The

same might be the case also for big New Member States, however we don't have enough data to confirm this finding for the moment.

The necessity to rely on colleagues of other nationalities to gather different Member States' viewpoints has been mentioned unanimously by all interviewed journalists. However, those were at first rather reluctant to name any nationalities with which they enter in contact on a more frequent basis. They put the emphasis on the informal and friendly atmosphere that reigns in the press corps and the absence of any closed groupings. All journalists, no matter of their nationality, were described as willing to help if addressed. As the cooperation depends mainly on the news flow, all possible contacts might prove useful. This type of reasoning points at an ad hoc nature of Brussels cooperation.

In line with our global research agenda that stretches beyond this single paper, we were particularly interested in the intensity of contact and forms of networks that mix together journalists from Old and New Member states countries. We are aware that those two are largely artificial social categories that don't necessarily correspond to any reality in Brussels, besides the common date of adhesion. However, the common features in media systems as well as politico-social realities justify this distinction. We were seeking to uncover if newcomers (which is a relative term because some are more „new“ than others) enter in contact with the „veterans“ or if they tend to cooperate mainly between them.

When correspondents working for media outlets from Old Member States were questioned about their privileged partners for cooperation, nationals from other Old Member State countries came always first. New Member State countries were mentioned less frequently (17 new MS versus 30 old MS) and in second place, often only in response to a prompting question. In contrast, New MS' correspondents featured more balanced cooperation networks, where Old MS' colleagues were as equally represented as those from the new ones.

While this might mean that keeping contact with colleagues from New Member States is seen as secondary by the journalists from Old MS, we must also take into account the factual realities in order to interpret this finding correctly. Indeed, New Member States' correspondents are described as valuable equal partners during the interviews whose low presence in one's personal networks is also given by the overall low presence of New Member States media in Brussels. Indeed, while there are more than 600 journalists coming from countries that gained EU membership before 2004, there are only 60 of them that came with the subsequent accession waves. This lower presence in numbers explains quite naturally why they are not the first cooperation partners. Overall we can still affirm that New MS'

journalists are well integrated in the existing Brussels networks. As we'll show subsequently they are also active in forming their own ones.

As far as the cooperation Old-New MS is concerned, Polish journalists were those mentioned as cooperation partners the most frequently by their Old MS counterparts, especially by the journalists coming from the „Latin“ countries (France, Italy, Spain). On the other hand, Poles seem to be absent from the networks of German journalists whose country shares important part of its borders and history with Poland, contrarily to the above-mentioned countries. This points to a fact than can be generalized to all countries : the only fact of having a common border isn't a sufficient pre-condition for network formation. The border factor plays a role only if completed by larger cultural affinities between the two (or more) nations as will be shown bellow.

Poland being a big country with a relatively high number of correspondents in Brussels (around 12) and relative propensity to learn French those two facts might explain its presence in some networks. An explanation why Poles, together with Romanian and Bulgarian journalists were globally more frequently mentioned as cooperation partners lays probably in the fact that they come from relatively big countries, compared to other New MS. The role played by the size of a country is double. First of all, those countries have larger number of correspondents in Brussels. This enables more interaction with other journalists. Second, big countries are generally seen as more influential which explains why „their“ journalists might be seen as potentially useful contacts.

On the contrary, Poland seems to be strikingly absent from New MS journalists' networks. The explanations that were put forward by Old MS journalists aren't perceived as decisive by their New MS colleagues. This absence is two-fold. First, Polish journalists are rarely mentioned as cooperation partners by others and second, Poles themselves don't seem to judge the cooperation with other New MS journalists necessary neither. They admit to be far more West-oriented, seeking contact with journalists from big Old Member States (Germany, France, UK etc.). Within the New MS journalists, not Polish but Hungarian colleagues seem to be preferred as New MS partners. This might be partly explained by a relatively high number of Hungarian journalists present in Brussels (Hungary has almost as many journalists as Poland).

The argument of influence represents an oft-mentioned leitmotiv. Indeed, the most-valued contacts by both Old and New MS journalists are the Germans, as they represent the most powerful country in the current state of the EU and as such have often a privileged access to some sources of (national but also European) information. As far as the New MS

correspondents are concerned, good relations with their German colleagues are sought after also because of the geographic proximity with Germany and close commercial links. Another factor might be a relatively well-spread knowledge of German in those countries compared to the rest of Europe (European Commission, 2012). This last point may also explain the good relations established with Austrian colleagues which are however already less intensive.

Among the Old MS respondents, close contacts with German colleagues were followed by good networks with French journalists. Those were explained by the same influence principle. However, French colleagues were strikingly absent from the New MS respondents' networks. There, various other relatively „un-influential“ Old MS countries, big (Spain, Italy) and small (Ireland, Scandinavian states) were preferred.

While there seems to be a disagreement over the utility of frequent contact with French journalists between the two groups, both agree on the fact that there's only a scarce cooperation with British correspondents. The main explanation that is given by the respondents themselves is the particularly critical position United Kingdom has in the EU that keeps it and its journalists apart from the rest of EU. This absence is even more strong in the New MS networks.

Influence isn't the only factor taken into account when choosing one's professional contacts. A perception of longstanding cultural bonds with others nations is also a powerful predictor of increased cooperation. Those imagined affinities between countries and peoples lead to a feeling of a shared sphere of common interests. Those interests translate then in the interest in similar news topics by their correspondents. Larger cultural and historical affinities are often accompanied or materialized by linguistic ones. Which nationalities are seen as sharing some ties of kinship ? A classical example that was frequently given during the interviews are the countries speaking Germanic languages or those that share the common Latin/roman origins.

The reasons for keeping contact with some nationalities varied across respondents. While German correspondents spoke about their French colleagues in terms of influence (or co-influence, making constantly reference to the role played in the EU by the Germany-France duo), Italians or Spaniards framed their decision to be in touch with French colleagues rather in terms of common interests and perceived cultural and linguistic links that unite their countries. This point of view was largely reproduced also by the French themselves alongside the same lines. They praised the facility of cooperation with Italians, Spaniards and Portuguese thanks to common language roots and common understanding of certain issues.

The same kind of discourse can also be heard about Romanian journalists that speak a language of Latin origins as well, but they were already mentioned less frequently.

The same principle of shared cultural and linguistic bonds may be found in the Scandinavian sub-group of journalists. This fact was described by a Danish journalist who's regular contact with her Swedish colleagues is a result of inexistent linguistic barriers. The fact that Danish and Swedish language share a grammatical and phonetic similarities greatly facilitates any exchange between the two groups.

New Member States' journalists abide by the same principles. Thus, we observed a greater propensity to cooperate between Centre-European journalists coming from "small Visegrad countries" as some journalists put it. Czechs, Slovaks and Hungarians perceive themselves as natural partners for cooperation. Journalists from countries on and around the Balkan peninsula present a similar pattern, let them be Old Member States (Austria), new ones (Slovenia, Croatia) or, to a lesser degree, candidate countries (mainly Serbia).

This propensity to cooperate with some nationalities merits deeper analysis. It is based on the principle of familiarity with other nations. It rests on two distinct but interlinked criteria. First of all, most of the cited groupings were geographical and cultural areas whose links go far back to the past. Second, those links are often made possible by linguistic similarities. However, same language family alone isn't a sufficient reason for cooperation. To illustrate this, we can take the example of Poland that is excluded from the cooperation habits of the journalists from "small Centre-European countries" even though it belongs to the same language family as its other two members. On the contrary, Hungarians with their different language, but strong historical ties, prove to be more suitable partners in this case. The same applies also for Austrian journalists who have the tendency to build privileged partnerships with their Centre-European and Southern-European counterparts due to the common history while they share no linguistic resemblance whatsoever. The continual impact of the past on the present state of things let them be mentalities, national habits and characters or similar political and social structures lead populations of some countries to be interested in the same issues and to take similar positions on those matters. This justifies the increased tendency to cooperate between the journalists from those countries.

What should also be pointed out is the absence of any encompassing New MS or post-communist solidarity. While the cooperation patterns seem to recreate some historical bonds, those never stretch to all countries of the post-communist bloc. They rest upon links that have their roots far beyond this relatively short but strongly traumatic experience. We must then come back to our preliminary "warning" that has been confirmed by our data : the label "New

Member States”, while making reference to the same date of accession doesn’t necessarily translate into any cognitive reality for its members.

Languages are important factor of cooperation that stretches far beyond the above-described phenomenon. All correspondents highlight the role played by language skills. Indeed, speaking a foreign language greatly facilitates any cooperation and may even become a strong motivation to enter in contact with others. All languages are seen as useful tools of cooperation. While the knowledge of English is taken for granted in this international setting, any other language skill confers an important advantage to its holder. Polish, Slovenian, Romanian, German or Spanish, any language may lead to an increased social contact with a particular national group and eventually to a more structural cooperation. Language skills are thus a powerful determinant of one’s choice of contacts. In this sense, cooperation isn’t always sought for at the first place, it comes as a product of the social contact between people speaking the same language.

Different language skills originate in different personal histories, let them be study or career trajectories. Thus, alongside the collective dynamics described above, cooperation and contact between correspondents remain also strongly individual in nature, based on personal skills, experiences and preferences. Language skills, previous career choices, family matters (ie. living in a bi-national family), personal sympathies and unplanned encounters as well as material realities (ie. sharing an office with a foreign colleague or using the services of a foreign cameraman) play an important role in network formation. Those factors tend to dominate over any conscious cooperation strategies. Thus, while acknowledging the decisive role played within the EU by Germany (and somewhat less by France), most respondents tended to emphasise the personal sympathy rather than strategy or even nationality matters as factors that influence the choice of their cooperation partners.

Indeed, future partnerships often come to existence by chance rather than by planning. The vocabulary used in the interviews points to this fact. Foreign colleagues are first and foremost described as « friends » or “acquaintances”. This vocabulary choice is made to emphasize the personal nature of such process. Those bonds of friendship seem to precede any professional consideration but may subsequently develop into work partnerships.

### **DISCUSSION : main finding and its possible consequences**

Press corps cooperation in Brussels is both a material necessity and a greatly valued consequence of the cosmopolitan nature of its environment. It enables journalists to compare

their national views and perspectives in order to get a more balanced picture about the complex endeavour that is the EU.

This paper comes with a new insight on the role that Brussels press corps plays in the formulation of European news through the processes of intensive cooperation between correspondents. Indeed, it has been demonstrated that foreign colleagues often act as experts on national positions and realities. They wear their national hat when contacted by their colleagues from other countries and are often contacted BECAUSE of their nationality. In this sense, European news formation remains strongly dominated by national viewpoints. They act as national informers. We might even want to use the term „spokespersons“ of a country, but this term implies allegiance to the messages transmitted which doesn't correspond to the realities of the journalistic work, strongly dominated by the principles of neutrality and objectivity. The aim of a correspondent vis-à-vis his or her colleagues is rarely promotion, advocacy or any propaganda objective. On the contrary, the role of foreign journalists as national informers doesn't imply any adhesion to the governmental or country's position and its potentially critical (and ideally objective) character constitutes one of its main added values.

Given the information-rich nature of Brussels communication sphere, correspondents of other nationalities are contacted in order to gather as much information as possible about what has been said in various press conferences and briefings organized by national politicians and permanent representations. The role of the foreign colleagues is double : they act as transmitters of information, but also as its interpreters. They also act as interpreters of national public opinion. Together with their expertise on European affairs, they mobilize their cultural capital as country nationals and when asked by foreign colleagues they speak on behalf of their publics, explaining what are the opinions of their compatriots on policy issues. Doing so isn't seen as speculation but as offering valuable contextual information to those who know the realities of their country less well.

Relying on a colleague of other nationality to complete one's own sources of information is a useful tool to nuance the strongly ethnocentric character of the discourse presented by one's national politicians. It enables to pass from a strictly national viewpoint to a more balanced, at least partly international and European one. Taking into account the various country perspectives is also useful in order to politicize the European information which consensual nature tends to be exaggerated in the declarations made by the various communication services of European institutions that tend to silence potential member states' disagreements. Last but not least, cross-checking of the facts with other foreign colleagues

goes against the general tendency of national politicians to constantly reject the fault of all unpopular decisions on “Brussels” and other member states. All those reasons might lead to the birth of more balanced coverage of European news that is at least partially (and horizontally) Europeanized.

However, the content analyses of the European news that dealt with its transnationalization remain rather divided on that matter (Bruggemann, & Kleinen von Koningslow, 2009; Semetko, De Vreese, & Peter, 2000; Statham, 2006). Transnational cooperation practices don't directly translate into more transnational media content, that is shown to be dominated by mainly national frames and perspectives. This might thus confirm the idea of O. Baisnée that the press corps indeed is a living example of how might a transnational public space work but this doesn't necessarily reflect itself in the product of its daily work. Editorial policies as well as perceived demand of the publics asking for a strong national focus prevent most of the transnationalization happening on Brussels level from filtering into the content itself. Moreover, the fact of speaking from the national position may at best lead to a horizontal transnationalization where views of other countries would be taken into account as opposed to a more integrative vertical one.

To conclude on a more pragmatic note, as we demonstrated throughout this paper, Brussels press corps is characterised by intensive cooperation mechanisms. However, there are also facts that contradict (or at least put in perspective) this finding. As we already mentioned, social and professional contact with foreign colleagues is still dominated by national membership. This remains valid when other practices, which may seem at first irrelevant, are taken into account. As was frequently pointed out in the interviews and subsequently verified during the observation period, taking a look at the sitting order during the main press conferences may be good indicator of the degree of mingling of journalists.

Indeed, when assisting to a press conference in any European institution, journalists tend to recreate their national groups by choosing their seats that are close to their colleagues of the same nationality. An informal sitting order that remains more or less the same through various conferences is respected. This led some of the respondents to speak about the myth of cooperation rather than actual reality. According to them, the relaxed and friendly atmosphere in Brussels newsroom is a favourable ground for social contact where everybody knows everybody but doesn't lead to any structural cooperation.

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