

The Role of News Media in European Integration: A Framework of Analysis for Political Science

by Robin B. HODESS

Doctoral candidate in international relations at the University of Cambridge, United Kingdom and Fellow of the Berlin Program for Advanced German and European Studies at the Freie Universität Berlin, Germany

Introduction

Despite a proliferation of analysis of the European Union (EU) by political scientists since the late 1980s, there has been a notable lack of attention to news media coverage of EU politics. While not offering a magic formula for understanding the complex effects of news media,¹ in the European setting or otherwise, the following article is based on the assumption that news media do influence the political process. The absence of attention to the media's role in European integration, it will be argued, is symptomatic of what has proved to be a crucial oversight in the political science theories of the EU: the role of public debate in the process of European integration. This deficit is especially problematic in the wake of Europe's 'relaunch' after 1985 and the increasing prominence of European issues. Consequently, political science study of Europe needs not only to grapple empirically with media's position in the process of European integration, but to insert media into theoretical debate about the nature and causes of European Union development.

What follows is a selective review of media's effects on politics, building the case for including media in research on European integration; an overview of the political science study of the European Union, providing the context for its lack of consideration of the news media; and, finally, the proposal of a framework of analysis for the role of the media in EU politics.

I. Media's Effects

Perhaps the most self-evident - and the most fundamental - effect of media on politics is that media shape society's understanding of what constitutes the category of 'politics' itself. To some extent, this reflects the crucial fact that media are the dominant source of information on politics in modern society. Yet the implications of this informational function for media go much further. As Bruce Gronbeck has written, 'There is little doubt that mass media depict our political culture and even create - through selection of details to cover and commentary to add to them - symbolic environments within which we work out our political practices'.² By creating the very discourse of politics, via news coverage, media shape society's understanding of what is political and what is the nature of political culture. In so doing, Seaton and Pimlott have concluded, that 'The main effect of

1 Media effects fall into four broad categories: cognitive (what one knows), affective (how one feels), evaluative (what one thinks), and behavioural (how one acts).

2 Bruce E. Gronbeck, 'Popular Culture, Media, and Political Communication', in Klaus Bruhn Jensen and Nicholas Jankowski, (eds.), *A Handbook of Qualitative Methodologies for Mass Communication Research* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 211.

the mass media may be to set the conditions and establish the climate in which opinion is changed and formed, rather than directly to alter particular opinions'.³

Media define not only the terms but the parameters of politics, taking part in the setting of the political agenda. As research within media studies, under the aegis of 'agenda-setting',⁴ has shown, people may not think *what* they are told by the media, but they do think *about* what they are told.⁵ McCombs and Shaw first showed this agenda-setting effect in their 1972 voter study, in which they observed that 'the mass media set the agenda for each political campaign, influencing the salience of attitudes toward the political issues'.⁶ Put simply, agenda-setting research suggests that the way issues are given priority in the news influences the importance attached to such issues by the news audience. Media thus create not only the content of, but the hierarchy within, politics.

Finally, media have a legitimating effect. The legitimation provided by media coverage builds the image of accountability that organs of democratic government continually seek to show the public. As Ericson et al have pointed out, '*...news is crucial to the constitution of authority in the knowledge structure of society, even if its veracity and contributions to understanding are in doubt. Resources have to be devoted to newswork if one wants to be recognized as an authorized knower, if one's organization wants to both promote and protect its image as accountable, if legitimation work is required to respond to and sustain the myths of one's institutional environment*'.⁷

The frequency, placement, type, and tone of coverage of a particular political institution or process, indeed the very selection of stories and sources and the portrayal of conflicts associated with them, contribute to the credibility of those institutions or processes. In short, the public legitimation of politics occurs through and because of media coverage.

Given the essential function of news media in defining and legitimating the sphere of politics and in shaping the political climate, it is possible to conclude that media merit more attention within the field of political science. Consideration of the European Union by political scientists is no exception.

II. Political Science and EU Development

In simplest terms, political science treatment of European integration has consistently failed to incorporate media into the framework of analysis of political change within the European Union. Given media's numerous effects on politics,

3 Jean Seaton and Ben Pimlott (eds.), *The Media in British Politics* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1987), p. xiii.

4 For a review of agenda-setting research, including criticism of the field, see Hans-Bernd Brosius, 'Agenda-Setting nach einem Vierteljahrhundert Forschung: Methodischer und theoretischer Stillstand?', *Publizistik*, 3 (1994), pp. 269-288.

5 Bernard Cohen, *The Press and Foreign Policy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 13.

6 Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw, 'The Agenda-setting Function of Mass Media', reprinted in Morris Janowitz and Paul Hirsch, (eds.), *Reader in Public Opinion and Mass Communication* (New York: Free Press, 1981), p. 128. The agenda-setting function has been shown over time.

7 Richard Ericson, Patricia Baranek, and Janet Chan, *Negotiating Control: a Study of News Sources* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1989), p. 23.

the continued lack of academic interest in media coverage of European integration seems curious. However, this inattention may in part be explained by the acknowledged difficulty of assessing the impact of news media on politics, more generally. As Doris Graber has concluded, the 'inability to prove mass media impact beyond a doubt has made social scientists shy away from assessing media influence on many important political events'.⁸ In addition, the lack of focus on media may also be due to the fact that the centrality of the media to politics was not anticipated - or widely accepted by social scientists - when the European Economic Community was founded in 1957.⁹ As a result, there evolved no tradition within political science of examining media's relationship to EU development.

It would be wrong, however, to assume that scholarly interest in the news media's role in modern European politics has not developed in academic study outside the field of political science. There is a long tradition of analysis of media's function in western European society, emerging from the work of such varied thinkers as Walter Bagehot, Max Weber, and later, the Frankfurt School.¹⁰ Weber's (proposed, but never completed) study is of interest, since it was 'the first attempt to put the study of the press on a firm empirical basis'.¹¹ The media scholar Kurt Lang has reviewed the design of the Weber study, highlighting the following key questions it posed: 'What gets into the paper?...What differences are there between papers in the same country and between the press in different countries and what accounts for these differences? What are the effects, especially the long-term consequences, of a particular form of news presentation?'¹² This

8 Doris Graber, *Mass Media and American Politics*, 4th Edition (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quality Press, 1993), p. 17.

9 American research by the Columbia School in the 1940s and 1950s disproved fears, in great part aroused by the apparent influence of propaganda in totalitarian systems, that media were creating 'mass society' in which media had nearly unlimited power to manipulate the public. The results, which showed media's ability to reinforce existing beliefs rather than its ability to change behaviour, led Klapper to conclude, in 1960, that the media had 'minimal effects' on politics. In fairness, his pronouncement, which was to have a profound influence on the young discipline of media studies, needs to be interpreted in light of the previous hypothesis of omnipotent media. Denis K. Davis, 'News and Politics', in Dan Nimmo and David Swanson, (eds.), *New Directions in Political Communications: A Resource Book* (London: Sage, 1990), p. 150, and James Curran, Michael Gurevitch, and Janet Woollacott, 'The Study of the Media: Theoretical Approaches', in Oliver Boyd-Barrett and Peter Braham, (eds.), *Media Knowledge and Power* (London: Croom Helm, 1987), p. 58-61.

10 The Frankfurt School critique of media is particularly well-known. Developed in despair over fascism and the seeming failure of the enlightenment project, it accused media of - at best - maintaining consensus and - at worst - bringing about the domination of a single cultural aesthetic in society. Adorno and Horkheimer believed that the industry of media, with its explicit interest in profit, would lead to cultural homogenisation, the creation of 'mass society'. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, 'The Culture Industry', *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (London: Verso, 1992).

11 Kurt Lang, 'The Critical Function of Empirical Communication Research: Observations on German-American Influences', *Media, Culture, and Society*, 1 (1979), p. 84.

12 Ibid, p. 84.

series of questions anticipated much of the empirical media research that emerged after the 1930s, research that defined the academic field of media studies.¹³

Yet if political scientists have failed to account for the influence of news media on European integration, what have they emphasised? In their early considerations (between the late 1950s and the mid-1970s) of post-war West European integration, political scientists focused overwhelmingly on the locus of power in European Union policy-making, trying to assess whether it had shifted from a national to a European level. The evolving academic discourse on European integration, taking place largely within an international relations (IR) paradigm, subsequently divided researchers into roughly two camps: those who believed political power remained (or ought to) with the nation-state, and those who argued that control of policy-making lay increasingly within the European Union structure - at the supranational level. To the extent that these competing positions could be pigeon-holed into the larger IR framework, the former fit into the realist school, the latter into that of the pluralists. It is perhaps worth noting that there has been very little work done on European integration within the third principle strain of IR analysis, that of structuralism.¹⁴

This focus on the degree of integration, pitting intergovernmentalists (realists) against neofunctionalists (pluralists), emphasised the efforts of elites, whether at the national or European level. In this context, 'elites' consisted of those individuals and institutions whose influence on policy-making directly determined the course of EU development. In the words of (neofunctionalists) Leon Lindberg and Stuart Scheingold: *"The birth of the European Community was, in the final analysis, largely the work of political and technical elites. The scheme was devised and elaborated by technical elites and presented to the public only after compromises had been worked out among political leaders... The supranational system that has materialized continues to evidence this elitist bias"*.¹⁵

The theory of intergovernmentalism contended that national elites, acting in the national interest, would resist any encroachment on state power. Neofunctionalism, for its part, emphasised the increased 'delegation of decision-making authority to a supranational agency',¹⁶ and the development of European elites as the critical element in European integration. Therefore, the principle academic debate on European integration, concerned as it was with the degree of integration and the role of elites, largely ignored the influence of other entities, such as news media, on the course of EU politics.

13 For its part, the discipline of media studies has also often failed to find a balance between a focus on media and their political context. As Nicholas Garnham has stated, 'Most study of the mass media is simply too media-centric'. Nicholas Garnham, 'The Media in the Public Sphere', in Craig Calhoun, (ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (London: MIT Press, 1993), p. 360. It is worth noting that consideration of the European Union by media studies scholars has been largely limited to 'election studies' of the European Parliament and the issue of developing Europe-wide media policy.

14 For more on the discipline's definitions and stages, see Margot Light and A.J.R. Groom, *International Relations: a Handbook of Current Theory* (London: Frances Pinter, 1985).

15 Leon Lindberg and Stuart Scheingold, *Europe's Would-Be Polity* (Engelwood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1970), p. 22.

16 Ibid, p. 7.

More recent (1980s and 1990s) theoretical interest in EU development has concentrated less on top-down integration, along the lines of the 'Community method',¹⁷ and more on policy-making within a European Union policy arena. Drawing on the traditions of comparative, domestic and bureaucratic political analysis, these newer theoretical approaches to European Union politics continue to focus on the influence of elite groups, as did their predecessors, but do so on a domestic (internal to the nation-state) rather than a union (supranational) level. By and large, this policy-making focus has sought to open the 'black box' of national politics and expose 'the linkages between domestic and EC tiers.'¹⁸

Perhaps most promising for the purposes of finding a role for the media in European Union politics was the domestic politics approach to European Union politics. In his seminal 1983 essay, *'Domestic Politics and Community Policy-Making'*, Simon Bulmer emphasised the need to evaluate the domestic sources of national approaches to European integration. In his words, domestic politics could show 'how EC policy-making is affected by behaviour within the nation state'.¹⁹ More than any other 'sub-state' theory, the domestic politics view of European Union attempted to deconstruct the unity of the 'nation-state-as-actor', to look at the domestic influences, both inside *and* outside government, that contribute to European policy development. Bulmer credited the uniqueness of each member-state's 'national polity'. In particular, he cited the significance of domestic 'policy environments' or 'policy styles'.²⁰ Still, the domestic politics model fell short of including the media as a factor in EU policy-making.

Other recent work in EU studies has begun to focus on the issue of the degree of democracy at the European level of governance. This general category of research has been primarily concerned with the quest for legitimacy within the European Union, as a result of the EU's 'democratic deficit'. If 'the great achievement of the late-nineteenth century West European nation state...was to link accountability, loyalty, and legitimacy to authority and power',²¹ as William Wallace has written, then it is perhaps only right that observers of the European Union have begun to assess to what extent the EU, as a supranational aspirant challenging the 'traditional' European nation-state, has acquired such linkages.

Indeed, as the EU has gained in stature, taking on and aspiring to new functions across the policy spectrum, the issue of its legitimacy has come to the fore. According to Karlheinz Neunreither, 'Legitimacy...depends on the consent of the citizen, not necessarily on individual political decisions taken, but on the system itself. There must be some identification between the citizen and the political system'.²² While the European Parliament has provided a link to European publics, the relative impotence of the Parliament has prohibited its ability to legitimate

17 Simon Bulmer, 'Domestic Politics and European Community Policy-Making, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 21, 4 (1983), p. 351.

18 Ibid, p. 349.

19 Ibid, p. 352.

20 Ibid, pp. 349-53.

21 William Wallace, 'Rescue of Retreat? The Nation State in Western Europe, 1945-93', *Political Studies*, 42 (1994), p. 75.

22 Karlheinz Neunreither, 'The Democratic Deficit of the European Union: Toward Closer Cooperation between the European Parliament and the National Parliaments', *Government and Opposition*, 29, 3 (1994), p. 312.

the entire supranational system of governance.²³ This new focus on legitimacy in EU studies has given attention to certain institutions (such as lobbies) or policy arenas (such as regional government) that are seen to connect the EU more directly to its constituencies and citizens. However, such investigations have not assessed the function of news media in the process of legitimation within the European Union.

Ultimately, interest in the legitimacy of EU institutions and the level of democracy within the European system of governance leads to the study of news media. 'If it is true that politics in Western democracies has to be justified in public, it can reasonably be assumed that the public discourse about supranational governance assumes a decisive role in the process of legitimation of European governance structures'.²⁴ As was stated earlier, media are the chief source of information about government, creators of the political climate and culture, agenda setters, and legitimators. Arguably, it is difficult to understand EU politics without understanding the communication of those politics, whether directed at political elites, the general public,²⁵ or both.

It is worth pointing out that theoretical treatment of the EU has largely ignored another critical factor in questions of legitimation: 'the public' and public opinion.²⁶ One reason for this lack of attention to the public role in European politics was the notion, long prevalent within political science, that the general public was not interested in foreign policy. In conjunction with this disinterest, it was claimed that domestic elections were not fought or won on foreign policy issues. If the EU, broadly speaking, was projected and/or perceived as an issue of foreign policy, then there would have been low public salience on the European issue. As a result, the elites in charge of Europe would scarcely need to worry about changes in public 'mood'.²⁷ Lindberg and Scheingold asserted in the early 1970s that the publics of Western Europe were, in fact, broadly yet consistently in favour of European integration, thereby creating the concept of the 'permissive consensus'.²⁸ This concept gave elites, and theories about elites, wide room

23 Brigitte Boyce has argued that low voter turnouts, such as have occurred in EP elections, '...may have the negative effect of alienating citizens from the political system...thereby undermining democratic legitimacy'. Brigitte Boyce, 'The Democratic Deficit of the European Community', *Parliamentary Affairs*, 46, 4 (1994), p. 461 and 470.

24 Markus Jachtenfuchs, 'Theoretical Reflections on the Efficiency and Democracy of European Governance Structures', Paper presented at the 2nd ECSA World Conference, Brussels, 5-6 May, 1994, p. 17.

25 Although imprecise, 'general public' is used to refer the populace not involved in European Union affairs at policy-making, or 'elite', level.

26 One exception was the theory of functionalism, perhaps the first 'theory' of European integration. Functionalism did address the issues of 'mass' attitudes and behaviour toward integration, positing that popular support for integration was essential to its success. The integration theory which followed, however, came to focus on elites, as mentioned above. See Simon Hix, 'The Study of the European Community: The Challenge to Comparative Politics', *West European Politics*, 17, 1 (January 1994), p. 4, and David Mitrany, *A Working Peace System: An Argument for the Functional Development of International Organization* (Oxford: University Press, 1943), p. 11.

27 Gabriel Almond, *The American People and Foreign Policy*, (New York: Praeger, 1962), p. 53.

28 Lindberg and Scheingold, p. 41.

to operate without attention to public interest or debate.²⁹ While the 'public opinion' factor has remained absent in most theoretical discussion about the nature and causes of EU development, extensive empirical work on public attitudes toward European integration has been carried out. In fact, it has even been argued that 'no other region of the world has produced a social research program that is comparable in cross-national scope or in the regularity with which these measures are conducted'.³⁰ Nonetheless, most models of public opinion emphasise the dominant role of elites in opinion-formation,³¹ thereby repeating (European) integration theory's 'elite' bias, and, ironically, fail to address media's role in the public opinion-building process.³²

Overall, political science study of the EU, whether supranational, national, or sub-national in focus, and whether concentrated on elites or issues of legitimization, has failed to acknowledge the influence of media in European integration. This oversight is linked to the lack of attention in EU theory to public opinion. Because the European Union grew in terms of power and competence in the mid-1980s, the media debate on European integration, as the principle forum for the public debate on the future of the European integration project, achieved ever more significance. Consequently, theory about European Union development now urgently needs to take account of the role of media.

III. Approaching the Role of Media in EU Politics: Normative Press Theory

Until now, it has been argued that media influence politics and that the study of European integration has failed to account for this influence. What need to be found, then, are theoretical constructs that frame the investigation of media's role in EU politics. To this end, it is useful to review the theories of media's role in the political sphere, as developed within the field of media studies. Such theoretical consideration, generally referred to as *normative press theory*, has attempted to determine the nature of media, focusing on why media have taken on certain func-

29 There is a debate as to whether the permissive consensus ever existed, or has now ceased to exist. Reflecting on favourable public opinion data in the early 1970s, James Caporaso presciently warned, 'If we interpret these figures as evidence of a reservoir of well-developed loyalty for a politically unified Europe, we are probably making a mistake. The argument could be made that the concept of Europe is popular precisely because it is only dimly perceived and affects Europeans everyday lives only peripherally.' James A. Caporaso, *The Structure and Function of European Integration* (Pacific Palisades, CA: Goodyear, 1974), p. 20.

30 Ronald Inglehart and Karlheinz Reif, 'Analyzing Trends in West European Opinion: the Role of the Eurobarometer Surveys', in Karlheinz Reif and Ronald Inglehart, (eds.), *Eurobarometer: the Dynamics of European Public Opinion* (London: Macmillan, 1991), p. 1.

31 This view of opinion flows stems from Lazarsfeld et al's two-step model, in which opinion leaders influence media which in turn influence the public. Work by Deutsch and Rosenau followed suit. For a full discussion, see Bernhard Wessels, 'Bubble-Up-Theory' or Cascade Model? The Formation of Public Opinion Towards the EC: Shaky Evidence from Difference Empirical Sources', Discussion Paper FS III 92-202 (Berlin: Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin, 1992), especially pp. 6 and 14.

32 In Reif and Inglehart, for example, not one of the 22 chapters focuses on the news media's relationship to public opinion on European integration.

tions in modern society.³³ Normative theory provides a basis for developing a framework for political science inquiry into the role of the media in European integration. Two broad conclusions can be drawn from normative theory: 1) that media function either as watchdog or mouthpiece for government,³⁴ and 2) that media are national and linked to the modern nation-state.

It is difficult to study the media's link to politics - and its deep-rooted connection to the evolution of the modern state - without consideration of the rhetoric surrounding media freedom and the contention that, in the ideal-type modern political system, media act as a watchdog on government. According to the watchdog model, the notion of a free press was critical to a self-consciously developing citizenry in whose interest such freedom lay as a counterweight to absolutist government.³⁵ Indeed, mass media evolved in tandem with a Europe transformed by rationalist thought, one moving swiftly toward industrialisation and the nation-state system. By providing the essential critical forum for public debate of politics, media had an important legitimisation function in the evolution of the modern state. In this context, freedom of the press was considered a vital aspect of democracy, a basic tenet and measuring stick of political liberalism.³⁶ In 19th and 20th century Europe, freedom of the press became a symbol for the democratic state, just as the control and manipulation of media came to symbolise totalitarianism.

In the theory of the media as watchdog, media are an essential component of the public sphere. Much recent consideration of the media as the creator of the public sphere stems from the *Habilitationsschrift* of Jürgen Habermas. The free press, according to Habermas, developed out of a tradition of coffee house literary criticism (the world of letters) and made possible the 'emancipation of civil society' from the established sources of authority in society, such as monarchs.³⁷ So emerged a 'public sphere that functioned in the political realm'.³⁸ Although Habermas' view of the emergence and decline of the public sphere has been roundly criticised,³⁹ his acknowledgement of the press as 'the public sphere's preeminent institution'⁴⁰ remains definitive for understanding the ideal function of news media in modern European states. As Curran has written, following

33 Siebert et al's theories of the press remain the standard for the normative framework of analysis, even if though they reflect a certain Cold War era crudeness. By 'press', of course, they were referring to 'all the media of mass communication'. See Fred Siebert, Theodore Peterson, and Wilbur Schramm, *Four Theories of the Press* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1956).

34 Siebert et al referred to this dichotomy as the *Libertarian* and *Authoritarian* models of the press. Ibid.

35 Denis MacShane, 'Media Policy and the Left', in Seaton and Pimlott, p. 221.

36 John Keane, *The Media and Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity, 1991), p. 143.

37 Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), pp. 51-56.

38 Ibid, p. 57.

39 An interesting review of this criticism can be found in Jürgen Habermas, 'Further Reflections on the Public Sphere', in Calhoun, pp. 421-461.

40 Habermas, p. 181.

Habermas' lead, 'the media...provide an arena of public debate...by reconstituting private citizens as a public body in the form of public opinion'.⁴¹

In the watchdog theory, media also offer themselves as the (unelected) representative of the public in its demands for the propriety and accountability of government.⁴² In modern times, it has been argued, the representational role of the media has mushroomed, with media taking over functions from political parties and serving as intermediary, ombudsman, reformer, and enforcer of the law.⁴³ This expanded role of the media, however, begs the obvious question: who serves as watchdog to the media? British Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin once famously accused the press of 'exercising power without responsibility, the prerogative of the harlot throughout the ages'. Yet, without wholly undermining the watchdog perspective, McQuail has pointed out that 'The media, and each mass medium in its own place and time, are very much constrained by a 'public definition' and a set of expectations and norms which grow around them'.⁴⁴ It is not insignificant, either, that most journalists are likely to view *themselves* as society's watchdogs. While each state has its conventions for monitoring the press and broadcasting, perhaps the strongest 'control' on the media arises from the fact that, as a product of their specific socio-political environment, most journalists share assumptions about institutions, values, and norms with society at large.⁴⁵

Some critics, however, view the actual role of media not as the government's watchdog, but as its *mouthpiece*. In other words, while the watchdog media remains the ideal-type (and the normative 'good guy'), critics argue that the practical circumstances of media in the modern European state have resulted in media that merely reinforce the established social, economic, and political order. The members of the media need not be witting mouthpieces, but they nonetheless build up conventions of self-censorship through prior restraint.⁴⁶ According to Herman and Chomsky, 'Most biased choices in the media arise from the preselection of right-thinking people, internalized preconceptions, and the adaptation of personnel to the constraints of ownership, organization, market, and political power'.⁴⁷ By parroting government positions, the views of the media are often indistinguishable from those of government itself. Not surprisingly, public service broadcast media - often linked explicitly to the state by their methods of funding - are more susceptible to this criticism than private broadcast and print media.

41 James Curran, 'Mass Media and Democracy: A Reappraisal', in James Curran and Michael Gurevitch, (eds.), *Mass Media and Society* (London: Edward Arnold, 1991), p. 83.

42 As the BBC journalist Jeremy Paxman has said, media '...put the questions to them (the politicians) that the people out there want to ask...'. Discussion at St Catherine's College, Cambridge, February 1994.

43 Keane, p. 43, and Graber, p. 171.

44 Denis McQuail, *Mass Communications Theory: An Introduction* (London: Sage, 1983), p. 18.

45 As Graber points out, Gurevitch and Blumler have developed four categories of control of the media: legal, normative, structural, and economic. Graber, p. 23-26.

46 For a discussion of all forms of censorship, see the chapter on 'Pressures, Censorship, and Self-Censorship' in Herbert Gans, *Deciding What's News: a Study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek, and Time* (New York: Vintage 1980), p. 249-278.

47 Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon, 1988), p. xii.

However, the media-as-mouthpiece model contends that the 'free press' is but another mechanism in the capitalist engine. The dominance in the West, including Western Europe, of a few key media organisations and media magnates - media 'moguls'⁴⁸ - through the concentration of ownership, and their reliance on favourable government relations, has further circumscribed the independence of the media. Media passivity is blamed on the institutional restraints of the news-making process. The hierarchy of the news organisation and the position of that organisation in the economic structure are both seen to maintain the media in a role subservient to government. Journalists not only depend on favourable management for job advancement, they depend on advertisers for profits and government for information. Finally, this view discredits the representational role of media,⁴⁹ since it may be the case that 'a free press rooted in civil society might constantly *misrepresent* its citizens'.⁵⁰

Here, normative theory first falls short when addressing the role of media in EU politics. The dichotomy of the watchdog and mouthpiece models has led to (similarly) polarised research agendas, with work too often taking one or the other model as a starting point for analysis. Media's function in the sphere of EU politics, as in other political domains, is more betwixt and between that either unfettered and free (watchdog) or directly under the governmental thumb (mouthpiece). The media, whether press or broadcast, do rely on the state for a legal framework of operation and, in the case of some public service systems, for funding. Most citizens might wish that the media were less sensational, more diverse, or more positive in their telling of the news, but few would claim media to be completely subordinate to the government, particularly the print media. If they did, media would lose both their own legitimacy and their ability to legitimate the political universe. In sum, the media exists in a symbiotic relationship with government, with news the result of an ongoing negotiation process between the two.⁵¹ While this is not a condition specific to European governance, it nevertheless holds true in the European sphere, both at the national and supranational level.

In addition to providing a watchdog-mouthpiece dichotomy, normative theory considers media overwhelmingly within the framework of the nation-state. As Denis McQuail has written, 'The media are still from, of and for their own nation and culture and are subordinate to the policy of their own society...'.⁵² Although normative theories of media have sought to explore the media within the context of existing 'social and political structures',⁵³ such 'structures', in terms of research, have become coterminous with nation-states.⁵⁴ By and large, most studies of news media in western European politics presuppose a relationship be-

48 Jeremy Tunstall and M. Palmer, *Media Moguls* (London: Routledge, 1991).

49 Habermas, for instance is 'profoundly suspicious of representative publicity'. See John Durham Peters, 'Distrust of Representation: Habermas on the Public Sphere', *Media, Culture, and Society*, 15 (1993), p. 545.

50 Keane, p. 44. Italics added.

51 See the introduction to Ericson, Baranek, and Chan.

52 McQuail, p. 225.

53 See the introduction to Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm.

54 Richard Topf has pointed out a similar trend in empirical analysis of legitimization issues. See Richard Topf, 'Democratic Deficit and the Legitimacy of Government in the European Communities: The Role of Collective Identities', Paper presented at the 22nd Joint Annual Sessions of the ECPR, Madrid, 17-22 April 1994, p. 17.

tween media and the national political system. This media-to-nation-state linkage reflects a bias within normative theory in conceptualising the state as the sole locus of political power and focus for affective support.

This bias is not unfounded. In historical terms, media did play a role in both nationalist movements and in the conceptualisation of *nation-states*. Benedict Anderson has claimed, for example, that print capitalism was essential to the development of nationalism and that the newspaper was a 'technical means for "representing" the kind of imagined community that is the nation.'⁵⁵ In addition, he has argued, nationalist movements in Europe were based at least in part on (late-developed) linguistic differentiation and on the central ideological and political role of 'national print languages'.⁵⁶

Nonetheless, the link of media to the nation-state is no longer exclusive. Here, then, we have a criticism of normative theory more specific to EU studies: the growth of a European sphere of governance brings the traditional nation-state focus of normative theory under scrutiny. In part, this has to do with the changing political economy of media, i.e. its Europeanisation or even internationalisation.⁵⁷ As Garnham has written: *'...because the development of an increasingly global market and centers of private economic power with global reach are steadily undermining the nation-state, and it is within the political structure of the nation-state that the relationship between communication and politics has been traditionally posed... we are thus being forced to rethink this relationship... What new political institutions and new public sphere might be necessary for the democratic control of a global economy and polity? These questions have been given a new urgency by the development of a single European market...'*⁵⁸

More important for the end of the media-to-nation-state linkage is the change in political orientation in Europe, in terms of what constitutes 'government'. West European integration gives news media a novel political focus: a supranational, rather than an exclusively national, political sphere. This supranational sphere differs radically from a sphere of international politics because of its implications for state sovereignty and the legitimacy of the nation-state as the primary political actor. While it would be difficult to argue that a European political - or even public - sphere has superseded any individual national one,⁵⁹ there is little doubt that the European sphere exists, largely through the European Union, and that its

55 Via the newspaper, Anderson eloquently writes, 'fiction seeps quietly and continuously into reality, creating that remarkable confidence of community which is the hallmark of modern nations'. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1995), pp. 25 and 36.

56 Ibid, p. 67. Today, European news media are still primarily nationally oriented (in terms of culture, content, and audience) due to language.

57 Of course, the emergence of European-wide media technology and ownership do not in and of themselves change the relationship of news media to the (national) polity.

58 Nicholas Garnham, 'The Media in the Public Sphere', in Calhoun, p. 361-2.

59 Philip Schlesinger has written extensively on the theme of a European public sphere, particularly in terms of media's role in 'European' identity-building. As Schlesinger states, 'Europe exemplifies in acute form the problem of constructing a collective identity for diverse people amongst whom nationhood and statehood remain key principles of sociocultural and political economic cohesion'. Philip Schlesinger, 'Wishful Thinking: Cultural Politics, Media, and Collective Identities in Europe', *Journal of Communication*, 43, 2 (1993), p. 6.

existence alters the exclusivity of the relationship of media to the nation-state. There may well be a 'tenacity of national media systems in Western Europe',⁶⁰ but the 'government' shaping them and with which they interact has become something of a moving target. In short, the European media space is more than an arena for the formulation of media policy.

Normative media theory - and its critique - provide a useful starting point for forming categories of analysis for political scientific consideration of the role of media in EU politics. By offering watchdog and mouthpiece models, they provoke the question: 'to what extent do media support or oppose European integration?' Establishing trends in media *opinion* on Europe can help to explain the climate in which both elite and public opinion have been formed. In fact, study of media provides a critical bridge between the examination of European integration at the elite and general public levels.

Additionally, by suggesting the implicit link of media to the nation-state, normative media theory provokes a second question: 'do media reinforce or undermine the position of the nation-state?' In other words, are the *thematization* and *sourcing* within reports on European integration more national (national interest and leaders, party politics and politicians, elections, etc.) or European (European interests, institutions, leaders, etc.)? Another variable which can shed light on the authority of the nation-state in the news is *conflict portrayal*. For example, is national government shown to be in conflict with other national government(s), or with European Union institutions and processes? How extreme is the conflict, and who dominates? Here, the underlying issue is how news media portray the nation-state, and its legitimacy, vis-à-vis that of the European Union. By reporting on European integration with a certain pattern of themes, actors, or conflicts, news media may contribute to the (de)legitimation of government at national and supranational levels. Clearly, this relates to IR's theoretical debates about the locus of power in Europe.

Given this framework of inquiry, the most obvious way of exploring these issues empirically is through news media content analysis, both qualitative and quantitative. The analysis of media coverage of Europe, particularly of opinion, themes, and sources, should reveal where media fit, along the watchdog-mouthpiece axis, and should show to what extent media legitimate the nation-state, in light of the development of a supranational, European level of governance. Ideally, research should take place across media and across EU member-states. By examining media coverage of EU politics, it is possible to offer the basis for a more specific evaluation of the role of the media in the process of European integration.

Conclusion

Because of their unique ability to create public discourse, media are central to the development of the climate in which politics take place. Yet until now, theoretical work on European Union politics has failed to account for the influence of media on European integration. Opening up the issue of the role of media in European integration complements other recent research within political science about the ability of the European Union to operate democratically. With the aid of normative press theory, particularly the watchdog and mouthpiece models

60 Ibid, p. 11.

of how media function in society and the notion that media have a traditional link to the nation-state, it is possible to conceptualise questions about the media's position in EU development. The resulting framework of inquiry suggests a rich empirical research agenda. While it is not possible to prove a causal link between news formation, content, and public opinion, the investigation of the role of the media in West European integration points toward a new, and until now, missing emphasis in EU studies: the centrality of public discourse, including media discourse, to the future of the integration project.

Summary: The Role of News Media in European Integration: A Framework of Analysis for Political Science

The phenomenon of European integration has received a great deal of attention from political scientists in the wake of the mid-1980s 'relaunch' of the European Union (EU). However, political science's theoretical consideration of West European integration has from the outset failed to include news media as a factor in EU politics. This oversight is linked to the general dismissal of the public and public debate as irrelevant to the integration project. Yet because media have several critical functions in politics - as an information-source, agenda-setter, and legitimator - political science treatment of the EU now needs to account for the role of news media. Turning to concepts in normative media theory, the article proposes a framework within which to consider media and suggests empirical analysis of media coverage of the European Union. Such analysis would complement political science study of the democratisation and legitimation of the EU, while acknowledging public discourse as an element crucial to the future course of European integration.