WHEN THEY DO THEY DON’T

A Study on How the Swedish News Media Perform Their Democratic Task of Informing the Public on EU Affairs

Jonathan Lundell
Abstract

In the literature on democracy, the media is often recognized as a fundamental pillar. Doubtlessly, a healthy democratic society requires an actively ongoing and informed public debate on matters of significance. Recognizing that we are to some extent dependent on the news media for our understanding of the world around us, this thesis sets out to study how the Swedish nation-wide news media perform their democratic task of informing the public on EU affairs, by examining how they reported on and conveyed the political conflicts surrounding the ten most important votes taken by the 7th European parliament (2009-2014). The daily mornings newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* stands as a critical and most likely case, and the remaining selections are based on the same principles. Results indicate that the performance of the news media is fundamentally flawed, as a majority of the votes received no attention. In addition, in one case only did the media manage the crucial task of conveying the words and actions of political alternatives, i.e. political conflict.

*Key words:* Swedish news media, democracy, political conflict, European Union, EU affairs, European Parliament.

Words: 15983
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## Abbreviations

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<tr>
<td>EPP</td>
<td>European People's Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>S&amp;D</td>
<td>Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats</td>
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<td>ALDE</td>
<td>Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>Greens/EFA</td>
<td>The Greens–European Free Alliance</td>
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<td>ECR</td>
<td>European Conservatives and Reformists</td>
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<td>GUE-NGL</td>
<td>European United Left–Nordic Green Left</td>
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<td>EFD</td>
<td>Europe of Freedom and Democracy</td>
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<td>NI</td>
<td>Non-Inscrits</td>
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1 Reporting the EU

Weren’t we all puzzled by the peculiar manifestation of Brussels bureaucracy? The story that the European Union literally considered stealing candy from children, i.e. banning licorice pipes, broke in the press in August 2013, resulting in a rarely seen mobilization against the supposedly meddlesome EU. The Swedish Center Party leader and Minister for Enterprise Annie Lööf did not spare the ammunition and fired away devastating criticism: "Jesus Christ. The EU needs to deal with the right kinds of things.”1 And this was not the first time the Swedes had been angry with the European Union for interfering in Swedish affairs. In 2012, politicians from across the country showed discontent with the European Commission for intervening in Swedish wolf policy. Members of the government openly declared that the EU had no business in such matters and that the Commission lacked profound contextual understanding. The Minister for Environment warned that "democracy is in danger.”2

Let’s rewind. What really happened? Were those two events textbook examples of how the Brussels bureaucracy sometimes with excellent precision snipes at national legislation for no reason at all – other than for a good laugh? Or could it be that the media fundamentally missed the point, or simplified matters to such an extent that the line between what was true and what was not became blurry? Sadly, they are rather crushing examples of the latter. The licorice pipes were never threatened, but it made great news saying they were after a single Czech MEP suggested such an amendment to a Commission proposal for a new tobacco directive. As a result, the media missed out on a chance to report on and discuss an important piece of legislation aimed at halting the recruitment of young nicotine users. And instead of simply trying to dictate Swedish policy, the European Commission did what they were obliged to do when they reviewed the Swedish wolf policy after several Swedish NGOs accused the Swedish government of breaching Union law. Still, the media told a different story and left the Swedes with a notion that the European Commission (or, even worse, the EU) somehow challenged Swedish sovereignty.

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These examples of poor media handling of EU affairs are taken from the book *Everything or the most of what you know about the EU is probably wrong*³ by Swedish journalist and former EU correspondent Ylva Nilsson, in which she argues that the media have resigned from their democratic responsibility of keeping the citizens well-informed on issues of importance. The arguments in Nilsson’s book are similar to those in *Reporting the EU: News, Media and the European Institutions* by John Lloyd and Cristina Marconi, which addresses the difficulty in covering a complex political system to an ever so picky audience. For instance, *The Economist*’s John Peet is quoted saying.

… there’s a problem about Brussels being boring. [The temptation for reporters and editors is to] make up interesting stories, [since] it is much for fun to think the Commission is banning roast beef or olive oil on the table than following the progression of a directive.⁴

Such a negative review of how the media cover (or don’t cover) EU affairs is particularly worrisome if we accept the argument that the media hold a democratic responsibility to provide the citizens with information on important public matters, thus serving their right to be informed. In other words, reporting the EU is a highly democratic matter; which will, from this point forward, be argued for repeatedly.

### 1.1 Aim and research question

This thesis sets out to study how the Swedish nation-wide news media perform their democratic task of informing the public on EU affairs, by examining how they reported on and conveyed the political conflicts behind some of the most important votes in the 7th European Parliament. Thus, the aim is twofold: first, to enhance our knowledge and understanding of how the news media cover EU affairs; second, to give practical examples of how political conflict in the European Parliament is conveyed. Accordingly, the research question is formulated as follows:

1. How do the Swedish nation-wide news media perform their democratic task of informing the public on EU affairs?

As already indicated, the research question will be answered by studying how the Swedish nation-wide media reported on and conveyed the political conflicts surrounding the ten most important votes in the 7th European parliament (2009-2014).

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³ Nilsson, Y. (2014), author’s translation
1.2 Towards the research problem

To provide free and autonomous opinion formations in a society is one of the core tasks of any media with claims on providing a democratic service.\(^5\) Indeed, there is little controversy surrounding the fact that the media hold a unique position in any democracy, and in turn produces much of what constitute our civic knowledge. In a sense, the media bears some responsibility for our political involvement, as qualitative journalism is at some level a prerequisite for active civic participation.\(^6\) Surely, "the media are the unknown player in European politics. Their presence often goes unnoticed but they might still be decisive in many respects."\(^7\) Thus, it is nearly self-evident that an examination of the media content is not only highly relevant, but necessary; empirical knowledge about the media's coverage of EU affairs is indeed crucial if one wants to say something about the state of democracy. In the words of Peter Dahlgren: "Without a firm analytic perspective on the media, our understanding of democracy will always be elusive."\(^8\)

1.2.1 The media should do better

Kent Asp, professor at University of Gothenburg and one of Sweden’s leading scholars on media and political communication argues that the concepts of fairness and informativeness are some of the most important normative demands on the media.\(^9\) In order to establish why the aforementioned examples of poor media handling of EU affairs are highly problematic, we shall briefly elaborate on those concepts.

The media should, in their role as communicators of information and opinions, "treat different opinions in such a way that no opinion is unduly favored or put at a disadvantage."\(^10\) In other words, different opinions must be treated equally in accordance with the principle of impartiality. This constitutes the demand of fairness. Moreover, the media should inform the citizens of matters of importance in such a way that they can autonomously make judgements and form their opinions. To do this, the media needs to offer relevant, dense, broad and deep

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\(^8\) Dahlgren, P. (2009), p.34


\(^10\) Asp, K. (2007), p.44
information, which taken together gives the citizens the necessary information value. This is the demand of informativeness.\textsuperscript{11}

The concept of informativeness consists of a total of four sub-criteria, which together form the information value. First, and most importantly, the information provided by the media ought to be relevant (1) if the ambition is to meet the information needs of the citizens. This criteria, however, is rather vague as it practically refers to any information that either favors or opposes a given position. Thus, the information communicated by the media must also be proportionate in relation to the total flow of information, i.e meet the requirement of information density (2). Still, density alone can be met with a ”parrot-like iteration of a handful arguments”\textsuperscript{12} and must therefore be combined with breadth (3) and depth (4). A maximum of information breadth is achieved when all relevant positions in favor or against a given issue is presented and offered to the citizens; information depths refers to how the media gives the citizens the necessary tools to make judgements on the validity and strength of the arguments. In other words, the information should put arguments in context and relate them to facts and the underlying motives and valuations. Moreover, an information depth requires the information to predict or assess the possible consequences of the different positions. These criteria – relevance, density, breadth and depth – are all important in themselves, but combined with each other they form, from a citizen’s perspective, what Asp refers to as the information value.\textsuperscript{13} In short, if the above criteria are met, the information is considered valuable to the citizens.

Referring back to the aforementioned examples of poor media handling of EU affairs, there ought to be no doubt about whether the media successfully met the criteria briefly addressed above. Put simply, the reason as to why these examples – and indeed many more – are highly problematic is because they offered neither information value, nor fairness.

1.2.2 Political conflict: an important ingredient

The existence of political conflict, i.e clearly distinguishable political alternatives, is an important criteria alone, and indeed a crucial ingredient in any reporting on public affairs. In essence, the argument follows the logic of informativeness and fairness. In other words, to convey political conflict is to treat different opinions equally (fairness) and to give the citizens the information that is necessary for them

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., p.34-6
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., p.34
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., p.34-35

8
to form an autonomous opinion (informativeness). Agreeably, we should therefore expect the media to convey a conflict, should a conflict exist.

In addition to the argument that conveying political conflict forms an important part of the democratic responsibility of the media (which will be further elaborated on in the next chapter), scholars have pointed to the important of political conflict as such. Not seldom, political conflict is linked to political participation. The intuitive argument is that participation increases when competition between parties is greater and if they are more ideologically divided. In such cases, voters are more likely to consider elections important and therefore also more likely to participate.\textsuperscript{14} In spite of empirical data both supporting and contradicting such arguments, it is fruitful to bare in mind. Other scholars, like Chantal Mouffe and Leif Lewin, argue that political conflict can in various ways enhance democracy. For instance, in trying to explain the emergence of populist parties in Europe (as well as terrorism and fundamentalist politics), Mouffe points to the diminishing left-right-scale, the absence of political confrontation and the overall rejection of the political as conflictual in nature. The attractiveness of populist parties, Mouffe argues, is due to their anti-establishment approach and sprung from the inability of the established parties to offer different alternatives.\textsuperscript{15} The post-political consensus-based political system, according to Mouffe and judged by its consequences, potentially threatens the functioning of democratic institutions.\textsuperscript{16}

Lewin, on the other hand, argues in favor of majoritarian democracy on the basis that consensus democracy may increase political distrust and decrease or blur accountability.\textsuperscript{17} While recognizing the importance of broad political agreements, Lewin emphasizes that such consensus can only be achieved through open deliberations between the people and its leaders.\textsuperscript{18} Though Lewin makes a contribution to the rather theoretical political debate on majoritarian vs. consensus democracy – which does not specifically address the concept of political conflict as such – his arguments are highly relevant for the topic at hand. Indeed, the rationale behind the concept of political conflict is similar to that of majoritarian democracy. Both rest upon the assumption that public deliberation and open confrontation is not at all harmful; on the contrary, bringing the discussions and conflicts out in the open, instead of keeping them behind closed doors until there is a general agreement, could very well strengthen democracy.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., p.71; 118
\textsuperscript{17} Lewin, L. (2002) "Bråka inte! om vår tids demokratisy"m, Stockholm: SNS, p.127; 136-7
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., p.137
In sum, Mouffe and Lewin both highlight the importance of political conflict and visible political alternatives, albeit in different ways. Given that this study assumes that the media hold a democratic responsibility to inform the public on EU affairs, and that such a responsibility includes conveying the words and actions of political alternatives, this section has argued that political conflict is not only a part of the criteria of informativeness and fairness, but also has a value of its own. In the subsequent chapter, this will become even more apparent.

1.1.3 Arriving at the research problem

All things considered, I have argued that there is a gap between our expectations and our understanding of reality. On the one hand, we expect the media to perform in accordance with their democratic responsibilities, of which conveying political conflict forms one important part. On the other hand, empirics and observations seem to unveil a different story, here exemplified by the reports on the licorice pipe and the Swedish wolf policy. Therefore, to all appearances, this requires us to dig deeper into how the Swedish media report on EU affairs and perform their democratic task of informing the public.

1.3 What’s been said and done

This study, with its focus on political conflict in the European Parliament and how the Swedish nation-wide media perform its democratic task of informing the public on EU affairs, is the first of its kind. However, the media and the European Union is not at all an under-researched area. Therefore, before anything else, we shall briefly revisit what’s been said and done within this field of research by giving a few examples. In doing so, it will become apparent what gap this study intends to fill.

Out of many, one study which addresses the issue of visibility of major EU events in the media is ‘Europe ‘in the News: A Cross-National Comparative Study of the News Coverage of Key EU Events’ by dutch scholar Claes H. de Vreese, in which he compares the Dutch, British and Danish news media and their performance during three major EU events (the January 1999 first step to introduce the Euro, the June 1999 European Parliament elections and the December 2000 summit in Nice). The result contains multiple elements: first, it shows that the news coverage peaks during
the events, but is barely visible at all before and after. Second, it shows that the Danish media, overall, devoted the most attention to these EU events, followed by Britain and the Netherlands. Finally, it also shows a cross-country difference in terms of the degree of effort invested in covering the events.21 The author discusses the findings in regards to the role of media in public opinion formation about EU affairs. Another study on the visibility of EU in the media concerns the 2004 national elections to the European Parliament. In The News Coverage of the 2004 European Parliamentary Election Campaign in 25 Countries22, four scholars provide an overview of the of the campaign coverage in national newspapers and television newscasts. On average, it shows that the elections were more visible in the new member states than in the old. Moreover, it shows that the political actors were in most cases national, as opposed to 'EU actors'. The authors discuss their findings in regards to EU’s legitimacy and perceived communication deficit.

Scholars have also addressed the media coverage of specific issues. For example, analyzing more than 10,000 articles from 40 newspapers in 10 different countries, the cross-country Reuter Institute project The Euro Crisis, Media Coverage, and Perceptions of Europe Within the EU addresses the understanding of Europeans regarding the challenges facing the Euro and the workings of the European Central Bank and the EU. The conclusions are presented separately in national reports, all of which discuss a wide range of issues in relation to the media coverage – size of the articles, the impetus for stories, what type of sources were frequently used, the framing of institutions et cetera. Subsequently, it seeks to identify difference between the patterns of national coverage.

As it seems, the previous research have had its focus on either European Parliament elections, how national media portray EU affairs or on specific issue-related media coverage (such as the Euro crisis). Therefore, this study could be seen as filling the research gap in four different ways: First, it focuses entirely on the media coverage in regards to the European Parliament (as apart from other European Union institutions); second, it studies a period in between elections (as opposed to during election campaigns); third, it identifies particularly important votes (as opposed to political issues in general or subject-related coverage); fourth, it focuses on political conflict as a particularly important element of media coverage.

21 Ibid., p.283
2 On the Democratic Responsibilities of the Media

In the literature on democracy, the media is often recognized as a fundamental pillar. Indeed, the claim that the media holds a unique position in any democracy is uncontroversial, though the arguments vary depending on the definition of democracy. Nevertheless, success and failure in politics is not seldom explained by the media’s way of reporting and distributing information. As such, we are, for good and for bad, to some extent dependent on the news media for our understanding of the world around us.\textsuperscript{23} An often quoted phrase on the democratic role of the media is that of Judge Frankfurter in the case of \textit{Associated Press v. United States}:

\begin{quote}
In addition to being a commercial enterprise, it [the press] has a relationship to the public interest unlike that of any other enterprise for profit … The Business of the Press … is the promotion of truth regarding public matters by furnishing the basis for an understanding of them.\textsuperscript{24}
\end{quote}

As the research question indicates, a central concept in this study is media responsibility. More specifically, it indicates that we should expect from the media to not only report on political affairs, but do so fulfilling certain democratic criteria, such as informativeness and fairness. In the following chapter, the aim is to establish \textit{why} the media should be considered as having a democratic responsibility, and \textit{why} we should expect from it to fully cover the political conflicts and the words and actions of political alternatives.

2.1 How we want it to be

Why should we expect the media to report on important political matters? On this subject, two books stand out as particularly groundbreaking and important: Denis McQuail’s \textit{Media Performance, Mass Communication and the Public Interest}\textsuperscript{25} and \textit{Media, Markets and Democracy} by C. Edwin Baker.\textsuperscript{26} In forming our argument,

\textsuperscript{25} McQuail, D. (1992)
we shall take note of some of their main conclusions. In addition, Jesper Strömbäck’s *In Search of a Standard: four models of democracy and their normative implications for journalism*\(^{27}\) constitutes a well-written overview on media responsibility and democracy, as well as his more comprehensive book *Den medialiserade demokratin*.\(^{28}\) Taken together, we can distinguish the following principal argument on media’s democratic responsibility:

"It is possible to redraw the map of relevant issues for normative media theory, without having to stray very far from the core values which guided earlier mass communication research.\(^{29}\) Thus, a healthy democratic society requires an actively ongoing and informed public debate on matters of significance.\(^{30}\) The press should provide a comprehensive and truthful account of political matters and secure the public’s full access to this intelligence, i.e. serving their right to be informed.\(^{31}\) In the political debate, there ought to be a diversity of viewpoints expressed and a majority of the citizens ought to be involved, whether actively participating or as observers.\(^{32}\) Moreover, it is crucial that the people can make retroactive assessments of the political power-holders and how they performed. At the very least, the people must be informed on how society works, who governs and the differences between the political alternatives.\(^{33}\) In turning this ideal into practice, the media is the key actor.

Judging from this argument, we can distinguish two ideal roles of the media. First, as *public informant*, the media is an observer and a "transmitter and interpreter of events of significance in society."\(^{34}\) In most democracy models – competitive, participatory and deliberate – this is a common approach to the issue of media responsibility.\(^{35}\) The citizens ought to have the information necessary for them to make informed political decisions and assessments of those in power, and about their political promises for the future. This means that the public should be able to evaluate the consequences of different proposals, which naturally requires access to different political opinions and alternatives. Therefore, the media and journalism should focus on the "words and actions of political alternatives."\(^{36}\) In addition, the media holds a responsibility to direct peoples’ attention in the right way by adding


\(^{29}\) McQuail, D. (1992), p.307

\(^{30}\) Ibid., p.307


\(^{32}\) McQuail, D. (1992), p.307

\(^{33}\) Strömbäck, J. (2005), p.338-9

\(^{34}\) McQual, D. (1992), p.85

\(^{35}\) Strömbäck, J. (2005), p.341

\(^{36}\) Ibid., p.339
a criteria of proportionality to their reporting, i.e giving important matters the proportionate attention. Furthermore, the media should not only secure the content’s accuracy by verifying the facts and "check with persons or organizations which are the subject or sources of news" but also guarantee completeness by offering the full range of information and "all the essential facts". These are the criteria of accuracy and completeness.

Second, in the role as facilitator of participation and deliberation, the media should not only inform on political matters and on how the decision-making processes work or enlighten the citizens on societal values, but should also enable the active participation and free deliberation of the citizens. This means that the media should be "a forum for the exchange of comment and criticism" and allow for "ordinary people to speak for themselves." Thus, the media should be carriers of the public discussion and let the citizens set the agenda, which is achieved through the framing of politics as open for citizen participation, rather than as simply strategy. Moreover, it is important that the media does not only represent the mainstream ideas and views, but largely gives "a representative picture of the constituent groups in the society", thus encouraging active participation and deliberation.

In sum, the normative demands on the media serve the democratic purpose of a self-governing public, which forms the basis of any democracy. In essence, this is how we want it to be; this is the ideal performance of the media. Given their unique position in a democracy, they are arguably largely responsible for truthfully informing the public on collective affairs, and for facilitating participation, deliberation and public autonomy.

2.2 How it often turns out

In spite of the aforementioned, one can argue that journalism never have operated according to the ideal. Indeed, it might even seem as if one neglects reality when demanding such high-flying performance of the media. Although most journalists

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39 Ibid., p.210
43 Ibid., p.155
would probably agree that providing the information needed for the citizens to be self-governing is absolutely necessary, it is certainly easier said that done.44

Clearly, both past and current media trends have reinforced the imagine of the media as something different from the ideal. For instance, the media are not seldom criticized for not sufficiently serving the needs of informed political participation.45 In the following section, before we establish what to expect from the media in practice, we shall make note of some of these trends.

The first trend, the commercialization of the media industry, has arguably led to news audiences being treated as consumers rather than citizens – a phenomena amusingly labeled in the literature as the "McDonaldization" of news value.46 Indeed, the media today are in a period of turbulence47 – the channels of communication are increasing in numbers and the media industries are concentrated to a decreasing number of profit-seeking corporations.48 Consequently, the relationship between the corporate owners, the government and the citizens have changed, arguably in a way which is "detrimental to democratic ideals."49 For instance, normative goals are often sidelined in favor of economic calculations. Moreover, journalistic ideals, ethics and traditions are not part of the culture and institutions of the business people and managers, thus arguably leading to their decreasing importance.50

Deregulation marks the second trend, which essentially refers to the concentration of ownership and happens when the laws, rules and codes that a government uses to shape the media functions – such as its financing, ownership and activities – are weakened or disappears.51 This opens up for market mechanisms, which are not always necessarily the same as the journalistic ideals and the normative expectations we have on the media.

A third trend is changing audience behavior. As the number of channels of communication increases, the behavior of the consumers change accordingly. Among others, new social media and internet services are now competing with traditional media such as TV, radio and the news press. In the case of Sweden, the media landscape has slowly transformed and adapted to this development.

44 Strömbäck, J. (2004), p.100 (author’s translation)
47 Dahlgren, P. (2009), p.35
48 Ibid., p.35-7
49 Dahlgren, P. (2009), p.37
50 Dahlgren, P. (2009), p.37
51 Ibid.
readers of the daily press are decreasing, while globalization allows for international TV to compete with local and national ditto. Consequently, popularization/tabloidization is becoming more common, meaning that news are increasingly focusing more on scandals, sports and entertainment, and less on society, politics and economics. As a result, the democratic ideals are again, potentially, sidelined.

In conclusion, the reality is sometimes rather far from the norms and expectations. Commercialization, deregulation and changing audience behavior (and many more trends) all contribute to what one might argue is a declining democratic media responsibility. In other words, in spite of our high expectations on the media, the result is sometimes less satisfying.

### 2.3 What to expect

As our high-flying expectations not seldom collide with reality, do we have to modify the expectations? Not necessarily. Notably, this thesis sets out to study how the media perform their democratic task of informing the public on EU affairs, by examining how they conveyed the words and actions of political alternatives in the European Parliament. As such, it is neither demanding nor expecting of the media to live up to every aspect of the aforementioned ideal; on the contrary, conveying political conflict is merely one of the criteria. However, arguably, to convey political conflict is not only within reach, but also forms an essential part of the ideal. As was established in a previous section, a common approach to media responsibility is that they should focus on the "words and actions of political alternatives." Arguably, is this not what we should expect as a minimum?

Even so, is it fair to demand of the media something that they might not be able to deliver, for reasons that are in some cases not entirely in their hands? Indeed, the free media has the right to be irresponsible or to simply satisfy an audience which is not always interested in political quiddities. Likewise, the performance of the

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53 Dahlgren, P. (2009), p.45
54 Notably, one should not assume that this problematization of the trends of the news media must necessarily be followed by counter-measures such as increased regulation, external interference etc. I recommend reading McQuail’s Accountability of the Media to Society, in which he discusses the dilemma of how to reconcile the increasing importance of the media (though mainly broadcasted media) with declining control to secure the public interest. For instance, while noting worrisome trends, he concludes that “intervention should be kept at a minimum and self-regulation is generally preferable to external regulation.” McQuail, D. (1997) ‘Accountability of Media to Society’, European Journal Of Communication, 12(4), pp. 511-529, p. 526
media is a reflection of not only their own shortcomings and failures, but also of the imperfections of the society in which it functions. In other words, shouldn’t we also blame ourselves if media fail?

Be that as it may, the answer to the question whether we should demand of the media to convey political conflict and political alternatives is answered in the affirmative; the reason for which is apparent, namely that it simply falls under the democratic responsibility of the media. Regardless of whether the media at times fail, conveying political conflict is an essential part of that responsibility and one of the prerequisites for a well-functioning democracy: the more fairness and informativeness, the greater the contribution to free opinion formation and political autonomy of the citizens. Agreeably, scrutinizing the media’s performance and discussing that in the light of their democratic responsibilities is therefore a reasonable approach to holding the media accountable.

Finally, can we pin those expectations on the Swedish media? I believe we can; and should. Arguably, the Swedish media landscape is largely influenced by what is called the social responsibility theory of the media, which stands in contrast to other media ideologies such as authoritarian and libertarian. Contrary to the libertarian theory, which considers every interference of the state or by law as reprehensible, promoters of the social responsibility theory focus attention on the social contract between the media and democracy, which serves to prevent media oligarchy and to promote a political debate based on moral obligations. This leads the social responsibility theory to accept government interventions within certain limits, such as regulation of the media market. McQuail captures the core of social responsibly theory:

> At the core of this tradition is the view that public communication, as carried out mainly by way of the mass media, has a significant contribution to make to the general welfare of society and carries a corresponding ‘social responsibility’, which is recognized, pursued (sometimes enforced) and attained in varying forms and degrees and by many different means.

In the case of Sweden, this approach is particularly evident in, for instance, the state aid given to parts of the printed press or in the public service broadcasting model. As is the case in general, one can certainly argue that the Swedish democracy is dependent on the media, just as much as the media is dependent on democracy. They both live in a symbiosis and are difficult to separate from each other entirely. Therefore, journalism and media is not only to be seen as a

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56 McQuail, D. (1997), p.528
57 Asp, K. (2007), p.44
commercial practice; more importantly, it is to be seen as a democratic practice,\textsuperscript{59} which is why this chapter has argued that the expectations on the media are fully applicable to the Swedish media landscape. In conclusion, because it forms an essential part of their democratic responsibility, we should indeed expect of the (Swedish) media to convey political conflict and to focus their reporting on the words and actions of political alternatives.

2.3.1 Bridging theory and practice

The above sections have accounted for some of the theoretical arguments in favor of the media having a democratic responsibility to inform and enable participation. Then, how do we bridge the gap between theory and practice? In other words, why should we expect the media to inform the public on the ten specific votes identified in this study (and presented in the next chapter)? Indeed, not all of the votes are of a legislative nature, which means that they do not necessarily directly impact the everyday life of citizens.

The aforementioned two roles of the media – as public informant and facilitator of participation and deliberation – offer three assumptions on what the media should provide, all of which I argue will bridge the gap between the normative demands on the media and the ten votes identified in this study.

First, the media should provide "practical knowledge about the probable consequences of their political actions"\textsuperscript{60}. The value of this is that the citizens are able to minimize the uncertainty of their political decisions, essentially enabling an effective citizenship. Second, we can assume that "the type of information most useful for citizens is contextual to the electoral decision they face."\textsuperscript{61} Thus, information on political platforms, decisions, legislation, candidates and political issues in general may very well be important when the citizens eventually cast their ballot. Third, we can assume that the "news media should provide citizens with political information at a variety of different levels",\textsuperscript{62} meaning that the information ought to be ranging from technical matters to the more popular issues; the reason for which being that the citizens approach politics with different interest and different preconditions in terms of knowledge and potential.

\textsuperscript{59} Strömbäck, J. (2004), p.74


\textsuperscript{61} Norris, P. (2000), p.32

\textsuperscript{62} Norris, P. (2000), p.32
Accordingly, as to the connection between these three assumptions and the ten votes identified in this study, I would argue that the nature of these ten votes fall under at least one of these assumptions. For instance, if we expect the media to provide the citizens with practical knowledge on what their political actions might result in, we should also expect the media to report on those issues which cause political division in the European Parliament. In doing so, the citizens are given practical knowledge about the potential consequences of their ballots. The same logic applies to the second assumption, that the media should provide the citizens with the type information most useful for them in the electoral decision they face. The ten votes identified in this study all caused division within the Parliament and the outcome of subsequent elections might very well impact the policy on these particular issues. Finally, the assumption that the media should provide the citizens with information at a variety of different levels implies that these ten votes, regardless of their nature (whether being directly legislative or simply a position taken by the Parliament), deserves attention.
The study takes the form of a case study, and the various selections are based on the most-likely and critical principles, which means that we should expect the media to perform in accordance with its democratic responsibility. Albeit this does not mean that we subject the theoretical predictions to a difficult test, it is indeed a critical test. In other words, if the theoretical predictions turn out incorrect (i.e. the media failed to perform in accordance with our expectations), our expectations that they would do so in other cases are low. In this study, even though the analysis is limited in both time and setting (the 7th European Parliament), the ten most important votes offer multiple measurements of political conflict. In addition, the research question seeks to answer how the media perform their democratic task of informing the public on EU affairs; thus it offers depth, rather than trying to identify and explain a variation.

In order to motivate the choice of method, let us briefly address the case study as such. One common misunderstanding or oversimplification of case studies is that "one cannot generalize on the basis of an individual case; therefore, the case study cannot contribute to scientific development." Another is that "General, theoretical (context-independent) knowledge is more valuable than concrete, practical (context-dependent) knowledge." Bent Flyvbjerg proposes the opposite: that whether one can generalize on the basis of one individual case depends upon the case and how it is chosen and, in regards to the second misunderstanding, that:

Predictive theories and universals cannot be found in the study of human affairs. Concrete, content-dependent knowledge is therefore more valuable than the vain search for predictive theories and universals.

Consequently, the case study is suitable even for those who seek to make generalizations. For the effectiveness of the social science discipline, a fair balance between breadth and depth is a prerequisite; in fact, without many thoroughly conducted case studies, the discipline would lack production of exemplars. For some even, the issue of generalizability is of less importance, as there is "clearly a

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64 Ibid., p.66
65 Ibid.
66 Ibid., p.74
67 Ibid., p.73
68 Ibid.
scientific value to gain from investigating some single category of individual, group or event simply to gain an understanding of that individual, group, or event.”  

Seemingly, though this particular quote might be too categorical for everyone to agree with, a case study is a good way to deal with the topic at hand.

However, to label a study as simply a case study is not entirely enough, as there are many ways to carry out such a study – random sample, extreme case, critical case, maximum variation cases, etc. As aforementioned, this study adopts the critical case principle. Identifying a critical case is far from an exact science. According to Flyvbjerg, it is a good idea to navigate among either ‘most likely’ or ‘least likely’ cases; in other words, those cases that are likely to confirm or falsify propositions and hypothesis. Thus, in accordance with the theoretical claims previously outlined, the following selections are based on the most likely principle.

3.1 The votes

No matter how one chooses, there will be others who disagree. Inevitably, pinpointing the most important votes in the European Parliament will come with elements of uncertainty; Why these? How do we measure importance? Important according to whom? For whom? At the end of the day, it is far from an exact science. However, it is neither an art of guessing. Thus, we ought to be able to identify and agree upon a number of votes which were indeed highly important, although we might very well argue over whether they were the most important. In fact, as long as the votes are considered important enough to be covered by the media in accordance with their democratic responsibility, everything else is practically besides the point. Therefore, the selected votes will serve as a litmus-test of how the media report on EU affairs and convey political conflict. Should the result be disappointing, we must be able to ask: if not in these cases – when?

This study is not the first which, for different reasons, tries to identify some of the most important votes in the European Parliament between 2009-2014. In the report 10 votes that shaped the 7th European Parliament from July 2013, produced by VoteWatch Europe, Dr. Simon Hix, Professor of European and Comparative Politics and Chair of VoteWatch Europe, presents the study as “intended to provide ammunition for debate by examining the voting records […] in what we have identified as the ten most important issues debated and voted on since the last

70 Flyvbjerg, B. (2001), p.78
elections in 2009.”\textsuperscript{71} The report applied three main criteria: First, ”that the piece of the legislation being voted on has a very high impact”\textsuperscript{72}; second, “that the subject matter is relatively easy to understand for the general public”\textsuperscript{73} and third, “that the issue generated controversy both in the EP and in the public sphere and that, in consequence, the political groups in the Parliament took different positions on the issue.”\textsuperscript{74} Thus, VoteWatch identified the following ten votes which will also be used also for this study. Below, they are cleverly translated from its technical legislative language into more understandable questions.\textsuperscript{75}

1. Should the minimum length of the maternity leave on full pay be extended from 14 to 20 weeks?
2. Should nuclear energy be phased out?
3. Should the Eurozone countries pool their public debts by creating Eurobonds?
4. Should there be a European tax on financial transactions?
5. Should the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA) be ratified?
6. Should there be an increase in the EU’s multi-annual budget for the next 7 years?
7. Should the agriculture subsidies remain a budgetary priority for the EU?
8. Should a proposal to increase taxes on CO2 emissions be rejected?
9. Should the location of the official seat of the European Parliament be reviewed as part of a future Treaty change?
10. Should the EU create a free trade area with the United States of America?

In sum, VoteWatch singled out these votes based on what one might call principles of importance, understandability and conflict. In other words, the votes were chosen because of a) the high impact they had on legislation, b) the possibility for the general public to understand the issues at stake, and c) because they generated controversy in the European Parliament. Just as these principles fit the original report, they also fit the ambition of this paper to study the critical and most likely observations. Given that the theoretical argument suggests that the media should report on issues of political importance – and convey the political conflicts – these votes certainly constitute critical and most likely cases. The logic is rather straightforward: if the votes not only fulfill the theoretical criteria presented in chapter two (i.e political importance), but are also of concern to the public and relatively easy to understand, the conditions are indeed set for the media to report on the issues and convey the political conflicts.

\textsuperscript{71} VoteWatch Europe AISBL (2013) 10 votes that shaped the 7th European Parliament. Positions of European groups and national delegations, Creative Commons, p.1
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., p.8; 10; 12; 14; 15; 17; 19; 21; 24; 26
3.1.1 The conflicts

Studying the media’s ability to convey the political conflicts surrounding the most important votes during the 7th European Parliament requires an understanding of what the conflicts were about, i.e. what positions the various actors took. Naturally, one can have different opinions on the interpretation of these conflicts; however, again, the VoteWatch report is of use. Instead of considering the entire resolutions, VoteWatch identified certain elements – amendments – in the resolutions/proposals that were particularly controversial or surrounded by conflict. Below, the conflict elements surrounding these ten votes are outlined. The votes are numbered as before, with the only difference that they are now referred to correctly.76


In October 2010, the European Parliament narrowly adopted a position on the Directive on Maternity Leave. The main conflict surrounded amendment 12=38, regarding the extension of maternity leave on full pay from 14 to 20 weeks. Prior to the vote, the center-left supported the amended proposal and argued that such a provision would "ensure greater protection of women"77 as well as favor demographic growth. Taking an opposite stand, the center-right groups argued that such a provision would increase costs for businesses in general and small business in particular, and would put women at risk of being discriminated in the labor market. Eventually, the vote passed with 327 MEPs in favor to 320 against. S&D, Greens/EFA, GUE-NGL managed to gather support by winning over 82 MEPs from the EPP, most of which from Poland, Italy, Hungary and Lithuania.78


In November 2011, the European Parliament adopted a position on the proposal for a Council decision on the Framework Programme of the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom) for nuclear research and training activities. The only ones against were the Greens/EFA and the GUE-NGL. The key vote, as identified by VoteWatch, was that on amendment 36, drafted by the Greens/EFA and aimed at

76 As labeled in VoteWatch (2013)
77 VoteWatch (2013), p.8
78 Ibid.
committing the EU to give up nuclear energy. It gathered support from the Greens/EFA, GUE-NGL, two-thirds of the S&D and approximately half of ALDE. However, as the number of votes against counted to 356 and the number of votes in favor to 210, the amendment was not carried.


In February 2012, the European Parliament voted on a non-binding resolution which voiced its opinion on the European Commission’s Green Paper proposing Eurobonds (also known as Stability Bonds). The Parliament was generally positive towards the initiative, as the S&D, Greens/EFA, a majority of the MEPs from the EPP and ALDE voted in favor. However, a total of 29 EPP MEPs from Germany and Sweden voted against, while 19 ALDE MEPs abstained. In addition, many of the MEPs from GUE-NGL, ECR and EFD opposed the resolution. In the case of Sweden, the Moderate Party (EPP) was critical, mainly due to hesitation over EU’s role in economic governance.80


In May 2012, the resolution regarding a financial transaction tax (FTT) was voted on in the Parliament. A majority of the MEPs – 487 votes – supported the resolution; however, there was a disagreement over where the money should go to. A minority, 152 MEPs from ECR, EFD and ALDE (except for the French, Italian and Finish members) did not support the resolution and thus voted against it. In addition, a total of 20 EPP members from Malta, Cyprus, Sweden and Latvia voted against; as did 6 Maltese and Cypriot MEPs from S&D.81

5. European Parliament legislative resolution of 4 July 2012 on the draft Council decision on the conclusion of the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement between the European Union and its Member States, Australia, Canada, Japan, the Republic of Korea, the United Mexican States, the Kingdom of Morocco, New Zealand, the Republic of Singapore, the Swiss Confederation and the United States of America.

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79 Green Papers are published by the European Commission to initiate a discussion among various actors and parties on the issue at hand. Green Papers may subsequently result in a legislative process, outlined in a White Paper.


81 VoteWatch (2013), p.14
In July 2012, the ACTA was rejected by the European Parliament. A total of 478 MEPs voted against the agreement and only 39 voted in favor. 165 MEPs abstained from voting. The opposition voiced concerns over "data protection, fundamental freedoms, openness and transparency." Christofer Fjellner, Swedish EPP MEP and ACTA advocator, asked the Parliament to delay its final vote until the Court of Justice of the European Union gave their ruling on the trade agreement’s compliance with Union law; however, a majority of the MEPs rejected that request. In the end, most political groups voted against ACTA. A majority of the EPP and ECR members abstained. Among the supporters within the EPP, the French MEPs stood out.


In March 2013, the European Parliament adopted a resolution which criticized cuts made in the EU’s multi-annual financial framework for the period 2014-2020. The resolution on the MFF – which had been agreed upon by the Heads of State and Governments in 2013 – stated that the MEPs will only consent should the budget allow for more flexibility and consolidation of the EU’s own system of resources. Although most groups – the EPP, S&D, ALDE, Greens/EFA and GUE-NGL – voted in favor of the resolution, many MEPs from the EPP voted against the official group line. These MEPs were mainly representatives from Central and Eastern European countries such as Romania and Poland, but also the Nordic Member States, i.e Denmark, Finland and Sweden. In addition, the Swedish, British and Danish S&D-delegations also voted against the EP resolution.


In March 2013, a motion for a resolution on the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) was adopted by the European Parliament. Approximately 40 percent of the EU budget is CAP-related, and the result of the vote put Parliament in favor of maintaining the status quo. The votes in favor counted up to 474, while those
against counted to 172. The Greens/EFA most of GUE-NGL MEPs voted against, as did 56 MEPs from S&D, mainly from Germany and the UK.\textsuperscript{86}


On 16 April 2013, the European Parliament voted to reject a Commission proposal with the purpose of boosting the prices of the so called EU polluter’s permits within the Emissions Trading Scheme, ETS. The proposal was opposed by mainly MEPs from EPP (but also from ECR, EFD, parts of ALDE and NI) who argued that such an increase in prices would be counter-productive in times of economic downturn, as it would result in higher energy prices for consumers as a result of raised costs for industry. On the other hand, the center-left MEPs, who supported the reform, argued that in order to fight pollution and climate change more efforts were needed and that renewable sources of energy ought to receive greater benefits at the expense of more polluting energy sources. The result of the vote (334 votes in favor, 315 against) meant that the Parliament rejected the Commission proposal to increase taxes on CO2 emissions.\textsuperscript{87}

9. \textit{European Parliament decision of 17 April 2013 on discharge in respect of the implementation of the general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2011, Section I – European Parliament.}

In April 2013, the European Parliament, with 370 votes in favor and 281 against, supported an amendment to a resolution related to the final approval of EP accounts of 2011. The amendment urged "the Member States to revise the issue of Parliament’s seat and working places in the next revision of Treaty."\textsuperscript{88} The European Parliament has three places of work: Brussels, Strasbourg and Luxembourg; and the cost of this arrangement has been a controversial issue in some Member States, not least in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. The opposition to revise this arrangement was mainly formed by the EPP and by a clear majority of the French delegations in other groups, as well as a slight majority of MEPs from six other Member State delegations: Romania, Hungary, Poland, Germany, Slovakia and Bulgaria. However, a clear majority voted in favor of raising the issue of the EP’s seat: 370 in favor to 281 against. Notably, within the

\textsuperscript{86} VoteWatch (2013), p.19
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid., p.21
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., p.24
EPP, the Swedish, Dutch and Belgian MEPs voted against the group’s official position, i.e in favor of raising the issue of the EP’s seat.\textsuperscript{89}

\textit{10. European Parliament resolution of 23 May 2013 on EU trade and investment negotiations with the United States of America.}

In May 2013, a large majority of the MEPs supported the proposed EP position on negotiations for a free trade agreement with the US, which called on the Commission to exclude from the negotiation mandate cultural and audio-visual services, including online services of such kind. However, other references to potential obstacles were voted down, such as labor and environment standards and GMOs. The vote was carried by 460 votes in favor to 105 against. GUE-NGL and Greens/EFA, as well as non-attached MEPs were opposed. French MEPs from ALDE and S&D abstained. Although the EU Treaty states that the negotiations are carried out by the European Commission, based on a mandate adopted by the Council and on behalf of all EU Member States, the trade agreement must, before entering into force, be ratified by a majority of the EP. Thus, in spite of the vote not having direct consequences in terms of legislation, it was still a “significant signal”\textsuperscript{90} sent to the national governments by the EP.

\section*{3.2 The 7th European Parliament}

The selection of the European Parliament and its 7th parliamentary term is most deliberate and based upon a handful of arguments. Most importantly, the European Parliament is chosen for its role as the direct link between the electorate and the European Union. Because the media’s responsibility to inform is to a great extent connected to the facilitation of a self-governing public (as argued in chapter two), the institution which is the representative body of the electorate in European Union politics is, agreeably, the most suitable pick. This link between the electorate and the European Union is largely self-evident to any political scientist; nevertheless, it might be fruitful to establish two facts in regards to this relationship: First, the European Parliament is the only directly elected institution of the European Union.\textsuperscript{91} Second, as stated in a new section on democratic principles in the Lisbon

\begin{multicols}{2}


\textsuperscript{90} Ibid.

\end{multicols}
Treaty, the functioning of the Union shall be founded on representative democracy.\textsuperscript{92}

Next, why is the 7th European Parliament particularly critical? First, empirically speaking, the VoteWatch report concludes that ”the number of cases in which the European Parliament managed to leave its footprint on EU legislation is certainly higher than in the previous term.”\textsuperscript{93} Furthermore, over the years, the Parliament has inarguably strengthened their position vis-à-vis other institutions, such as the Commission and the Council. For instance, the Amsterdam Treaty in 1999 amended the codecision procedure first established in the Maastricht Treaty 1992 and made it more efficient by introducing the possibility to conclude agreements in the first reading. Moreover, following the Treaty of Lisbon, which entered into force on 1 December, 2009 the powers of the European Parliament was strengthened even further, both in terms of decision-making and in constitutional matters. First, the strengthening of the European Parliament is particularly evident in the decision-making process. The Parliament has, under the \textit{ordinary legislative procedure}, now extended its powers to over 40 new policy areas, including crucial areas such as agriculture, justice and home affairs and transport.\textsuperscript{94} As such, the ordinary legislative procedure is now used for most areas, with only a few exceptions.\textsuperscript{95} In addition, the Parliament now has to give its consent to conclude international agreements, as well as having been put on equal footing with the Council under the EU’s budgetary procedure.\textsuperscript{96} In terms of constitutional matters, the Lisbon Treaty considerably empowered the Parliament in four ways. First, it extended the Parliament’s powers under the ordinary treaty revision procedure, as well as under the simplified revision procedures. Second, it extended the Parliament’s powers in regards to the \textit{enhanced cooperation framework} between Member States, which now requires the Parliament’s consent. Third, it put the Parliament on an equal footing with the Council in regards to adopting the EU’s annual budget, by removing the distinction between compulsory and non-compulsory expenditure.\textsuperscript{97} Finally, the Lisbon Treaty states that the Commission President is to be elected by the Parliament on the basis of a proposal from the European Council, which in turn has to take into account the outcome of the elections to the European Parliament.\textsuperscript{98}

\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., p.145
\textsuperscript{93} VoteWatch (2013), p.2
\textsuperscript{96} Monar, J. (2011), p.11
\textsuperscript{97} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{98} Shackleton, M. (2012), p.131
In sum, the fact that the European Parliament is the only elected body of the European Union, and the fact that it has become increasingly powerful over the years, i.e. more important as a political actor, lead us to expect that the media should cover it with intensity – depth and breadth – following the logic presented in chapter two. Accordingly, the 7th European Parliament is a particularly critical selection.

3.3 The newspaper

The print edition of the daily morning newspaper *Dagens Nyheter (DN)* is selected as study object. As the research question seeks to answer how the Swedish nationwide news media perform their democratic task of informing the public on EU affairs, two questions arise when selecting which news media to study: first, which news media can be seen as representative of the Swedish nationwide media? Should the result be positive, we must be able to expect of the Swedish nationwide news media in general to perform accordingly. Second, should the result be negative, we must be able to ask: if not this news media – then which one? In other words, it must be both representative of the Swedish media and constitute a critical and most likely case. Naturally, it is difficult to strike a perfect balance between the two criteria as they are seemingly different; however, it is not impossible.

First, as to why *Dagens Nyheter* should be considered as representative of the Swedish nationwide news media, it is fruitful to look at how Asp uses *Rapport*, the public service broadcasting news program, as indicator for how the Swedish press in general report on political issues. By simply referring to the publicistic ambition of *Rapport*, which is to report on the "most important issues", Asp claims it to be an indicator of the general news sample by the major press. Reasonably, if we accept this argument, it is more likely than not to go both ways. In other words, the news published by *Dagens Nyheter* is likely to gain attention in other news media, and (politically) important news published elsewhere is likely to gain attention in *DN*. This logic assumes a state of interconnectedness in the major press and nationwide news media. The following quote from DN’s publicistic ambition, describing its role vis-à-vis society, points in this direction:

> Everyday, Dagens Nyheter shall set the agenda for the political, public and cultural discussions. DN shall not only mirror and constitute a forum for the current societal debate, but also

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constitute its motor. A precondition for this is that Dagens Nyheter continues to speak to readers across the country.\textsuperscript{100}

Second, as to why \textit{Dagens Nyheter} is to be considered a critical and most likely case, it is again fruitful to use the argument presented by Asp. As the publicistic ambition of \textit{DN} is similar to that of \textit{Rapport}, it is not far-fetched to argue that Asps’s argument – that \textit{Rapport}, because of its publicistic ambition, reports on the most important issues – could also be applied to \textit{Dagens Nyheter}. The following quote from DN’s publicistic ambition, again describing its role vis-à-vis society, highlights why it ought to be considered a critical case:

\begin{quote}
DN adheres to a tradition of enlightenment. DN’s point of departure is that all people, regardless of social background and given conditions has the right to participate in and attain an understanding of collective affairs. DN aims to be a newspaper of breadth and quality and shall function as Sweden’s most important democratic meeting place.\textsuperscript{101}
\end{quote}

Moreover, the argument that \textit{Dagens Nyheter} is among the most credible heavy-weighers of the Swedish press, and therefore most likely to perform accordingly, is arguably reinforced by the fact that \textit{DN} is the largest nation-wide newspaper with a daily edition of roughly 272.100 (2012)\textsuperscript{102}, ahead of other nation-wide newspapers such as \textit{Svenska Dagbladet} and \textit{Dagens Industri}, as well as by the fact that \textit{DN}, in terms of public trust, scores relatively high when compared to other nation-wide media.\textsuperscript{103} With this in mind, the following question is close at hand: if \textit{DN} does not manage to perform in accordance with the theoretical predictions, what news media will?

Finally, the analysis will focus on news articles or news flashes, thus excluding editorials and debate articles etc. As to which time frame to apply, one has to take into consideration the following obstacle: if the vote took place on day \textit{x}, how many days or weeks before and after should we search for articles on the subject? As there is no obvious answer, one has to simply aim at being more generous than not. Thus, the time frame is set to \textit{three weeks before}, and \textit{three weeks after} the vote took place. Given the high pace of temporary news coverage and consumption, the selection is arguably on the generous side of the spectrum, as it allows for extensive pre-vote and post-vote coverage. As to how the search for the articles will be carried out, the \textit{Retriever Media Archive} – a database containing material

\begin{footnotes}
\item[101] Ibid., (author’s translation)
\end{footnotes}
from most Swedish newspapers and journals – will be used. The following search string has been applied for all ten votes: "europaparlamentet OR eu-parlamentet" (European Parliament OR EU-parliament). The search result will accordingly display all articles containing either of these words, among which the relevant articles will be manually identified. By throwing the net this wide, the risk of excluding articles ought to be almost entirely diminished.

3.4 Evaluating media performance

One question is yet to be answered, namely that of how to analyze and evaluate media performance in relation to the theoretical ideal. Quite naturally, as there is no universal method to adopt, one has to construct criteria by drawing upon principles expressed by other scholars, which will then guide both the reader and the researcher throughout the analysis. Still, two challenges are particularly apparent. First, it would be deeply unfair towards both the media and democracy to solely use the ideal as point of comparison. For instance, claiming that *Dagens Nyheter* failed to perform its democratic task only because it missed to convey one or two elements of a political conflict is unfair to both *DN* and the state of democracy. At the same time, conveying a political conflict does not equal performing in accordance with the democratic ideal, as it is fully possible that that particular conflict is just one out of many, or simply not the most important. Though difficult, it is crucial to strike a balance between these contrasts – being demanding and being fair. Second, in some cases, the conflicts might not be clearly expressed, though not entirely overlooked either. Thus, when to consider a conflict fully *conveyed* is not easily done. Therefore, in the next section I shall account for how this is to be carried out, with the ambition of being as explicit as possible.

First, the research question on media performance cannot simply be answered with a yes or no; good or bad. Instead, it requires deliberation and discussion. As the challenge is to be both demanding and fair at the same time, this is seemingly the only reasonable approach. In essence, this open deliberation approach echoes the benchmark/checklist provided by Pippa Norris, whom argues that media performance (in regards to its role as facilitator of pluralistic competition, which is the definition she uses) can be evaluated by asking questions such as "Does the news media provide extensive coverage of news about politics and government
Accordingly, I intend to answer the research question by discussing the following (which sums up the theoretical arguments, as well as the checklist on how to evaluate media performance by the aforementioned Norris): did the media provide extensive coverage of the votes in the European Parliament? Did the media convey the political conflicts and did they involve a variety of actors? Combined, the questions should be able to produce answers which can then be used to make a trustworthy assessment of how the media perform its democratic task of informing the public on EU affairs. This approach, which I argue is the only reasonable, stands in stark contrast to locking oneself to quantitative measurements, such as a percentage scale. Such an approach, e.g. because the media conveyed the political conflicts in 60 percent of the cases, it is said to perform in accordance with its democratic responsibilities, allows little room for maneuver, and the discussion is consequently bound to focus on where to draw the border. Inasmuch it is possible, such definite assertions will be avoided, though without compromising on clarity.

Second, in regards to when a political conflict is to be considered as successfully conveyed, it is equally difficult to make definite assertions. Here, it seems as if we have two very general options at hand: a quantitative content analysis or a qualitative approach, such as the analysis of the meaning of words. While the former studies the frequency of which words are used, the latter is used to systematically understand the meaning behind words and political messages. In simplified terms, in this study, where the setting is different, this means that we can either consider a conflict conveyed when its existence is simply mentioned, or first when it has been given meaning through description and discussion. Arguably, the best method is that which manages to strike a good balance between the two approaches. However, it is fair to argue that a prerequisite for a political conflict to be considered conveyed is that the conflict, regardless of simply being mentioned or more thoroughly discussed, also attaches the different positions to political parties, groups or MEPs. Accordingly, for each set of articles, we shall answer two questions, which will then help us address the issue of whether and how the media managed to convey the political conflicts:

1) Do the articles convey the main themes of the conflict?
2) Do the articles convey the main actors and which positions they adopted?

Inevitably, the answers will include elements of subjectivism; however, to elaborate on this balance, the following two fictive examples describe 1) a case

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105 Ibid.
in which those questions would have been answered in the affirmative and 2) a
case in which those questions would have been answered in the negative.

_C1:_ Yesterday, the European Parliament voted on the Directive on Maternity Leave. The Parliament was divided on the issue of whether to extend the minimum maternity leave on full pay from 14 to 20 weeks, but eventually adopted the proposal after voting 327–320. A coalition of center-left and greens, as well as individual MEPs from the EPP, argued that the proposal would ensure greater protection of women, whereas the opposition warned that such a provision would put women at risk of being discriminated in the labor market.

_C2:_ Yesterday, the European Parliament voted on the Directive on Maternity Leave. A majority of the MEPs, most likely exhausted after a long and heated debate, voted in favor of extending the minimum maternity leave on full pay from 14 to 20 weeks.

In both cases, the presence of a political conflict is apparent. However, in the first case, the article conveyed not only the conflict (whether to extend maternity leave on full pay from 14 to 20 weeks), but also pinned different positions on political actors (center-left and greens, EPP, the opposition). In the second article, though the conflict was mentioned, it did not attach the conflicting positions to the left-right scale, let alone specific political groups, MEPs or national delegations. Following the logic presented in chapter two, _C1_ is an example of the media performing rather close to the ideal, whereas _C2_ is an example of when the media failed to convey the ’words and actions of political alternatives’, even though it mentioned the conflict per se.

All things considered, the analysis will combine the quantitative content analysis, identifying whether or not the conflict is mentioned, with qualitative and normative elements seeking to answer whether enough information is provided in order for the citizens to be able to identify the ’differences between political alternatives’. Naturally, arriving at the perfect method for doing so is difficult; however, by recognizing that there is no universal formula, thus resorting to deliberation and discussion, I argue that it is fully possible to produce trustworthy assessments of the democratic performance of the media.

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107 See chapter 2.1
108 See chapter 2.1
3.5 Summary

The figure below explains the main characteristics of the methodological approach. As stated repeatedly, the selections are based upon the critical and most likely criteria, which means that it should be possible to ask the following question, in regards to media responsibility and it’s ability to convey political conflict in the European Parliament: if not in this case – when? More specifically, if not *Dagens Nyheter* – which news media? If not these votes – which ones? Consequently, by having done these selections, the media’s ability to convey political conflict in the European Parliament is put to a critical test.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Guiding principles</th>
<th>Main purpose</th>
<th>Time period</th>
<th>Cases/observations</th>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>Generalization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Critical, most likely</td>
<td>To achieve logical deductions of the type, ‘if this is not valid for this case, then it most likely applies to no cases’</td>
<td>The 7th European Parliament 2004-2009</td>
<td>The ten most important votes identified during the 7th European Parliament (2009-2014)</td>
<td>Dagens Nyheter, daily print edition</td>
<td>How the Swedish nation-wide media perform their democratic task of informing the public on EU affairs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1: Summary of selections
4 The Media Performance

On the one hand, the result is surprising, to say the least. On the other hand, it is not. In the figure below, an overview of the number of articles and a simplified assessment of whether they managed to convey the political conflicts is presented. It shows that in a majority of cases, the media did not report at all, despite the political importance of the votes. Subsequently, an analysis will follow, aimed at giving meaning to the result and discussing how the media performed their democratic task of informing the public on EU affairs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The votes</th>
<th>Number of articles</th>
<th>Article length (words)</th>
<th>Political conflict</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>130-1023</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2: Summary of the result

4.1 Analyzing the result

Did the media provide extensive coverage of the votes in the European Parliament? Did the media convey the political conflicts and did they involve a variety of actors? Those are the two questions we shall now address, as we analyze the articles one by one and vote by vote. A brief recap of the political conflicts will begin each section, after which the article will be summarized, followed by a conclusion of whether and how the media managed to convey the political conflicts.
1. Should the minimum length of the maternity leave on full pay be extended from 14 to 20 weeks?

The main conflict was between center-left (Greens/EFA, GUE-NGL, S&D) who favored the amendment and the center-right (EPP) who opposed. There was also a rift within the EPP, as MEPs from Poland, Italy, Hungary and Lithuania voted in favor of the amendment. The vote passed with a narrow majority, 327 in favor to 320 against.

*Dagens Nyheter* published a total of one (1) article on the issue. The day before the vote, on October 19, the newspaper devoted approximately half a page to the upcoming vote in the European Parliament. Under the headline *Utökad barnledighet splittrar EU-länderna* (roughly 'EU countries divided over extended parental leave') the article correctly described the conflict as being about whether to extend the maternity leave from 14 to 20 weeks and also accounted for some general arguments in favor and against, such as gender equality and increased government spending in times of economic hardship. Though parts of the article accounted for the positions of the Council (Germany and Great Britain were mentioned as being against such an extension), the Parliament too was accurately described as deeply divided. In addition, the article quoted Swedish parliamentarian Eva-Britt Svensson (GUE-NGL) saying that the division was not only between the political groups, but also within. What is more, the article stated that Swedish politicians from both camps opposed the proposal, albeit for different reasons.

However, the article did not specify the political alternatives, i.e. attached different positions to different parties, groups or politicians. Only one politician was quoted in the article, without referring to anything else than her Swedish party affiliation, which arguably left the readers with no additional knowledge of which politicians, parties or groups opposed and which were in favor, apart from the vague reference to the opposition formed by both Swedish left-wing and right-wing politicians in general.

*Did the article convey the main themes of the conflict? Did the article convey the main actors and which positions they adopted?* Indeed, the article mentioned the "division between and within political groups" and the main themes of the conflict. However, the article failed to convey which actors took which position. Arguably, disregarding the vague reference to Swedish left-wing and right-wing politicians in general, the article did not account for the main actors and the positions they

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adopted. Therefore, as the fundamental question of which political alternative took which position was left unanswered, it cannot be said that the media managed to convey the existing political conflicts.

2. *Should nuclear energy be phased out?*

The conflict surrounded amendment 36, which proposed the European Union give up nuclear energy. The proposal was drafted by Greens/EFA and gathered support from GUE-NGL, two-thirds of the S&D and approximately half of ALDE. Even so, the amendment fell with 356 votes against to 210 in favor.

During the period three weeks before and three weeks after the vote, the number of articles in *Dagens Nyheter* counted to zero (0). In spite of the vote being politically important and easily understood, it was not covered. Obviously, the conclusion must be that the media did not manage to convey the existing political conflicts.

3. *Should the Eurozone countries pool their public debts by creating Eurobonds?*

When the Parliament gave its opinion on whether the Eurozone countries should pool their public debts by creating Eurobonds, S&D, Greens/EFA and a majority of EPP and ALDE voted in favor. EPP members from Sweden and Germany voted against, as did a number of MEPs from GUE-NGL, ECR and EFD.

The number of articles in *Dagens Nyheter* during the given time frame counted to zero (0). As with the previous vote on nuclear energy, the conclusion must be that the media did not manage to convey the existing political conflicts.

4. *Should there be a European tax on financial transactions?*

A majority supported the proposal; however, 152 MEPs from ECR, EFD and ALDE (except for the French, Italian and Finish members) opposed the resolution, as did a total of 20 EPP members from Malta, Cyprus, Sweden and Latvia, and six Maltese and Cypriot S&D members.

*Dagens Nyheter* published a total of one (1) article\(^\text{110}\) on the issue, which in fact was a short notice of 73 words, informing only about the proposal and that the European Parliament voted in favor. Does the article convey the main themes of the conflict? Does the article convey the main actors and which positions they

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adopted? In the article, the existing political conflicts are completely absent and instead of pointing to the different positions taken by the different actors, the article referred to the Parliament (i.e. as a single actor with no internal differences). For the reader, this means that the important focus on the ‘words and actions of political alternatives’ was completely lost, consequently erasing all context and possibility of assessing different political opinions. Thus, the conclusion is that the media did not manage to convey the existing political conflicts.

5. Should the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA) be ratified?

A total of 478 MEPs voted against the agreement and only 39 in favor. 165 MEPs abstained. Most political groups voted against ACTA, but a majority of EPP and ECR abstained. Among the supporters within the EPP, the French MEPs stood out.

A total of three (3) articles on the European Parliament and ACTA were published in Dagens Nyheter during the time frame, two of which concerned the vote in the Committee on International Trade on June 21 and the other the final vote in the Parliament on July 4. Because these two votes cannot be entirely separated, they are both included in the result.

In the first article, published on June 21 the supporters and the opposition are described as equally strong, though the main proposal is to reject the agreement. It identified one Swedish EPP member, Christoffer Fjellner (though it did not mention his political group affiliation) who argued that the vote be postponed until the Court of Justice of the European Union had given a legal opinion on the agreement. It did not specifically identify any of the opposition.

The second article, published one day after the vote in the Committee on International Trade, on June 22 is indeed more deliberative. It includes the commonly heard arguments in favor and against, as well as basic information on ACTA. It also identifies various supporters within EPP, such as the Swedish Moderaterna and Kristdemokraterna, as well as the German parliamentarian Daniel Caspary. It also notes that the Polish delegation within the EPP rejected the agreement due to heavy domestic pressure. Finally, it identifies two more ACTA opponents – Swedish MEP Carl Schlyter and Amelia Andersdotter (Greens/EFA) – though their political group affiliations were not mentioned. The third and final article, published on July 5 reported that the European Parliament voted to reject ACTA by a large majority.

111 A fourth article was published on June 22; nevertheless, as it was a column and not a news article, it is not included in the analysis. Had it been, it would however not have made up a positive contribution, as it neither informed on the vote, nor conveyed political conflicts.


with the vote record showing 478 against, 39 in favor and 165 abstained. The article identified a total of three individual supporters and opponents, as well as other actors in favor – among those the European Commission and the 'conservative political group in the European Parliament’. However, the MEPs identified in the article were exclusively from Greens/EFTA and EPP (though these labels were not used).

Did the articles convey the main themes of the conflict? Did the articles convey the main actors and which positions they adopted? Indeed, the media covered the existing political conflicts and identified both supporters and opponents, even though they focused mainly on a few Swedish political parties. However, in addition to Swedish MEPs, a German member of the EPP, as well as the Polish EPP delegation received attention. Thus, the focus was indeed on the 'words and actions of political alternatives’, leading us to conclude that the media successfully conveyed political conflict.

6. Should there be an increase in the EU’s multi-annual budget for the next 7 years?

On 13 March 2013, the European Parliament voted on a resolution criticizing cuts made in the EU’s multi-annual financial framework for the period 2014-2014. Most groups voted in favor; however, EPP members from Central and Eastern Europe, as well as the Nordic states voted against. In addition, the Swedish, British and Danish S&D-delegations also voted against the resolution.

The number of articles in Dagens Nyheter during the given time frame counted to zero (0), which naturally generates the conclusion that the media failed to convey the existing political conflicts.

7. Should the agriculture subsidies remain a budgetary priority for the EU?

Approximately 40 percent of the EU budget is CAP-related. In March 2013, the Parliament voted in favor, 474-172, of maintaining this status quo. The Greens/EFA and most of GUE-NGL MEPs voted against, as did 56 MEPs from S&D, mainly from Germany and the UK.

The number of articles in Dagens Nyheter during the given time frame counted to zero (0), which naturally generates the conclusion that the media failed to convey the existing political conflicts.
8. *Should a proposal to increase taxes on CO2 emissions be rejected?*

In April 2013, the European Parliament voted to reject (334-315) a Commission proposal aimed at bossing the prices of the so-called EU polluter’s permits within the Emission Trading Scheme, ETS. MEPs from mainly the EPP, but also from ECR, EFD, parts of ALDE and NI opposed the proposal and argued it would be counter-productive in times of economic downturn. The center-left voted in favor, arguing it was necessary in order to fight pollution and climate change.

The number of articles in *Dagens Nyheter* during the given time frame counted to one (1), in which the vote is reported as being a ‘setback for EU efforts to fight pollution’. The outcome of the vote is commented by Swedish MEP Kent Johansson, who supported the proposal, though it only mentioned his Swedish political party affiliation, and not his EP political group affiliation (ALDE). There is no additional information on the words and actions of political alternatives. Thus, the two questions – *Did the article convey the main themes of the conflict? Did the article convey the main actors and which positions they adopted?* – are answered in the negative, naturally generating the conclusion that the media failed to convey the existing political conflicts. This follows the logic presented in the previous chapter, which establishes that enough information for the citizens to be self-governing is a necessity. Arguably, when only one political alternative is present, such information is not provided.

9. *Should the location of the official seat of the European Parliament be reviewed as part of a future Treaty change?*

On April 17, the European Parliament voted in favor (370-281) of an amendment urging the Member States to revise the issue of Parliament’s seat and working places in the next revision of the Treaty. The opposition was mainly formed by the EPP; however, a majority of the French delegations in other groups opposed the amendment, as well as delegations from Romania, Hungary, Poland, Germany, Slovakia and Bulgaria. Within the EPP, the Swedish, Dutch and Belgian MEPs voted in favor.

The number of articles in *Dagens Nyheter* during the given time frame counted to zero (0), leading to the conclusion that the media failed to convey the existing political conflict.

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In May 2013, a large majority of the MEPs supported the position of the Parliament which called on the Commission to exclude from the negotiation mandate cultural and audio-visual services, including online services of such kind. While 460 voted in favor, 105 MEPs from GUE-NGL and Greens/EFA, as well as non-attached members voted against. French MEPs from ALDE and S&D abstained. Other references to GMOs labor and environment standards were voted down.

The number of articles in *Dagens Nyheter* during the given time frame counted to zero (0), leading to the conclusion that the media failed to convey the existing political conflict.

4.2 Conclusions

Having analyzed each of the (very few) articles, is has now been established how the media reported (or not reported) on these issues. What can then be said about how the Swedish nation-wide media performed their task of informing the public on EU affairs? Before answering that question, however, let us briefly recap and summarize how the media conveyed political conflict in the European Parliament and conclude the main findings.

In sum, the media only reported on four out of ten votes. In spite of all votes being *important, easily understood* and *controversial*, the media simply did not pick up on the stories. Furthermore, the number of articles per vote only exceeded one (1) in the case of ACTA, which was also the only vote of which reports included an element of political conflict. In all other cases, the issue was either ignored all together, or the political conflicts were ignored. The main actors were almost exclusively Swedish parliamentarians, whom in turn were seldom mentioned with their political group affiliation.

Then, how did the media perform their democratic task of informing the public on EU affairs? To answer that question, we need to revisit the main theoretical arguments previously made in this paper. First, I argued that the media was a fundamental pillar of any democracy. Though there are ways of attaining information on politics, political alternatives and collective affairs other than through traditional media, it certainly is true that we are to some extent dependent on the media for our understanding of the world around us. Therefore, the media
holds a unique responsibility. A common approach to media responsibility is that it should act as a public informant, i.e. provide the citizens with information on political affairs and, in doing so, enabling their self-governance and independent assessments of consequences following political proposals. Second, I argued that in spite of our expectations on the media, the reality is sometimes disappointing. Still, we shall, at the very least, demand of the media to inform the public on collective affairs and convey the words and actions of political alternatives, as that ought to be a prerequisite for a self-governing public. Thus, in the section on how to evaluate media performance, the following questions were asked, the answers to which were argued to also answer the overall research question of how the media performed their democratic task of informing the public on EU affairs: did the media provide extensive coverage of the votes taken by the European Parliament? Did the media convey the political conflicts and did they involve a variety of actors?

4.2.1 On the media coverage

First, let us discuss whether or not the media provided (enough) coverage of the votes in the European Parliament. Without a doubt, in terms of quantity the media performed poorly. In only four out of ten cases, the media reported on the issue. The length of the articles varied between 75 words (should there be a European tax on financial transactions?) and 1023 words (should the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA) be ratified?). Counting all seven articles, the average length was 321 words, which is just slightly more than the previous section of this chapter. When excluding the by far longest article (1023 words on ACTA), the average number of words counts to roughly 200, which is only 30-some more words than the first two sections of chapter 4.2.

Clearly, there is no universal answer as to whether or not the coverage of the media is enough to consider this aspect of its democratic task of informing the public on EU affairs fulfilled. However, we ought to be able to agree on the following: given that these votes were not just any votes in the European Parliament, but in fact the ten most important votes by our definition, the media coverage is far from ideal. Though it was previously stated that, inasmuch it is possible, quantitative measurements would be avoided in order reach conclusions, the fact that the media did not report on six out of ten votes can not generate any other conclusion that the media did not provide extensive coverage, much less performed according to the ideal. As an example, the vote on whether there should be a tax on financial transactions (#4) was covered with one article á 75 words. Taking into consideration the potential impact such a tax would have on EU public finances and/or the economy, and the fact that there was division not only between but also
within parliamentary groups, it is difficult to imagine that any article á 75 words is enough for the citizens to make an individual assessment of the consequences, or enough to form an autonomous opinion on the political issue. As regards to the other three votes covered by the media, only one (ACTA) generated more than one article. Therefore, it seems fair to argue that the media did not provide extensive coverage of the most important votes taken by the 7th European Parliament.

4.2.2 On the political conflicts

Second, did the media convey the political conflicts and did they involve a variety of actors? Seemingly, the conclusion must be negative. In one case only (ACTA) did the media manage to convey the political conflicts and account for the words and actions of political alternatives. Notably, even when the media covered the vote in the European Parliament, it failed in almost all cases to convey the political conflicts. Agreeably, this points to an overall absence of political conflict; however, are there nuances to this negative answer?

Though the conclusions regarding each article is accessible above, and clearly shows that the media failed to convey the political conflicts in all cases but ACTA, it is necessary to elaborate on how the media conveyed the political conflicts and the political alternatives, regardless of them doing so successfully or not. The question we asked in chapter 4.5.5 on how to evaluate media performance was: Did the media _convey the political conflicts and did it involve a variety of actors?_ Disregarding the votes which were not covered by the media, we are left with seven articles on a total of four votes. Out of these seven articles, only one article (second article on ACTA) mentioned one of the political groups (EPP). All other articles focused on single MEPs and their Swedish political party affiliation. Notably, in only two cases (second and fourth article on ACTA) did MEPs from different political parties figure in the same article. The figure below illustrates what actors were given space in the coverage of the votes. Note that the ‘relevant’ actors ‘available’ (i.e Swedish political parties with representatives in the European Parliament and the political groups in the Parliament) count to fifteen (eight plus seven). It shows that out of these fifteen actors, only six were given space in the media coverage, out of which only one was a political group in the European Parliament. The remaining five actors were Swedish political parties. Notably, the second largest political group in the European Parliament during this period, S&D, as well as its member, the Swedish Social Democratic Party, were absent in the media coverage.
Considering this figure, it is fair to argue that the media did not only fail to convey the political conflicts successfully, but also included a rather limited amount of political actors in their reporting. Thus, the claim that the media failed to convey the political conflicts cannot even be slightly nuanced. Possibly, the answer could have been much more complex, in case the media failed to explicitly convey the political conflicts, but still included a variety of actors in the articles. That, as we have seen, was not the case. Therefore, the answer to the research question must not be an elaboration on how the media conveyed the political conflicts, but simply they didn’t.

4.2.3 The democratic task of informing the public on EU affairs

Hitherto, we have argued that the media did not provide extensive coverage of the most important votes taken by the 7th European Parliament. Neither did they convey the political conflicts, as the conflicts were most often completely absent, or not conveyed in such a manner that one could identify the words and actions of different political alternatives. Seemingly, we are therefore in a position to answer the research question on how the Swedish nation-wide media performs their democratic task of informing the public on EU affairs. Based on the arguments made above, the answer could be formulated as follows:

*The Swedish nation-wide media, in terms of informing the public on EU affairs, performs far from the ideal and the tasks given to them as one of the fundamental pillars of democracy; more specifically, they disregard existing political conflicts, with the consequence of citizens not being able to distinguish the words and actions of political alternatives, which in turn is crucial for them to be self-governing, independent and politically informed.*

At this stage, when we shall elaborate on the generalizability of the result, it is indeed needful to revisit the methodological considerations which were taken into account when selecting the votes, the newspaper and the time frame. As has been
repeatedly stated, the selections were *critical* and *most likely*. The main purpose was to achieve information which allows for logical deductions of the type: *if this is (not) valid for this case, then it most likely applies to (no) cases*. I argued that the selection of the time-frame was critical, because of the Parliament’s ever so powerful role in EU politics. I also argued that the selections of the votes were critical, because they were not only highly important, but also easily understood and of public relevance. Moreover, I argued that the selection of the newspaper was critical, because of its publicistic ambition and position among Swedish nation-wide media. Finally, I argued that the selections were also *most likely*, i.e the theoretical predictions/expectations were most likely to be accurate in these cases.

All things considered, if we accept this logic, then we are in a position to say something about how the Swedish nation-wide news media perform their democratic task of informing the public on EU affairs. Judging from the analysis, their performance can arguably be described as fundamentally flawed. Whichever word one chooses to use, it seems reasonable to argue that the performance is far from ideal and lacks the crucial democratic aspect of conveying the words and actions of political alternatives, i.e political conflict. Seemingly, the news media are not always guided by the what is politically important. Had they been just that, the number of articles would arguably have counted to more than the six identified in this study.

To conclude this study, let us consider the following: what needs to change in order for the media to better perform their democratic task of informing the public on EU affairs? Do the votes have to be *even more important*, the European Parliament *even more powerful* or the link between the Parliament and the electorate *even stronger*? Or could it be that the news media are simply not guided by this logic? If that is the case, is that not utterly disappointing?
While carrying out the study from start to finish, I took notice of interesting observations which were outside the scope of my research question, but still academically and empirically intriguing. Consequently, in this final chapter, in addition to sharing some general reflections, I give suggestions on what future research could explore.

First, given the rather scarce material gathered from Dagens Nyheter, I also carried out control searches which included other nation-wide newspapers and city press; in which case I searched for news articles two days before and two days after the votes; however, note that this search did not follow the same methodological precision as the previous and must therefore not be considered as anything else than hints.

Seemingly, the coverage by Dagens Nyheter was largely representative of the media coverage in general. For instance, even when expanding the search, reports on vote #4, #9 and #10 were not found. However, one exception was vote #6 – on the EU multi-annual budget – which was not covered by DN, but received attention in several regional and city newspapers such as Sydsvenskan, Landskrona-Posten and Göteborgs-Posten (although the coverage was indeed brief). Another (partial) exception was vote #7 on whether to keep CAP as a budgetary priority. As opposed to Dagens Nyheter, nation-wide Svenska Dagbladet and regional Sydsvenskan covered the vote with one article each; although these articles included other elements of conflict than those identified in this paper.

What did the media found to be more important than our ten votes? Instead of reporting on vote #2, on whether to phase out nuclear energy, both nation-wide newspapers and the city press reported on that the European Parliament had voted to ban so called 'naked' credit default swaps. In addition, EU regulations on body scans at airport security checks received major attention. Moreover, instead of reporting on vote #3, on whether to create Eurobonds, several articles from a variety of newspapers reported on newly adopted EU regulations regarding chemicals in dish soap and laundry detergent. And instead of reporting on vote #6, on the multi-annual EU budget, Dagens Nyheter covered the Parliament vote to further regulate the use of hormone increasing substances in various products.
Presumably, one could argue that the priorities of the media were in order. However, given that our votes are recognized as some of the most important votes taken by the 7th European Parliament, it is not farfetched to question whether that was the case. Arguably, the Parliament vote on the multi-annual EU budget triumphs new regulations on the use of chemicals in dish soap.

As to what future research might want to explore, these observations hint that there is little difference between nation-wide and regional city press in terms of de facto coverage of EU affairs (disregarding variables such as depth, breadth and quality). It also suggests that while these particular votes were most often missed, EU affairs was still present in the media. Future studies could therefore, most fruitfully, approach the why – i.e why do the media cover certain issues, while disregarding others (sometimes more important). Additionally, though the various newspapers seemed to cover the same issues, there ought to be differences in terms of depth, breadth and quality. Future studies could therefore approach the differences and/or similarities in how nation-wide and city/regional media cover EU affairs and convey political conflict, as well as potential differences between the coverage of the European Parliament and other institutions, such as the European Commission, Council of the European Union or the European Council.

A second reflection is more academically oriented, and concerns the way in which the media portrays EU affairs. Almost exclusively, the news articles were strictly reported from a Swedish perspective, meaning that those figuring in the articles were Swedish MEPs and members of the government. It may seem natural, given that the articles were aimed at a Swedish audience; however, if one wishes to create a European democracy, such an approach could be harmful.

Then, what is a European democracy and why is it important? The widely acclaimed democratic deficit of the European Union is not seldom described as one of the shortcomings of European integration. According to some, the role of media in contributing to this deficit is particularly apparent when the reports do not contribute to a “shared framework of reference and a European identity.” Consequently, the existence of a European public sphere, involving a common public debate and news agenda is a prerequisite for the creation and development of a European democracy. This requires the various national media coverage to correspond and allow for "speakers and listeners recognize each other as legitimate participants in a common discourse that frames the particular issues as common European problems.”

perception of the EU and its legitimacy, various EU actors must be given space in a commonly shared and recognized European discussion. It is only through the Europeanization of the public debate, or the Europeanization of the national spheres that a European democracy can be developed.

As to what future research might want to explore, the observation that a vast majority of the articles were strictly within the 'Swedish sphere’ could indeed motive studies on how the media in general contribute to or withhold the development of a European democracy. Fruitfully, such a study could argue for the (positive) impact of a Europeanization of the national sphere, and provide cross-country empirical material on the framing of EU affairs and which actors are given access to the spotlight.

Finally, in the research on the so called EU democratic and communication deficits, studies have established a link between the "media coverage of the EU and public perceptions of EU legitimacy, mass support and citizen engagement in elections.”¹¹⁸ Indeed, future studies could begin to explore the consequences of political conflict being largely absent in the reports on EU affairs and the European Parliament.

6 Bibliography


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