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Mass media and EU information

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Introduction

Communication between citizens and public officers is a fundamental aspect of public institutions' planning. It is through an open and clear dialogue that positive public opinion is shaped. Furthermore it is a tool for creating a good reputation and stronger support. Especially for those institutions, which base their existence on citizens' legitimization, it is important to establish good media relations. The European institutions have felt this necessity and the importance to tight good relations with governments of the member states and the national media. It is through more local support that EU institutions could improve their reputation. In fact national governments generally have much more support and greater credibility among their citizens than the European institutions. If citizens of a nation recognise and legitimate their institutions, they are more prompt to accept and follow their leaders. Hence the EU message will have more impact on the citizens if political leaders of the member states also support the EU cause. In this sense communication about the EU is most obviously shaped by national political and cultural frameworks during European Parliament election campaigns and when referenda are held. Analogously, the information campaigns of the European Union have addressed national political, media, and public relations structures, and they are also increasingly focused on regional media and regional representative bodies within the member states. As the European Union's policy-making and political direction impinge increasingly on member states, it is evident that the European dimension increasingly shapes the content and sets the agenda of the mediated political discourse of national polities. It is also apparent that in member states national editorial values influence coverage and that national governmental sources are still of key importance for journalists covering European Union issues.

This study aims to clarify the importance of media relations for European institutions as a tool for creating support and trust. This analysis will help to understand if Finnish and Italian people have received enough information about EU policies and which role mass media play in these countries. The role of mass media is also discussed considering previous works and research on mass communication. There is a big question in the background to which it is difficult to find an empirically verifiable answer: are the European communication strategies propaganda or information? Are they effective? Do they convey a public debate?

This study provides material to reflect on these questions but does not give a direct answer about the media's influence. It is based on content analysis of EU documents, press releases, speeches of the Vice-President of the Commission Margot Wallström and other reports made by Gallup Europe and other NGOs regarding the status of communication policies. Most of the quantitative data

presented in this article was provided by different Eurobarometer and Flash Eurobarometer surveys and by several officers working for national info points in Finland and in Italy.

Background information

In order to understand Finnish and Italian media relations regarding EU information, it is necessary to know the aim of EU information and the objectives that its information campaigns want to reach. Regarding the second point, the Commission believes that the principal objective is: “to improve perception of the European Union and its institutions and their legitimacy by deepening knowledge and understanding of its tasks, structure and achievements and by establishing a dialogue with its citizens” (European Commission, 2004: 3). This includes in particular raising the quality of European public debate, associating the public in European decision-making, listening to the public and their concerns more attentively, and the methodical, consistent rebuilding of the EU’s image. EU’s image is one of the most controversial aspects of EU issues, because it implies different socio-political analysis related with the concept of trust and reputation. In fact trust links ordinary citizens to the institutions that are intended to represent them (Bianco, 1994), thereby enhancing both the legitimacy and the effectiveness of democratic government (Braithwaite & Levi, 1998; Gamson, 1968; Hetherington, 1998). Trust is needed to move from a non-cooperative to a cooperative situation, and it is clearly some kind of belief in others’ credibility (Rothstein, 2000).

Trust is very important in politics, since it is almost universally considered good for democracy. High levels of trust in politicians, political parties and political institutions are, on the one hand, synonymous of good democratic health and, on the other hand, good assets to make democracy work. It is usually argued that political trust affects the citizens’ willingness to pay taxes, the desire of the brightest citizens to enter in the public service, the voluntary compliance of the law (Nye, 1997: 4; Norris, 1999: 8) and, more generally, the voluntary compliance with governmental policies. As has been convincingly argued by Margaret Levi (1997: 19-20), if citizens perceive that the government is trustworthy, they will comply with its policies. Hence, if Europeans trust European institutions, they will observe their regulations and by doing it they will legitimate the role of EU as a defender of democracy in Europe.

In general the aim of EU turns around the concepts of trust and reputation, but it is also related with the creation of a hypothetical European sphere of publics, which should, among other things, involve the dissemination of a European news agenda, need to become a significant part of the everyday news-consuming habits of European audiences, and entail that those living within the EU

have begun to think of their citizenship, in part at least, as transcending the level of the member states. These are some of the aspects promoted by EU through its activities, campaigns and events.

Democracy and EU information

The concept of democracy within the European Union has an important meaning and it is the base of the existence of the Union itself (Wallström, 2005c). In order to establish a full and deep integration among the member states and in order to be legitimised by its citizens, the European Union needs to found its political system in a liberal democracy. Nevertheless, European policies and practices are felt very distant and bureaucratic by the majority of Europeans. This feeling of distance and complex ruling is somehow reflected in diminished confidence in government institutions, declines in voting, and shifts in political identity and identifications with others in society. Furthermore the concept of democracy is questioned in its ethimological meaning. In fact the word “democracy” originates from the Greek $d\mu\alpha\tau\acute{\alpha}$, specifically from $d\mu$ meaning “the people”, plus $\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}$ meaning “to rule”, and the suffix $\acute{\alpha}$; the term therefore means “rule by the people”¹. If European Union is a democracy in this meaning, it should be ruled by its people. Additionally by creating a system where the public can remove administrations, without changing the legal basis for government, democracy aims at reducing political uncertainty and instability, and assuring citizens that however much they may disagree with present policies, they will be given a regular chance to change those who are in power, or change policies with which they disagree, as it has happened with the French and Dutch results of referenda for EU constitution. Christopher Lasch (1995) believes that the gap between the political elites and the demos is so tremendous that no concepts, such as democracy, equality, tolerance cannot any longer fill it up. The reality is very different from the ideology of democracy. So is democracy only a slogan, cliché, detached from the real life, or Lash’s interpretation is extreme? Democracy as it is, is a contested concept. Different definitions and theories emphasize different aspects of democracy, and various people give dissimilar meanings to it. For the European Union the concept of democracy is of a system of political governance whose decision-making power is subject to the controlling influence of citizens who are considered political equals². A democratic political system should be inclusive, participatory, representative, accountable, transparent and responsive to citizens’ aspirations and expectations, but Europeans do not feel it is like that. Furthermore democracy is not an all-or-nothing affair. It is a question of the degree to which citizens exercise control over political decision-making and are treated as equals. These values of democracy are realized through political

¹ Ethimological meaning taken from Economic expert, at URL: <http://www.economicexpert.com/a/Democracy.htm>

² Definition taken from International IDEA at URL: <http://www.idea.int/democracy/index.cfm>

institutions and practices. However, these values are not always easily achieved. One of the greatest barriers to democracy in Europe is considered to be the decline of the nation-state, because contemporary democracy is its invention. EU is considered to weaken the grounds of the nation-states, of the independent national politics by engendering part of the crisis of the nation-state. Hence, if the contemporary idea of democracy is attached to the ideology of the nation-state, does not this mean that the EU restricts in fact the democratic processes on the continent?

The reality is that the democratic process in Europe is not running at the same speed of the citizens' consensus. Citizens' participation to EU policies and legislation is generally quite low. On June 2004 during the European Parliament elections only 45.7% of Europeans voted and in certain new member countries the voting turnout was lower, like in Slovakia 17%, in Poland 20.9% and in Estonia 26.6% (European Commission, 2004f). Why did not Europeans express their right to vote? Is the idea of EU democracy not important for them?

Proponents of the civic decline school often argue that these changes are caused, or at least aggravated, by communication. Popular communication-centered explanations for civic decline include the isolating effects of television, the tabloid trends in news media, and the rise of political marketing techniques that break up society by appealing to immediate individual emotions over broader social identifications (Putnam, 2000; Turow, 1997). As the Vice-President of Commission Margaret Wallström has claimed, EU communication strategies have been too centralized and too bureaucratic, and EU commissioners have missed the first and most important aspect of communication: listening the citizens' needs (EurActiv, 2005a; Wallström, 2005a). Two recent examples of inaccurate campaigns are the French and Dutch referenda for the Constitutional treaty. In addition to the incorrect EU communication strategies, the national media had played an important role in the creation of citizens' perceptions.

The role of mass media

The media has a critical role to play in boosting civic participation in the EU. Through the media flows the information that integrates society and provides a sense of community and commonality. But to achieve this, journalists, editors and media proprietors will have to bypass some existing media attitudes and try new approaches. One of these attitudes is the role of the news media as provider of a "record of events" in society (De Fouloy, 2005). In fact in a Habermasian paradigm the role of the media is merely to disseminate information and to encourage public reasoning, we know that in reality public reasoning is influenced by the media and by particular interests with access to the public via the media (Holmström, 1996:28). The media has a tendency to first

personalize and then simplify stories into dichotomies – safe or dangerous, right or wrong (Watson et al., 2002: 56). Sandman (1986) argues that there are valid reasons for this. When confronted with an environmental risk the public is generally faced with a yes-or-no decision. Journalists seek to offer information to the public in a form that is consistent with one or the other decision. Also, modern media formats do not allow for complex, extended or balanced presentations.

Nevertheless the role of the media in the diffusion of information is essential for different reasons: not only mass media can be the vehicle for informing citizens but it creates public opinion and public support towards administrations and other relevant national institutions. Of this opinion are different scholars, which assume that public opinion drives government policy (Downs, 1957), and they document high correlations between opinion and policy to support the assumption (Erikson, Wright, & McIver, 1993; Monroe, 1979; Page & Shapiro, 1992).

In the case of the countries within the study, public perceptions of media performance play an important role in the extent to which citizens trust the media or the information that they receive. A lack of trust in media and political institutions hinders the development of political and civic participation. While recent Eurobarometer data indicates varying levels of trust in the media with radio being the most trusted medium in the EU member states yet generally less utilised than broadcasting or press (European Commission, 2003a), the results of Eurobarometer surveys consistently indicate the importance of media, particularly television, as sources of information at the national and EU level. Levels of trust in the media on the whole are lowest in Italy then in Finland (European Commission, 2003b). Despite any scepticism that may exist regarding the media it is clear that citizens rely on the media for political and cultural information. The use of the internet in this context is growing steadily but usually only indicated as a source of EU information by 12-15% of respondents. The situation among young people indicates a stronger use of the internet in the context of EU information, particularly in the accession and candidate countries (European Commission, 2003c). The findings of the World Internet Project³ illustrate that internet users consider the internet as a very important source of information. However, trust and reliability of information distributed via internet, is an issue of concern among experienced users in nearly all countries.

Media agenda and political influences

Democratic societies rely on the mass media to provide citizens with adequate information to make sound judgments about politics, and powerful structural and institutional forces may bias

³ <http://www.worldinternetproject.net>

information systems. In fact considering the media as a passive mirror reflecting society back to itself, it is not more possible because the process of news selection and concepts such as “newsworthiness” constitute agenda-setting. Of this opinion is also the European Union which has, in the document “Information and communication strategy for the European Union” (European Commission, 2002), deeply stressed the importance of active, coherent and co-operative actions between member states and European Union but it has also limited the freedom on decisions at the national level. In fact as it is stated there is a necessity of neutral, factual information but it is not sufficient for communicating EU policies and activities. Because information is generally re-interpreted and reworked by different media, relays, national parties and other opinion multipliers, EU has decided to implement a more personal and persuasive communication action. As the European Commission has affirmed the “genuine communication by the European Union cannot be reduced to the mere provision of information: it must convey a meaning, facilitate comprehension, set both action and policy in a real context, and prompt dialogue within national public opinion so as to enhance the participation of the general public in the great European debate” (European Commission, 2002b: 10).

In reality there are three main currents about what and who influences the media. Some scholars (Herman & Chomsky, 1988) believe that governments have substantial power to shape interpretations of events. They have access to and control over information; they direct resources and maintain organizational structures to disseminate information. If the media depend on government and other powerful institutions for information, coverage may reflect the interests of its sources and may reproduce the distribution of power in society. As Yudof (1983) warned, the influence of government may have a profound impact on democratic processes. It may show the observed relationship between public opinion and policy in new light. Public opinion may not influence policy; government officials may shape public opinion instead.

Others see the mass media as promoters of the interests and wishes of media owners, this happens more easily if the owner of media is also the Prime Minister of the same country as it is in Italy. Owners may exercise their authority cautiously and subtly, but they have numerous opportunities to express their preferences and ensure that they are reflected in news coverage. They can set editorial policy and intervene directly in news decisions; they can choose like-minded editors who suggest the tone and substance of stories to subordinates and alter the content and significance of stories that reporters submit; they can shape the ideological perspectives of reporters through their power to hire, promote, and fire (Chomsky, 1999).

Finally the third current of thoughts represents those scholars, who think that the media have a different role in the distribution of information. Mass media do not depend on government/media

owner interests, but have the possibility to control the information considering their business profits. They have distorted the political process also by turning politics into a market like game that humiliates citizens' dignity and rights and ridicules political leaders' words and deeds (Entman, 1989; Jamieson, 1992; Patterson, 1993; Sartori, 1997). Critics argue that the media's presentation of politics in the United States as well as in many other countries—as “show-biz” based on battles of images, conflicts between characters, polls and marketing, all typical frenzies of a journalism that is increasingly commercial in its outlook—has diminished if not supplanted altogether debate about ideas, ideals, issues, and people's vital interests and has debased voters by treating them not as citizens but rather as passive “consumers” of mediated politics (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999). Mediatized politics is politics that has lost its autonomy, has become dependent in its central functions on mass media, and is continuously shaped by inter-actions with mass media. This phenomenon is somehow happening in some European countries too, for example Italy, but it cannot be referred to the entire European context. However it is truly recognisable that the mass media are not mere passive channels for political communicators and political content. Rather, the media are organizations with their own aims and rules that do not necessarily coincide with, and indeed often clash with, those of political communicators. Because of the power of the media, political communicators are forced to respond to the media's rules, aims, production logics, and constraints (Altheide & Snow, 1979). One of the most significant results is that politicians who wish to address the public must negotiate with the media's preferred timing, formats, language, and even the content of the politicians' communication (Dayan & Katz, 1992). Some even hypothesize that legitimacy of the exercise of power increasingly might lie in the ability of rulers to communicate through the media (Cotteret, 1991). If the information is controlled either by the government or media owners or by the media themselves, how is the public interest represented?

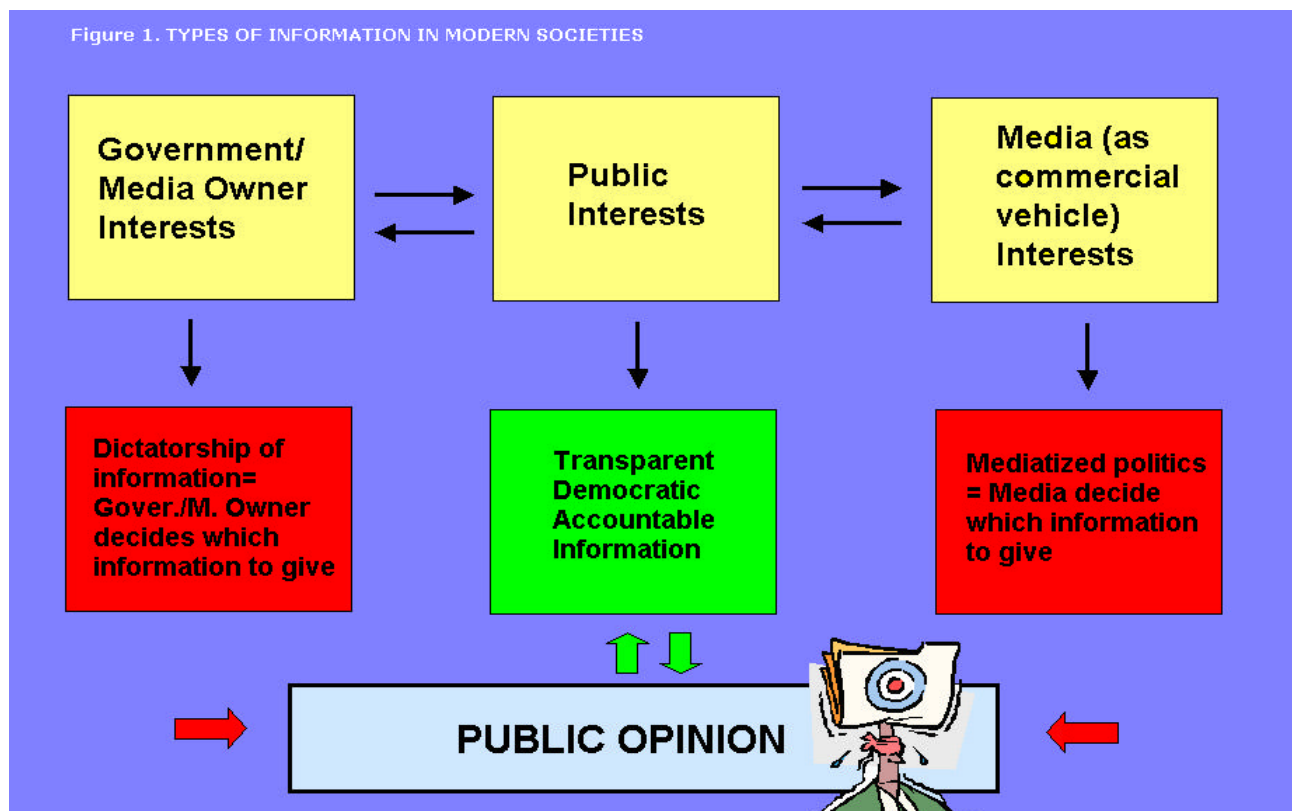
A well-functioning democracy requires an electorate that is aware at least to a certain degree of social issues and topics. To form such an electorate and to keep it up-to-date, we need the media through which the plans, decisions and measures of decision-makers can be subjected to critical study and debate. There is, however, no unanimity as to how well this positive view on publicity reflects the real situation; anybody hardly argues that this would not be a desirable state of affairs.

As Gramstad (2003:11) claimed: “the free and independent position of the media is never won permanently, neither is media pluralism. Efforts will always be made to exploit the media for personal or political purposes, to create media monopolies in order to raise profits, to concentrate content to what sells the best or to sweeten, change or ignore content to favor the owners, the authorities, the sources or others. The struggle to make favorable conditions for freedom of

expression and information is therefore an important and never-ending story in all societies. Positive results are vital to the maintenance and development of our democracies”.

The public interest, suggested and represented in *fig 1. Types of Information in Modern Societies*, corresponds to the cooperation between media and government interests, it is characterized by transparent democratic and accountable types of information and it is based on the mutual interaction between public opinion and mass media. The public opinion is influenced but it also influences the decision-makers by asking more transparent, democratic and accountable information. On the one hand the public interest should consider the necessity of good media relations and on the other the necessity of representing equally the parties and coalitions in the governments.

Fig.1 Types of Information in modern societies



Simultaneously the media should acknowledge their responsibilities and duties to the whole society. A media supportive of civic participation would admit that the news media, in giving prominence to the priorities of governments and other dominant influences on public thinking, largely sets the public discourse. Having recognised this, the media could then set up its own processes to garner public opinion and to help the public take a more active and influential civic role. For journalists and editors, it would be a challenge to report the point of view of the ordinary citizen and not fall victim to the unrepresentative and the spokespeople for specific interest groups.

Of this opinion it is the EU lobbyist De Fouloy (2005) who believes that the voice of the professional, politician and expert is dominant in the public discourse on account of their training or position within organisations and for this reason it is quite difficult to represent the citizens. Additionally, the opinions of strong interest groups get probably more media exposure than warranted because they represent a sizeable body of community opinion or because they have gained public influence as the purveyors of some presently-popular theory.

De Fouloy (2005) and many other scholars (Grayson, 2003; Fishkin, 1995; Entman, 1989; et al.) presume that the possible solution is the civic journalism, which is a fresh approach to newsworthiness and news gathering, but, like other elements of democracy, it is not easy to implement. Civic journalism brings citizens together around a particular issue by setting up structures within which they can deliberate without domination by powerful interest groups, vociferous individuals, bureaucrats or institutions. This new approach of newsworthiness requires that media organisations are willing to meet the costs of establishing the process and making available space of time to fully report the deliberations. On the other hand it guarantees an increment of circulation or audience, and surely a more credible perception of the press and electronic media by its critics. Regional and local media are particularly well placed to conduct civic journalism because of their closeness to their readership or audience (Glasser and Campbell, 1999). The media is called upon to play a proactive and socially-positive role. Civic journalism offers a sense of influence and belonging to participants, an innovative and new role for media organisations, for journalists and editors and the development of new skills.

Structure of Finnish mass media

There are 26 daily newspapers publishing seven days a week — the highest figure in the Nordic region. The total circulation of dailies is 2.3 million copies and an average circulation of 42,000 copies. Some 170 newspapers are issued one to three times a week with a circulation of 1.1 million copies and with an average circulation of 6,200 copies. There are about 100 free newspapers on the market with a total print-run of 3.3 million copies⁴.

The publishing of dailies has concentrated on three newspaper chains: *Sanoma-WSOY Corporation*, *Alma Media Group*, and *Intermediate-Finland Media (Väli-Suomen Media)*, with control over two thirds of the dailies' net sales in Finland. Outside the chains there are 11 dailies with a circulation of 490,000 or 21% of the total. Sanoma-WSOY publishes the two biggest newspapers in Finland,

⁴ Data from <http://www.stat.fi/>

Helsingin Sanomat and the afternoon newspaper *Ilta-Sanomat* and a further four dailies. Sanoma-WSOY also own seven non-dailies papers (Jyrkiäinen, 1999).

Alma Media is a 1997 merger between the Aamulehti Group, the country's second largest newspaper publisher, and the *MTV Oy*, the Finnish commercial television company. The new conglomerate combines three businesses, newspaper publishing, printing, and broadcasting. Alma publishes four dailies published seven times a week: *Aamulehti* in Tampere, *Satakunnan Kansa* in Pori, *Lapin Kansa* in Rovaniemi and *Pohjolan Sanomat* in Kemi, the business newspaper *Kauppalehti*, the afternoon tabloid *Iltalehti* as well as three other dailies. In addition, Alma Media publishes 15 newspapers and seven free delivery papers. The biggest publishers are *Yhtyneet Kuvalehdet*, *Helsinki Media Company* and *A-Lehdet*, which are in domestic ownership.

In 1993, the commercial television station MTV3 Finland started full service operation on its own channel. Since the regular television broadcasting in 1957 in Finland, MTV3 had broadcast its programming in blocks between the programmes of the Finnish Broadcasting Company's (*YLE*) two channels. In May 1997, the first nationwide commercial radio station, *Radio Nova*, started operation. In June 1997, the second commercial national television network, Channel Four (*Nelonen*) started broadcasting. The number of cable television connections totalled 906,000 or 39% of households in 1998 (Jyrkiäinen, 1999). Cable services are primary distribution networks for non-domestic free and pay channels. Satellite channels are available to nearly all cable television households. At the moment the supply in the Finnish language by satellite is limited to a few pay television channels and a sport channel. Among the most popular are MTV Europe, Eurosport and TV5 Europe. The subscription number for the biggest pay television channel, Canal Plus, is estimated to be 80,000 subscribers. The increasing number of television, satellite and cable channels have changed and widened the video content available to Finns. Channel Four broke MTV3's monopoly on national TV advertising as well. Channel Four belongs to the Sanoma-WSOY group. It is owned by Helsinki Media Company (50%), Egmont Holding (25%), newspaper Turun Sanomat (14%) and VBH-Television (11%). The public service company YLE broadcasts radio signals on four nationwide channels and further regional radio channels. The national public service channels still dominate the market accounting for 61% of all listening time, the figures for private radio being 39% (15% for Radio Nova and 24% for other private stations).

Finns and mass media

Newspaper readers in Finland rank third in the world, with 455 copies sold per 1,000 inhabitants in 1998. Television viewing time in Finland has remained relative stable. For three years Finns

watched television an average of 2 hours 30 minutes a day. In 1998, YLE's share of viewing time with its two channels TV 1 and TV 2 was 45 %, MTV3's 42.1% and Channel Four's 7.2%. The network coverage for YLE and MTV3 is 100% and for Channel Four 73%. (Jyrkiäinen, 1999).

Although Finns read more than Italians the first media for information remains the television. Mass media in Finland have an important role for the construction of public debate especially in regards to European Union policies. 69% of Finnish people are of the opinion that the Finnish media report about the right amount of news regarding the European Union, this shows a five percentage point increase in one year (2003-2004). Over half of the population (57%) thinks that the media presents the European Union objectively, 34% thinks that the EU is talked about too positively and 5% thinks that the media reports too negatively about the European Union. Manual workers, supporters of the political left wing and people living in the northern parts of the country, in particular, consider that the media present the European Union too positively (European Commission, 2004e).

Another big source of EU information in Finland is provided by the different European information offices, which are located all around the country. These offices provide information to citizens about different topics. As the table 1 shows the total amount of material distributed in 2003 was 196103 copies and the total contacts either with public presentations or service contacts is of 111533 times.

Tab. 1- European information office “Annual report 2003 full year”⁵

REGIONAL OFFICES	CUSTOMER CONTACTS			MATERIAL DISTRIBUTED (n°)		
	Service contacts	Public presentations	Total	Own material	Commission material	Total
Helsinki	10385	7841	18226	14085	3330	17415
Hämeenlinna	1570	154	1724	2690	55	2745
Joensuu	1373	5271	6644	9188	7520	16708
Jyväskylä	2771	5727	8498	9795	1810	11605
Kajaani	2400	2182	4582	9586	6802	16388
Kokkola	3403	6710	10113	11112	4300	15412
Kouvola	2104	3072	5176	5169	1030	6199
Kuopio	1413	520	1933	3360	0	3360
Lahti	2733	3915	6648	7020	3390	10410
Lappeenranta	1437	656	2093	3310	2055	5365
Maarianhamina	749	730	1479	1896	2347	4243
Mikkeli	1246	1481	2727	5425	1790	7215
Oulu	1698	1538	3236	5455	6785	12240
Pori	829	516	1345	2814	610	3424
Porvoo	770	1219	1989	5424	1302	6726
Rovaniemi	1466	3072	4538	5761	1879	7640
Seinäjäki	2570	10952	13522	14311	1138	15449
Tampere	1813	3746	5559	6773	0	6773

⁵ This data has kindly been provided by Infopoint Tampere

Turku	2742	1680	4422	7691	600	8291
Vaasa	3035	4044	7079	15445	3050	18495
Total (Helsinki-Vaasa)	46507	65026	111533	146310	49793	196103

Considering that a larger amount of information is available and consulted in internet, specifically the information presented on the web pages of the Representation of European Commission in Finland and of all the European information offices and NGOs, the total amount of information offered in Finland is very high.

The situation represented shows a country where EU information is well available to all citizens, but the most relevant aspect, if compared with Italy, is the Finnish high interest in knowing EU policies, and this is expressed in the continuity of information available and on national mass media coverage of EU information.

Structure of Italian mass media

There are 177 daily newspapers in Italy, most of them owned or controlled by a small number of publishing trusts including *L'Espresso*, *La Stampa*, *La Repubblica*, *L'Unità*, *Il Resto del Carlino*, *La Nazione* and *Il Giorno*, to mention some of the most important. Italy does not have tabloid daily newspapers. This is mainly due to the existence of a successful weekly press of genuine popular character. The real popular dailies in Italy are undoubtedly the sporting papers (*La Gazzetta dello Sport*), vis-à-vis the remaining types which are more like the so-called quality papers.

In Italy there are two major broadcasting groups, *RAI* and *Mediaset*. *RAI* is a public-owned company, governed by a board appointed by the Speakers of the Chamber of Deputies and of the Senate. It enjoys the financial privilege of getting its income from both the household licence fee (50% of revenues in 1998) and advertising (43%) (Molle & Pruzzo, 2001). Besides broadcasting, through a number of subsidiary companies, *RAI* undertakes a series of related activities: publishing, advertising, programme sales, recording industry. While the commercial channels have been for years heavy importers of foreign programmes, *RAI* has traditionally had a consistently high level of in-house production. Nowadays all national broadcast channels are obliged by law to reserve a 30% quota of their programming to the production or acquisition of Italian or European works. Furthermore, *RAI* is obliged to reserve 20 per cent of its license fee revenue to the production of European fictions. *RAI* is also involved in the satellite business through *RAISAT* consortium.

Mediaset is part of the Berlusconi broadcasting empire. *Mediaset*, together with *RAI*, controls almost completely the domestic television market, which explains why the term 'duopoly' is currently used. Compared to the variety of the programming on the public channels, the commercial

stations scheduling appears to be geared towards entertainment and advertising. In January 1991, however, the three commercial channels inaugurated a regular daily news service, thus presenting themselves as well as key information outlets, in competition with the previous monopoly of public television. There is also a third broadcasting group called *La7*, which is now controlled by SEAT, owned by Telecom Italia.

The radio sector has a structure similar to that of television. The public broadcasting company, RAI, runs three AM/FM nationwide channels, *RADIO1*, *RADIO2*, *RADIO3*. Altogether the RAI channels have more than 50% of the national audience (Molle & Pruzzo, 2001). The 14 commercial networks share the other 50% of the national audience in an average day. These commercial radio networks, as well as the about 1,300 local stations, depend exclusively on advertising and offer mostly music, heavily packed with commercials, and very little news, mostly headlines.

Italians and mass media

As it is for Finland, in Italy the first media is television, followed by mobile communication and radio (see tab.2- Italians' relationship with the media). Newspaper readership figures in Italy are relatively low, and given the size of the population the number of dailies was not large - around 91 in 2002 (BBC News; 2004).

Tab. 2 –Italians' relationship with the media (%)- translated from Italian, tab. 1- “Il rapporto degli italiani con i media” in Quarto rapporto sulla comunicazione in Italia - I media che vorrei, October 2004.

Media	Using media			Do not use media (1)	Total population
	Total	Habitual users (2)	Not frequent users (3)		
Television	98,6	95,5	3,1	1,4	100
Mobile phones	77,6	70,9	6,7	22,4	100
Radio	62,8	51,1	11,7	37,2	100
Newspapers	46	35	11	54	100
Weekly papers	43,9	15,2	28,7	56,1	100
Books	43,5	29,9	13,6	56,5	100
Monthly magazines	33,8	8	25,8	66,2	100
Internet	28,8	19,4	9,4	71,2	100
Satellite TV	16	11,1	4,9	84	100

To the question about the use of one mass medium:

(1) they answered “no” or “never/almost never”

(2) they indicated a frequency of three times per week at least (they have read at least three books in the last year)

(3) they indicated a weekly frequency between once and twice (they have read 1 to 2 books in the last year)

Source: Censis survey, 2004

In fact 95,5% of people watch TV every day, but only 35% read at least three times per week a newspaper, including also the sport news and only 29,9% read three books within one year. This tendency is increasing and shows one of the biggest differences between the Finnish and Italian use of mass media.

Another difference is the use of internet. Internet in Finland is one of the most growing tools of information, not only regarding EU information but in daily life needs. In Italy the number of citizens who uses internet is growing but it is still far from the Finnish numbers. Although, the availability of EU information in Italy is high, the amount of people who search such information in internet or read newspapers is much lower than in Finland. In addition, TV programmes like Euronews, TV5 Euro and EuroSat are not followed by the average Italian because of the costs related with cable and satellite TV and because of the language issue.

Finally there is a general tendency at following more commercial and entertainment TV than public debate and special TV programmes dealing with the European Union. Since the Italian TV in both public and private sector is mostly interested in reaching high audience shares, the programmes available are more concerned to show national politics and entertainment.

According to a relative majority of the Italian sample (33%), the Italian media present the EU in an objective manner – a figure that is slightly lower than the EU average (41%). 28% of Italians share the view that the EU is presented by their national media in a more positive light than is warranted (European Commission, 2004e). Half of the Italians also think that their national mass media do not give the European Union enough coverage.

Although EU information is available in internet web pages, books, leaflets, etc., in the same quantity as in Finland, Italian national TV channels do not give enough space to such information in their programmes. And considering that in Italy the majority of citizens watch mainly TV, the flow of EU information is lower than in Finland. Also the interest of requiring more public debate is somehow lower than in Finland.

Future plans

Despite the fact that European Union has implemented a decentralised communication policy, where member states could organise and tailor their activities considering the needs of their citizens, the European communication strategies are not achieving the expected results. Recently the attention has been paid to the two referenda in France and in the Netherlands for the approval of the Constitutional Treaty. The results were negative and they generated enormous consequences for the future of the European Union. Many countries such as UK, Czech Republic, Denmark, Ireland and

Portugal have decided to postpone the referendum for the constitution (EurActiv, 2005b), hoping to have more time to improve the general perception of the new constitution.

Big responsibility has been given to the Vide-President of the European Commission, Mrs. Wallström to ameliorate the current situation. To explain to the people of Europe how the Union can respond to these anxieties, Mrs. Wallström plans to work on a number of goals which could, she said, be summed up in the word “democracy”. Firstly, to create a culture of cooperation, the three players in the institutional triangle will need to work in a spirit of cooperation. Then, the degree of “shared ownership of the European project” will have to be improved by pushing European, national and local institutions to work together because they have a key role in defining and explaining the European project. One of the immediate challenges will be to inform the public about the significance of the draft European constitution in a clear, neutral and objective way (Wallström, 2005b). To improve ties with the public, Mrs. Wallström wishes to develop a new communication strategy which above all avoids jargon. She will encourage the external offices of the Commission and Parliament in the 25 member states to work together more closely and she plans to invite representatives of civil society to talk about a “European public space”. The total cost expected for this project, which has started on 2004, is EUR 197.139 million for 3 years (more details in Fig.2 Financial Statement).

Fig.2 Financial Statement⁶

Total allocation for action (including Financial Intervention and Technical Assistance)= **EUR 193.239 million in CA for the period 2004-2006**

2004	EUR 65.169 million
2005	EUR 63.835 million
2006	EUR 64.235 million

Multi-annual estimate of expenditure 2004-2006 (commitment appropriations and by budget line)

Financial Interventions **EUR 179.205 million** broken down as follows:

Citizens' information via the media	EUR 28.165 million
Direct communication and media	EUR 8.300 million
Public opinion analysis and proximity actions	EUR 22.800 million
Actions in the field of communication	EUR 27.190 million

⁶ This data is taken from the Legislative Observatory, reference: INI/2004/2238, title: Implementing the information and communication strategy for the European Union, legal basis: REG 045, Dossier of the committee: CULT/6/24919; at URL: <http://www2.europarl.eu.int/oeil/file.jsp?id=5214472>

Tools for information to the citizens	EUR 24.250 million
Communications tools	EUR 15.900 million
Information outlets	EUR 52.600 million

Technical Assistance **EUR 14.034 million** broken down as follows:

General information work concerning the EU	EUR 0.540 million
Information outlets	EUR 0.942 million
PRINCE Programme	EUR 8.352 million
Communication work	EUR 4.200 million

Overall financial impact of human resources and other administrative expenditures
 EUR 1.300 million/year, so for three years plan is EUR 3.900 million.

Total Cost 2004-2006: EUR 197.139 million

In regards to the countries of this study, on March 2005 in Italy the Representation of the European Commission in Rome has replied to the open call for tenders of the Directorate-General for Press and Communication and asked extra funds for an audiovisual project. The project deals with daily review of information broadcast on radio and TV in Italy, which aims at helping the Representation in the planning of its activities related to the information and communication. The review should cover the main items of news or national developments in politics, economics, social issues and any other sectors of particular interest to the European Union, its institutions (particularly the European Commission), or its members or which touch on its policies. The Commission should be able to see daily from the review how these issues, including important events such as European Councils, the European Convention, G7/G8 summits, the European elections, etc., are handled and portrayed by the Italian radio and TV media. The review should also look at how Europe is viewed in the media (i.e. opinion polls) and those aspects of Italian politics which are relevant to Europe as a whole (i.e. neutrality, foreign policy, economic and social developments). Relationships between Europe and the WTO, NATO, the OECD, the IMF, the G7/G8 and other European bodies such as the EBRD must be included when the European aspect is significant. Likewise, interviews with members of the European Commission must also be covered. The radio and TV press review should provide the Representation with relevant information and act as an early warning system. The estimated total value of this project, excluding VAT is 550 000 EUR to 650 000 EUR /5 years (EC Representation in Rome, 2005).

As well the Representation of the European Commission in Finland has replied to similar tender at the end of 2004 requiring, in the framework of its information and communication activities, daily reviews of radio and TV information broadcast about the major national news/developments in

politics as well as in economic and social affairs and in other fields of particular interest for the European Union, its institutions (in particular the European Commission), its policies and its members. The reviews must enable the Commission to monitor on a daily basis the way in which these topics are reported in the Finnish AV media⁷. Coverage should also include perceptions of Europe in the media and aspects of Finnish policies with European significance. Relations between Europe and other organizations and other European institutions should be included in the case of a significant European dimension. Interviews with/contributions of members of the Commissions are to be included, too. The AV media review should provide relevant information for the Representative and serve as an early warning system. The AV media review should be provided daily throughout the whole year, except for the European Commission holidays. It covers a list of specified Finnish, national and regional TV and radio programmes, and be drafted following a style guide common to all Representations of the Commission. It is supplied on an internet system set up by the Commission and be available in the early morning to the Commission. In case of technical problem with the internet system it is sent by e-mail to the Commission. In addition the Representation of European Commission proposed a daily review of audio visual media in Finland. The task of service provider consists of monitoring on a daily basis the way in which nation-wide Finnish television channels and the radio stations deal with the European Union, its institutions, in particular the European Commission and its members, its policies, Finnish members of the European Parliament, as well as the major Finnish political, economic, social and other relevant news of the day. This task has to be performed continuously, starting with the early morning news and ending with the midnight news. In the case of special events, like important EU or UN meetings or international conflicts, the monitoring/review period may have to last even longer. Estimated amount for the daily review of print media is 260 000 EUR/5 years and for the daily review of AV media is 875 000 EUR/5 years. Total amount for the project 1 135 000 EUR/5 years (EC Representation in Helsinki, 2004).

Conclusions

Media relations in nowadays life are very important in public institutions as well as in private and non profit organisations (NGOs). It is a tool for building a democratic society and for helping journalists to present good messages to the citizens. In the countries studied the role of mass media in creating support for European institutions is common and it applies similar communication strategies, tailored to the national needs. Although the decentralised approach, it is clearly stated

⁷ AV means “audiovisual” and Finnish AV media review is made by the Finnish Media Desk.

that European Union main communication strategy is alike in all the member states. This common plan has obviously shown the impossibility to reach all target groups of the communication. In fact the levels of credibility and trust for European institutions in Finland are lower than in Italy. Controversially Finnish mass media have been more concerned to present objectively both sides of European policies than the Italian counterpart. In addition Finnish mass media have covered EU policy much more in quantity and quality than Italians. Recalling figure 1 “Types of Information in modern societies”, in Italy mass media represent either government/media over interests (Berlusconi) or media, as commercial vehicle, interests (main TV programmes are purely entertainment and reality shows), while in Finland the media are located more between government interests and public interests. Somehow in Finland journalists resent of the influences of politicians and Euro supporters. Pressure from European institutions is stronger in Finland than in Italy, since in Italy European news has a smaller impact in the society. Additionally in Italy mass media are lacking of public trust and support and citizens are asking for more information and more quality. Furthermore, in discussions of how the EU and the process of European integration more broadly is communicated, a common assumption is that the best strategy for communicating Europe is to send out rigidly pro-European messages. However, feel-good messages about the benefits of being European do little to solve the communications deficit. Instead they increment the idea of propaganda and consequently they generate a rejection-feeling. There is a big debate about the legitimacy of promoting European Union through mass media and the idea of public information. The answer is not easy and it is somehow subjected of free interpretation. It is quite sure that EU information is not information in the sense of objective, impartial and critical communication between two parties, but more a brand concept with massive use of promotional activities. Hence the question is on the delimitation of EU promotion between acceptable and not more tolerable messages for safeguarding our democracy. Therefore it is difficult to make such delimitation if the concept of democracy is not clarified. The European reality somehow moves away from the ideology of democracy expressed in the idea of a system of political governance whose decision-making power is subject to the controlling influence of citizens who are considered political equals or better it represents the diversity of Europeans’ perceptions on what democracy should be. A similar problem exists between those who believe that promoting EU is necessary for the process of integration and those who claim that such communication strategies are propaganda and thereby against democracy. Although there is not a unique interpretation of what EU democracy should be and what should be done for helping its process, it is one of the major priorities of the European Commission to give guidelines and suggestions to politicians, NGOs and civil societies in general so as to establish a better dialogue with Europeans.

In order to build trust and support and ameliorate EU's image, EU commissioners responsible for communicating Europe should prepare two plans, one with long-term communication goals and another with short-term communication objectives. In De Fouloy's opinion (2004) a long-term goal is to communicate the notion of Europe to its citizens and beyond. This involves a process of strategic, long-term image-building which projects a positive, emotionally appealing European narrative based on 'European values' such as democracy, equality, tolerance etc. and a history of European integration as that of a continent, which overcame division and achieved a morally and rationally superior form of coexistence among peoples. Different activities such as Leonardo, Socrates and Tempus programmes, to mention some of them, and other cultural events could help to achieve the long term communication goals. However, more attention to the media relations, specifically with TV and radio programmes could improve EU perception among citizens. In regards to the short-term communication objectives, which are to present Europe as a responsive disputatious political system and to reflect its citizens' priorities, the Vice-President of Commission Wallström (2005b) believes that a different communication approach is necessary, where information is more accurate, factual, relevant, understandable and concrete for citizens. The messages for Europeans should avoid jargon and Eurospeak and the Commission should provide technical facilities to the national mass media to help them to cover EU news with access, in line with the principles of transparency, to expert sources. The information needs to cover the issues and their arguments involved and what is about to be decided, the procedural dimension including its meanings, actors and access points. Finally but not the least it should be accountable, it should clearly state who is responsible for a decision taken or the implementation of a policy. Good relations with national mass media, transparency and accountability but also openness to citizens' feedbacks for improving the decision-making process are the prerequisites for public debate, political legitimacy and for a more democratic and united Europe. Within this framework the role of mass media for the European Union is fundamental and it requires careful attention, but because mass media are subjected to different interests they cannot guarantee the accomplishment of the proposed results. This question is still open to be discussed.

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