Whereas the European Union constitutes a transnational organisation, academia often claims that the European public sphere remains nationally oriented and segmented (Machill, Beiler and Fischer 2006). More recent studies, however, contradict this opinion, finding evidence for an increasing Europeanisation of the public sphere (e.g. Pfetsch 2008). Similarly, research on European journalism has identified a move towards transnationalisation. Brüggemann (2013, 416) for example states that “we do find patterns of journalistic practices that are shared across borders. [...] Journalism is a transnational community of practice.”

Set within this context, this paper analyses the work of news agency journalists based in Brussels. In particular, focus is laid on the potential, challenges and outcome of cross-border journalism within the press corps. News agency journalists take centre stage not only due to a lack of research within this field (previous studies on EU journalism and the public sphere hardly include news wholesalers). First and foremost, they are analysed as for their role as agenda-setters. Particularly with regard to foreign news, agencies serve as a pivotal point of reference and orientation for retail news organisations as well as a very important, if not the most important source. Hence, it remains to be seen whether news agency correspondents belong to and reflect this transnational community of practice and, as trendsetters, might even pave the way for a Europeanised public sphere. This being said, the paper revolves around the following questions:

1) How do Brussels-based news agency journalists cooperate transnationally?
2) Which structures and circumstances internal and external to the news organisation foster and hinder cross-national journalism?
3) In which respect do agency correspondents function as agents of Europeanisation, contributing to a Europeanised public sphere?

These questions are analysed from a micro, meso and macro perspective, making use of Schimank’s model of actor-structure-dynamics (1996). As an attempt to unite both actor and systems theory, Schimank builds upon Giddens’ structuration theory to create his model. At the macro level he identifies subsystemic orientation horizons that provide the general alignment an actor bases his actions upon (i.e. what an actor wants to do). At the meso level institutional structures set rules and boundaries, thereby defining what an actor should (and should not) do. At the micro level actors face other actors, crossing their intentions and actions. Within these so-called actor constellations, the scope of possible action emerges, thereby establishing what an actor can do.

The following analysis is based on semi-structured interviews with 36 journalists from more than 20 news agencies from both EU and non-EU countries, including national, international and global news organisations. The qualitative approach allows for thorough insights into the professional orbit of agency correspondents. Considered as experts of their profession, they provide an exclusive insider perspective into their bureaux, news organisations, the press corps and the Brussels microcosm. The interviews were transcribed and subsequently analysed with the help of qualitative data analysis software.
As regards journalistic cooperation, the interviews disclose that national boundaries become obsolete. On the micro level (agency) correspondents are very willing to help each other out, transnational cooperation is standard procedure. The journalists share material, serve as experts and translators or offer advice and analysis. The relationship within the press corps is described as friendly and supportive; members of the press corps meet each other both in a professional and social context very frequently. As a consequence of these transnational actor constellations, perspectives from several European countries as well as European sources are included in the agency bulletins (horizontal Europeanisation). One must concede, though, that transnational cooperation is often confined to a handful of nationalities only, thus limiting the potential of Europeanisation. Global agency bureaux in contrast profit from “inhouse” transnational cooperation as they employ journalists of numerous nationalities. Institutionalised cooperation across news agencies, in turn, is the exception. Only one such example surfaced, that between AP and dpa.

This leads to the analysis of the meso level. It is exactly this kind of institutional order that exemplifies how structures can impact on the transnationalisation of journalism. Two further examples shall not remain untold. Firstly, the lack of financial capacities among national agencies to invest in more than one correspondent: While this deficiency poses a daily challenge for the affected journalists, transnational cooperation has become a means to cope with the sheer dimension of the Brussels news beat. Secondly, EU journalism cuts across borders within one news organisation. In most cases, cooperation between the correspondent and the news desk at home is very intense. The role and task of both entities is clearly defined, albeit often not in a formal sense. The EU correspondent is considered the expert for his news beat, enjoying a lot of professional autonomy. Whereas the formal hierarchy within the organisation would rank the editor above the correspondent, in practice the latter leads the way. This being said, the task of writing EU news is shared between Brussels and the home desk. Hence, EU journalism emerges from teamwork across borders.

Regarding the macro level, the interviews disclose the tension between the correspondents’ orientation towards the public sphere on the one hand and economic profitability on the other. Apart from these two subsystemic orientation horizons, the study further illustrates that these logics overlap with a nationalism-Europeanisation spectrum. In this respect, the advantage of Schimank’s model that allows for more than one system-specific compass becomes apparent.

The above-mentioned examples illustrate that EU journalism produced by news wholesalers in Brussels transcends national borders in several respects. This does not mean that agency correspondents create genuinely transnational news. Their stories are adapted nationally to appeal to a national audience. Yet, EU wholesale news also reflects elements of both vertical and horizontal Europeanisation. Without doubt, agency journalism from Brussels is more Europeanised than EU news produced at home. As “members” of the Brussels microcosm (institutional order), EU correspondents represent the truly European citizen. Although the level of Europeaness varies depending on the outreach of the agency, as agenda-setters agency correspondents contribute to building a more Europeanised public sphere not only for their customers but for all European citizens. Crossing borders incessantly, Brussels-based news wholesalers create EU news to draw a multi-perspective picture of what is going in Europe. To sum up, the EU news wire originates not only in Brussels, but in Luxembourg and Strasbourg.
also as well as all over Europe. Thus, news agency journalism on the EU is at its core borderless – the product of a transnational community of practice.

**Image 1: Subsystemic orientation horizons of Brussels news agency journalism**

![Image](image_url)

**References**

