



Adequate Information Management in Europe

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The Case of Norway

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1: Information/news management

News management and *information management* are, in Norwegian communication research (as in most countries), concepts used to characterise public relations strategies, especially the attempts to influence and control messages and images in a communication process.

In journalism research the study of the relations between sources and news organisations has been a central topic for several years. One approach emphasised the power of the institutional elites using news media as their channel (Olsen & Sætren 1980), characterised by Reinton (1984) as the *tyranny* of the sources. An alternative approach emphasised the role of media as 'a zone of struggle' where rivalling actors, including the media themselves, was trying to influence the agenda and increase their credibility (Eide 1984, Eide & Rasmussen 1985, Eide & Hernes 1987, Eide 1992, Allern 1992).

Dependence and *conflict* are two key concepts characterising central aspects in the relations between politicians and the news media, wrote Martin Eide (1984). In a later study he studied election campaign as 'the staging of publicity'. In this staging there exists an interplay between media logic and political party logic (Eide 1991: 186).

The 'dance' between journalists and professionalised news sources is the topic in a dissertation written by Sigurd Allern, documenting and analysing the media initiatives and news management of institutional actors like corporations, ministries and organisations. An interesting tendency, observed in Norway as in other countries, is how effective professional news sources use different journalistic formats and genres in their production of information subsidies for public relation aims.

An *information subsidy* can in general terms be defined as an offer of edited information, or access to news in different forms, given free of charge. The aim of the information provider is to increase the use of the offered information (including the framing of the stories) in the news media. Material perceived as news, rather than as statements of opinion or as commercial advertisements, has a higher value to decision makers. Well known forms of information subsidies are press releases, news and reportage pictures, opin-

ion polls, interview offers, free office facilities for the press at different news beats, free reportage tour arrangements etc. (Bartlett 1973, Gandy 1982, 1992, Allern 1997).

'News management' in this sense cannot, in most cases, be interpreted as an attempt to 'manipulate' journalists but rather as an attempt to produce and present initiatives, 'stories' and angles that appeal to the media's own priorities and market oriented news values as well as their need to minimise the costs of news production.

The media has also gained increased importance in fields other than politics, not least the economic field. In a research project about the Norwegian media order, Tore Slaatta (2003) has analysed the new role of economic journalism. In the political field the symbolic capital is directly independent of the news media as intermediaries and their presentations of issues and persons. In the economic field private property and exclusiveness concerning knowledge is a source of profit. However, the converting of economic capital to symbolic capital is still a process that is controlled by the media. A more active and investigative economic journalism has therefore resulted in new types of knowledge about actors and events in the economic field. This can be interpreted as an extension of the democracy in Norway, and as a corrective to corporate news management. At the same time there is a danger that commercial media are becoming so integrated in the logics of the economic field that their mediations to a general public will play a reduced role (Slaatta 2003: 228).

Public relations studies are an underdeveloped research area in Norway. However, in a recent dissertation Øyvind Ihlen (2004) discusses the influence that organisations have on public policies both through their rhetoric and use of resources. The empirical investigation focuses on two environmental conflicts, the first concerns a hydroelectric development and the second relates to the building of gas-fired power plants. The environmentalists lost the first conflict. In the second conflict the environmentalists have had more success; after several years of discussion the power plants have yet to be built.

The findings in the dissertation illustrate, concludes Ihlen, that there is no reason for a pessimistic conclusion arguing that those with the most economic capi-

tal always get their way. Economic capital does play a role, however and symbolic and social capital are also important. It is argued that the outcome of the conflicts that have been studied could not be understood properly without taking *both* rhetoric and resources into consideration. An integrated perspective is needed.

Ihlen also discusses the 'managerial slant' in traditional public relation theory, where there is a talking to, rather than a 'talking with', mode that is prescribed. The concept *managing* implies control rather than negotiation with publics. Here, it is argued that the latter view better encapsulates the communication process, since it stresses the important active, interpreting role of what has traditionally been seen as the passive audience. Organisations might *attempt* to manage meaning, but there are clear limits to how this might be done (Ihlen 2004: 14).

Ihlen highlights how these definitions of public relations refer to *publics* rather than *the public* sphere in an Habermasian sense. The organisation's external links and relations to the world around is analysed using the stakeholder concept. Stakeholders are those who are affected by the decisions of the organisation and those who can affect the organisation with their decisions. When stakeholders become active they transform themselves into publics that can be analysed according to segmentation principles. The problem with such analytical tools is that it becomes difficult to relate the analysis of practice (including news management) to the greater civil society, rather than just particularised publics (Ihlen 2004: 13).

In their strategies professional sources combine enclosure and disclosure of information connected with their organisation's activities. There is organised PR production of news stories which the press and broadcasting organisations can publish free of charge, and present to the public under the by-lines of their own journalists. Another type is the arrangement of pseudo-events, which can include actions and spectacular initiatives by PR-controlled 'grassroot lobbyists'¹ The Internet has of course made it much easier to launch such initiatives. News management also involves leaks and the planting of negative information (known as *shit bags* by PR consultants). And last, but not least, news management involves activities of censorship and control regarding all internal information that *not* shall become news (Allern 1997: 85-139).

2: National journalism culture

The concept of 'national journalism culture' is for many reasons difficult to define accurately. However, I will approach the topic by referring to communication research analysing the development of Norwegian journalism and news media as a social and political institution, especially the professional demarcations from actors in the journalistic field towards other fields and professions.

An important factor in the constituting ground for the journalism culture in Norway is the character of the Norwegian media system. As Eide and Ottosen (1994) point out, the Norwegian Press structure has produced neither elite-oriented quality papers nor a purely populist, popular press. We do not have a *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, neither do we have a *Bild Zeitung* or a *Sun*. Norwegian journalism is in most cases journalism 'of a middle range', concludes Eide and Ottosen (1994: 429).

Most Norwegian newspapers have a local or regional distribution. The journalistic profile is serious, giving priority to local news and local politics. The place given to international news is, however, limited and few local papers have the resources or the will to give backing to investigative journalism. In the two 'national tabloids', *VG* and *Dagbladet*, the mix of editorial content is far more entertainment oriented than in local and regional news papers. However, the two papers combine both this 'classical' tabloid priority with investigative journalism and news and commentaries about politics and culture.

The journalistic standards have also been influenced by Norway's long tradition of public service broadcasting, with the state-owned *Norsk Rikskringkasting* (NRK) as a parallel to the British BBC. Norms of impartiality and 'balance' were, and still are, central values in broadcasting as well as in the press.

2.1: From party press to an independent political institution

Institutions form a central concept in the social sciences and can be described and defined as social patterns of behaviour, common to the organisations operating in a given sector of society, extending over space, enduring over time and expected to perform certain

tasks and fulfil certain needs in society (Cook 1998). Norwegian media, starting with the first newspapers in the 18th century, gradually and over a long period of time, developed such features. Rune Ottosen (1996) and Martin Eide (2002) have both described and analysed this process in their historical works about the role of journalists and editors, their organisations and professional ambitions.

Various government commissions and committee reports on Norwegian media (NOU 1992: 14, St. meld nr. 32 1992-93, NOU 1995: 3) describe the news media in institutional terms and speak of roles that are prerequisite to the proper functioning of democracy: public affairs information, scrutiny of wielders of power, and public debate. In the report from a government appointed commission proposing a revision of the 'freedom of speech paragraph' in the Constitution, the news media and the educational system were called the most important institutions or 'walls' in the public sphere (NOU 1999: 27: 55).

A specific pattern, similar in the other Nordic countries, is the long-lasting connection between the political parties and the press. In the 20th century, up to the 1980s, the typical Norwegian daily newspaper was affiliated with one of the political parties (Høyer 1982, 1995, Simensen 1999, Bjerke 2001, Allern 2001). The news media was in many ways an social institution, but could not yet be called an independent political institution, as most political questions were seen through the spectacles of the parties, and in the political parties both editors and senior political journalists normally played an active role.

However, as the media historian Hans Fredrik Dahl has observed, the weakening of the links between parties and newspapers started earlier in the century, long before WW2. In his opinion a crucial element in this process was the distinction between *news* and *views*, between telling something new and interpreting what had happened or ought to happen according to party ideology (Dahl 1982: 206). To expand their audience (and advertisements) the party papers had to rely on the news genres, not on their role as opinion papers.

This process accelerated in the 1970's and in the 1980's and first part of the 1990's Norwegian newspapers gave up their role as spokesmen for different political parties. In the same period the Norwegian Broadcasting Company (NRK) lost its monopoly.

In his analysis of this process Odd Raaum (1999: 41) writes that the press organisations from the middle of the 1970's began a determined effort to distinguish journalism from party politics. He characterises the technique used as *exclusion*: party politics should have no place inside the field of journalism. 'Independence' became both a remedy and an objective. One symbolic action was a decision to deny membership in the press lobby of the Norwegian parliament to journalists who were working for political party publications (Allern 2001: 83).

In their analysis of the general development of Norwegian election campaigns, Bjørklund (1991) and Østbye (1997) have described the first forty years after World War II as a historical period where news media first functioned as *channels* from the parties to the voters, then as increasingly important *arenas* for the debates and struggles between the parties. After the political party press system was gradually abandoned, and professional journalistic values were strengthened in all news media, the news organisations became more independent *political actors*. In the periods prior to national elections we have experienced a change from party controlled to media-driven campaigns (Bjørklund 1991: 291). The political parties have lost their traditional monopoly as political opinion formers.

The double role of the media as 'arena' and 'actor' has been the focus of several studies concerned with the dramaturgical and stage setting role of news media and journalism (Eide 1984, 1991, 1992, Hernes 1984, Eide & Hernes 1987, Slaatta 1999a). This development also changed the formats and genres of political journalism. Interviews, reportages and different types of intervening and interpretive journalism replaced the traditional reports from political debates, meetings and press conferences (Ottosen 1996, Allern 2001, Slaatta 2003: 61, Thorbjørnsrud 2003).

2.2: Professionalism and ethics

In research literature about journalist culture and journalist values the historical development of media ethics and more specifically, the institutionalised *press ethics*, has a central place (Raaum 1986, 1999, 2003, Røssland 1995, 1999, Østnor & Lunde 1998, Brurås 2002, Ottosen & Roksvold (eds.) 2003, Rasmussen 2004).

The Code of Ethics of the Norwegian Press is a set of normative guidelines adopted by the Norwegian Press

Association, with member organisations from all news media, including broadcasting. The guidelines have been analysed as 'consequence ethics' (Raaum 1999: 168), but also as 'conduct ethics' (Østnor & Lunde 1998). As 'consequence ethics' the norms are mainly concerned with the possible, negative effects of journalism for *individuals*, and most cases discussed as 'ethical questions' in Norway belong to this area.

The Code of Ethics is also the normative base for a council appointed by the Norwegian Press Association to deal with complaints from the public against journalists and media organisations. A majority of the council (4 members) represents the press, a minority (three members) is appointed to represent the public. The council has no power outside the publication of its decisions, normally done by the accused media organisations.

Before the WW2, and up to 1972, this council was an *internal* sub-institution of the press. Only journalists could make complaints and professional journalists took the decisions about what was good or bad journalistic conduct. Lars Arve Røsland has analysed the decisions of the council in this period in his doctoral dissertation and one of his conclusions is that one of the roles of the council was as a builder of professional authority. The 'professional norms' which were predominant in the council were, however, representative of the type of journalism found in conservative, mainstream media, as opposed to journalism of a more popular and 'tabloid' character (Røsland 1999).

The decision to invite the public into this domain introduced, however, a schism between 'profession' and 'ethics'. The background was intense public debates about press ethics. The changed role of the council has been interpreted as a strategic move by the press to avoid the establishment of alternative formations concerned with press ethics, especially the introduction of 'media laws' (Røsland 1999: 234). One of the consequences, Terje Rasmussen points out, has been an increasing division between the implication of the professional and the ethical, and the present council's role is to concentrate on the last dimension. He discusses, as Odd Raaum has done (1986: 123), the paradox that sometimes 'good ethics' can seem to be a contradiction of 'good journalism', especially concerning the professional and market oriented news values of popular tabloid journalism (Rasmussen 2004: 79).

The press council is mainly concerned with individual complaints and therefore seldom discusses ethical questions outside this domain. An (unintended) consequence is that pressures or demands from owners, advertisers and professional sources are seldom treated as a part of the ethical problems journalists meet in their daily work.

2.3: Professionalism and the rights and duties of the editor

In the Norwegian journalist culture the declaration about 'rights and duties of editors', signed as a joint document between the Norwegian Editors Association and the National Association of Norwegian Newspapers in 1953 (revised in 1973), has attained a mythological status as proof of journalistic independence and integrity. Together with *The Code of Ethics* this declaration has been described as the *Magna Charta libertatum* of the professionalisation and liberation process of the Norwegian journalistic field (Eide 2002: 308).

The Norwegian Editors Association has since 1995 argued that the principles of the declaration should also be made Norwegian law. One argument is that this will be a better guarantee for independent journalism than the traditional attempts to regulate media ownership. As long as editors' rights are respected there will be no problems of the Berlusconi-type, is the argument. Leaders from some of the media corporations have expressed the same opinions in their opposition against new ownership regulations.²

The declaration consists of three sections. The first section takes up journalistic ideals such as the necessity to promote freedom of opinion, to serve society and promote an impartial and free exchange of information and opinion. The second section takes up the duties of the editor, who is expected to share the fundamental views and aims of his/her publication. Within this framework the editor is entitled to free and independent leadership of the editorial department and editorial work and full freedom to shape the opinions of the paper. However, if the editor finds himself/herself in irreconcilable conflict with the fundamental views of the paper, the editor is obliged to resign. The third section states that the editor bears the full judicial responsibility for the paper, and has the full and personal responsibility for the whole content of the newspaper.

The declaration, no doubt, has been and still is important for Norwegian news media in periods when directors, board members and different pressure groups try to intervene in the editorial process and 'play editors'. It is also a normative weapon against owners who want to involve themselves directly in daily editorial priorities.

However, the editorial autonomy is limited and relative: the declaration does not remove the rights of media owners to appoint or sack editors, nor does it remove the owners' control over budgets and investments, or remove the owners' right to define the aims (including the objects clauses) of the media companies (Allern 1997b, 2004). 'Independent editors' in corporate news organisations have to face demands for increasing profits from owners, directives from corporate boards, as well as challenges connected both with the technical development and initiatives from legislators (Eide 2002: 299).

The 'Rights and duties of editors' is in many ways a formalisation of what James Curran (1990) has called licensed autonomy. It gives important rights to editors. However, the owners can at any time withdraw the license.

2.4: Professionals drawing a demarcation line versus PR

The extensive production of information (PR) subsidies from institutional sources, and the reliance of the news media on such subsidies, has resulted in a debate about the difference between 'news' as a PR activity and 'news' based on the principle of free access to sources and professional judgement of relevance and factuality by news organisations (Raaum 1999, Allern 2001, Ottosen 2004).

The National Union of Journalists in Norway (*Norsk Journalistlag*) decided in 1997 that journalists working as information officers (or as PR consultants) could no longer be members of the Union. The debate became especially heated because both corporations and PR-consultant firms for many years had actively recruited leading journalists to positions as information directors and well paid consultants.

This attempt to distinguish between 'us' and 'them' has been characterised as 'ethical cleansing' by Odd

Raaum, and analysed as a public relations strategy, aimed at image control by journalists who feel that their credibility is weakened if they mingle with people in the PR sector (Raaum 1999: 32 ff.). In contrast, in Denmark journalists and PR-consultants are members of the same union and the debates between journalists and PR consultants have not been as heated as in Norway (Kristensen 2004).

In Norway one important result of this debate has been increased consciousness among journalists about the importance of having free access to different types of relevant sources. Journalists and PR consultants also seem to have more ethical awareness against attempts to manipulate news media. In 2001 the national association of PR consultant firms excluded one of their members because of actions that were regarded as unethical. The leaders of this firm were, interestingly enough, former journalists (Allern 2004: 173).

2.5: Professionalism without a profession

The professionalisation of journalism also refers to the establishment of journalist education at several university colleges in the 1970s and 1980s. The relations between the journalistic field, represented by chief editors, senior journalists and leaders from the media industry on one side, and academic researchers of media and journalism on the other, were for many years strained and polarised. Some practitioners argued that only media researchers with a background as active journalists could have anything sensible to say. Media scholars answered that nobody would demand that ornithologists should begin their careers as hens.

This schism is now less acute. Journalism and media studies are today among the most popular courses, both at the university colleges and the universities, and a steadily increasing proportion of Norwegian journalists have an academic education.

The journalistic field is therefore often called a profession. However, as several authors (Ottosen 1996 and 2004, Allern 1997, Raaum 1999) note, the journalistic field in Norway cannot be called a profession if we use the criteria developed by sociologists in this research area (Torgersen 1972, 1994).

According to such criteria news journalists are professionals in the sense that they work full time, have their

own trade organisation and recognise a code of ethics. An occupational education for journalists exists. However, a journalist education is not compulsory to get a job as journalist, and there exists no demand of public acceptance or any certifying procedure. Anybody accepted by media employers can still work as a journalist, in contrast to traditional professions like medical doctors, dentists and lawyers, and in contrast to other occupations with different kinds of 'authorisation'. A study of job advertisements in the journal of the Norwegian Journalist Association shows that employers did not even mention or demand a formal journalist education (Høyer & Ihlen 1998). Journalism represents professionalism without a profession (Ottosen 2004: 124).

This should not in the eyes of the public or of the journalists, be seen as a problem. 'Authorised journalists' and 'freedom of the press' can be seen as rather contradictory concepts.

3: Concepts of 'European Public Spheres'

The most important research community in the field of European studies in Norway is ARENA (Advanced Research on the Europeanisation of the Nation State), a centre for European Studies at the Faculty of Social Science at The University of Oslo. ARENA also coordinates the EU-funded project CIDEL (Citizenship and Democratic Legacy in the European Union). The ARENA researchers have published numerous reports and articles on a number of European questions, and there is also research on EU-related topics from other universities and research centres. However, specific research related to European Public Spheres is very limited in Norway. Three studies, which I find especially relevant, will be mentioned here.

3.1: Conceptualising public spheres

The first study is a doctoral dissertation (media studies) by Eli Skogerbø (1996), *Privatising the Public Interest. Conflicts and Compromises in Norwegian Media Politics 1980-1993*. One of her objectives is to discuss justifications for regarding the media as democratic institutions with specific obligations towards the public. One conclusion is that *the public sphere* is the notion that most clearly conceptualises the relationship between citizens and the media in the context

of a systematic normative theory. The validity, in her opinion, does not rest on Habermas' construction of a discursive democracy. Instead, she argues that the relevance of the public sphere lies in a more pragmatic use of the concept; in the explicit coupling between the conditions for public debate and the conditions for democracy: 'Citizenship is defined in terms of rights, and the public sphere defines the space where these rights can validly be claimed and exercised' (Skogerbø 1996: 124).

Liberty of expression and liberty of the press is pivotal to our understanding of democracy, writes Skogerbø, but underlines that without the positively defined right to information, full citizenship cannot be exercised. In her view the deconstruction of the *bourgeois* public sphere as a network for the privileged groups and classes provides the classic argument for the establishment of systems that aim at universal distribution of communicative resources (Skogerbø 1996: 120-125).

The second study is a doctoral dissertation in media studies by Tore Slaatta (1999a), *Europeanisation and the Norwegian News Media. Political discourse and news production in the transnational field*. Slaatta analyses the news media in Europe as part of an emerging, transnational political field structured by the institutional frameworks of European integration. The European news media order is, according to Slaatta, 'divided into communicative spaces where contesting political discourses on the changing political order in Europe are being produced and mediated to national, regional and local publics' (Slaatta: 1999a: 7).

Slaatta writes that the concept of *domestication* has recently been introduced in studies of international news production to account for the narrative differences that appear in national broadcasting of international events (Gurevitch et al. 1996). Mainly as a suggestion, it is argued that although events and news are seen as 'international', it is through a process of 'domestication' that foreign and transnational events and news stories are made relevant and meaningful to domestic readers and viewers. An event or news story can be said to be 'international' through its consequences and causes, or by the way that international crisis news appeal to empathic reactions and reactions from informally or formally legitimated voices of 'international society'. Still, when comparing their differing presentations within national oriented news media, it is observed

that the journalists use frames that reflect cultural and political idiosyncrasies within their domestic and local audiences. In this way, the term 'global news' or 'international news' becomes ambiguous, and it becomes important to analyse how exactly different news media are domesticating 'facts' and 'events' from a presumed 'global' news environment.

Slaatta's way of analysing domestication and the role of the news media reflects a different expectation in terms of what the outcome of the research will be. Rather than seeing domestication as a residual category which explains differences appearing in national news media reports on international or foreign news, he sees domestication as both a sociological and ideological structure. Historically, there is a strong connection between the practice of news production and the political order of the nation state. This is observable in the way the profession of journalism was established and how norms and considerations regarding newsworthiness and news production routines became connected to interpretations of national interests and identities. The political institutions of the democratic nation state became the institutional framework for beat-routines and source-journalist relations of foreign correspondents. Considerations of political institutions and situations have always been an important part of the organisational and professional knowledge, which define and make sense of organisational priorities and routines for news production.

Generally, Slaatta argues that European integration, or what can be labelled as 'Europeanisation', produces new conditions for news production by (1) establishing new political arenas, procedures and practices from which transnational political discourses are constructed, mediated and thereby domesticated; (2) redistributing symbolic powers and redefining regions of disclosure and enclosure where political information can be accessed and thereby made public; (3) changing the routines of news production and source - journalist interaction. In theory, the European Union could be seen as an emerging institutional framework for a transnational, political field, to which the present structures and orders of European and national news media constitutes a complex and contradictory media public sphere. Thus, it is an empirical question of how and to what degree these new conditions are actually influencing practices of news production on EU related matters in various news media (Slaatta 1999a, Slaatta 2001).

The last contribution to be mentioned here is an ARENA working paper, written by Erik O. Eriksen (2004), with the title *Conceptualising European Public Spheres*. The author distinguishes between a *general public sphere*, *segmented publics* and *strong publics*. General publics are characterised by being open and inclusive communicative spaces rooted in civil societies at the periphery of the political system. Such a sphere is found wanting at the supranational level in Europe. What is discovered are transnational, segmented publics evolving around policy networks constituted by common interest in certain issues, problems and solutions. The EU has, Eriksen sums up, many strong publics, which are defined and described as legally institutionalised discourses specialised on collective will-formation close to the centre of the political system.

In the EU there are traits of transnational communicative spaces in which all the citizens of the EU can take part, but more salient are segmented publics evolving around policy networks and legally institutionalised discourses – strong publics – like the European parliament. In modern societies it is the law that establishes unity, and Eriksen draw this conclusion:

What hampers democracy at the European level today is the lack of a common, law-based identification and the possibility for transnational discourse – a single European space – in which Antonio in Sicily, Judith in Germany and Bosse in Sweden can take part in a discussion with Roberto and Julia in Spain on the same topics at the same time. The debate on the future constitution of the EU is a paradigmatic case for such a venture (2004: 29-30).

3.2: EU in the news of Norwegian media

It is necessary, as a background, to highlight that Norway in some ways is a special case compared with the other countries involved in the AIM-project. The main reason for this is that the country is not a member of the European Union. However, Norway is at the same time a partner in the European Economic area and therefore has a close relationship to the EU.

A majority of the population voted 'no' to membership in the EU in two referendums, first in 1972, and then in 1994. The main political force opposing membership in the EU is an alliance between people liv-

ing in Northern Norway and other parts of the ‘periphery’, the trade union movement and urban, left wing intellectuals. Most members of the economic, social, bureaucratic and political elites, and a majority of the population in Oslo and other central areas, favour EU membership. *Høyre*, the Conservative Party, is the only party that more or less unanimously favours membership in the EU. Polls have the last years shown a ‘yes’-majority. Few leading politicians dare, however, to mention a new referendum before they are sure that the outcome will be a solid majority. It is symptomatic that the only political party that actively takes up the EU-question is the leading ‘no-party’, *Senterpartiet* (The Centre Party), which has a strong membership base in the rural areas.

Norway’s strong national economy, being based and on oil, gas and fish exports, is of course an important background factor. The threatening elite argument that Norway ‘must’ join the EU as a full member to secure the country’s economic future has failed to impress large sections of the voters. The country’s political history (as a colony under Denmark, a half-colony under Sweden and then, with all the resulting memories, under German occupation during WW2) has also made the question of national sovereignty important to broad sections of the people. The national question was a central topic in the membership debate in the 1970s, but also played a role in the debate before the referendum in the nineties.

The ‘no to EU’ in the referendum is, as mentioned, just one part of the story of Norway’s relations to the EU and the single market. Since 1993 Norway has been a partner in the European Economic Area (EEA). This agreement allows Norway and other members of the trade organisation EFTA (except Switzerland) to participate in the single market. It is more than just a trade agreement. The treatment is linked to the European integration process, and many laws and regulations passed by the EU-institutions are also passed by the Norwegian parliament, the *Storting*. The member states of EFTA have, however, the right to veto ratification of EU acts.

The EEA agreement means that Norwegian government representatives have regular consultations with the European Commission and participate in different EU Commission expert committees. Norway is, as a non-member, not represented either in the EU Council, the Commission or the European Parliament.

3.2.1: A devastating experience

The ‘no’ to membership in the EEC in the referendum in 1972 was a devastating experience for the political elites, including the editors, and most of the press met with harsh criticism. The political journalism in leading newspapers had been one-sided and propagandist. It has since been argued that in the years that followed, public and political discourse on Europe became ‘taboo’ among the political elites. Certainly the debate, for more than a decade, disappeared (Sæther 1996).

An important explanation for this development was the threat that the membership issue represented to the political party system. Before the referendum both private families and political parties experienced traumatic contradictions and the memories of this period were strong. In particular the split in *Arbeiderpartiet* (the Labour Party) in 1972 represented a negative experience and most politicians knew that their members and voters were still divided on the question (Valen 1981).

In a debate in *Stortinget* in June 1988, the government (Labour) for the first time declared that it would start the process of harmonisation with the EC on the basis of the existing trade relations. Through EFTA the Norwegian government took the initiative for negotiations between EFTA and the EC about a new trade agreement, adjusted to the model of the Single Market. This was followed up when Norway got a new coalition government, but after one year this coalition was split on the EC question. A minority Labour party government took over.

The negotiations resulted in the EEA-agreement, sanctioned by the *Storting* in 1993. However, soon after this agreement was signed, the debate of yes or no to full membership in EU became the number one question, both in politics and in the media.

The news media became a major symbolic space where competing definitions of national interests and identities vs. Europe were produced and mediated for domestic audiences. Tore Slaatta, in his thesis about this process, argues that during the years when the EFTA frame and the EEA agreement dominated the field, most media staged their coverage in response to the dominant consensus and thus reflected the political definitions and frames of the dominant political agents. This consensus was broken and the *Storting*

election in 1993 (about one year before the referendum) marked a shift. Rather than playing a new and independent role, the news media reflected the diversity of legitimate controversy among the political elites (Slaatta 1999a: 148-1949).

In the same study Slaatta sums up that, in the years after the referendum, both journalists and journalists felt that EU and EEA stories had lost their 'appeal' and newsworthiness, since the membership question was out of the way. Not being a full member was taken as a sign that Norway was no longer involved, as it would have been 'if we had been a member'. The EEA agreement was seen to define a outside position to the European integration project (Slaatta 1999a: 210).

The news editor in *Aftenposten*, one of Norway's leading newspapers, expressed the position of the paper in the following way:

We reflect the political environment; if there had been stronger signals of decline in Norwegian economy, increasing unemployment and so on, there would have been more intensity to the debate. However, Norway's economy is thriving – the DNA³ can perform the adaption to EU that they want at the same time as the no-majority in the population is strengthened (cited in Slaatta 1999a: 210).

This humble position is, as Slatta concludes, a fairly acute theory of the news media as a producer of status quo. If the oppositional political news sources do not represent an open and clear critical force, this result in a conflict, consensus will prevail and the dominant media has no ambition of changing this situation through investigative journalism.

Today, just a few Norwegian news organisations (the telegram bureau *NTB*, the broadcasting company *NRK* and the newspapers *Aftenposten*, *Dagens Næringsliv* and *Bergens Tidende*⁴) are treating Brussels as a regular news beat and most questions concerning the EEA-agreement are ignored in the daily press. It seems that only the launching of a new and third referendum can change this.

4: Conclusion

The news media is in many ways a 'zone of struggle' where rival actors, including the media organisations

themselves, are trying to influence the public agenda. News management and information management are, in Norway as most other countries, concepts used to characterise public relation strategies, including the use of different types of information subsidies, combining enclosures and disclosures.

A specific pattern in Norway and other Nordic countries is the long lasting connection between the political parties and the press. These ties were, however, weakened over a long period of time, and today's news media has grown to an independent political institution. 'Independence' became both a remedy and an objective. The political parties therefore have lost their traditional monopoly as political opinion formers. At the same time most 'independent' news media in Norway are now controlled by public stock companies with harsh demands on profits and cost control.

In national journalism culture the historical development of press ethics has a central place. The Code of Ethics and the declaration about the rights and duties of editors has been described as the *Magna Charta liberatum* of the Norwegian journalistic field. Norms of integrity and editorial independence has a strong standing among Norwegian journalists and editors. The National Union of Journalists no longer accepts members working as information officers or PR consultants. However, this professional independence has its clear limits and the relations between journalists and professional sources can best be described as interdependence, both parties negotiating control of news, the priorities and the framing of news stories.

Research directly related to the concept of 'European Public Spheres' is very limited in Norway and very few works analyse how EU questions are treated in Norwegian news media. Skogerbø (1996) and Eriksen (2004) discuss the concept of public spheres related to more general questions of political democracy, while Slaatta (1999a, 2001) also analyses how Europeanisation produces new conditions for news production, among other things by establishing new political arenas, procedures and practices.

¹ "Astroturf", as such commercial activism today are labelled by critics, is a tactic used by companies in their issues management strategies.

- ² The financial paper *Dagens Næringsliv* gave priority to this debate in January/February 2004. See articles by Nils Øy (National Association of Norwegian Editors) 21th of January, Ole Jacob Sunde (chairman of the board in Schibsted) 26th of January and Stig Finslo (Orkla Corporation) 24th of February.
- ³ DNA (Det Norske Arbeiderparti), the Labour Party.
- ⁴ The correspondent for Bergens Tidende is also working for two other regional papers, Stavanger Aftenblad and Adresseavisen (in Trondheim).

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