

Chapter 6

Economic inequality, appraisal of the EU and news media

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The chapter explores how economic inequality, attitudes towards the EU and the provision of news act together. It starts from the assumption that attitudes towards the EU are related to economic inequality. This assumption is tested by juxtapositions between opinions about the EU and indicators of inequality. The concept of information detriment is used to explain the implications of media markets with respect to the coverage of European issues. The chapter concludes that information detriment adds to the situation of inequality and feeds into the non-appraisal of the EU and the lack of a feeling of belonging to the EU.

The European Union is in a miserable state. The centrifugal forces are stronger than any forces of integration. Right-wing populism is promising that a nation built on homogeneous ethnos augurs better living conditions than the construction of diverse nations. Separatism seems to be the trend, as the developments in Cataluña, Scotland, Venetia and Lombardy show. Anti-European or anti-liberal parties have achieved great gains in elections in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland, the United Kingdom is in the process of leaving the EU and other parties are working towards an exit. Greece is flirting with China, and EU candidate countries in Southeastern Europe are opening their markets to this big player in Asia. Studying European citizens' opinions about the EU in view of this situation will give insights into the problematic situation.

The ongoing debates on Europe are less a multitude of voices than a polarization between forces wanting to return to the ideal of an enclosed and coddled national identity and those still hoping that the EU can survive as a framework in which national well-being has better chances. The dispute between the two is strident: homeland, identity, culture, security and national sovereignty are the buzzwords of those who think of globalization as a fighting zone, where the threatened nation has to be defended. On the other hand, there are visionaries who want a renewed EU that will protect the citizens against the impositions of globalization. This situation gives rise to many questions. Does the public opinion about the EU reflect the polarized discourse? What are the underlying reasons for this polarization? Does this polarization

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find an equivalent in the existing and ever-growing inequalities? How do economic disparity and inequality translate into opinions about the EU, and which role do the media play in this respect?

The overarching research question of this book concerns the way and the extent to which the media and communications contribute to inequalities. This chapter answers that question with respect to differences in attitudes towards the EU, which in turn – this is the working hypothesis – correspond to economic inequalities. The question asked in the chapter is the following: Do the attitudes about the EU reflect the economic inequality in Europe and how do the media contribute to these attitudes? To explore the relation between economic welfare and views of the EU, we consider the media to play an important role and focus especially on the digital media. We argue that the information detriment, especially when it comes to the EU, is linked to inequality in society and has an effect on the perception of European polity and policies.

To elaborate this argumentation, the first section refers to the concept of information detriment resulting in “citizen detriment”, as presented by Golding (2017). Golding argues that inequality in access to and ownership of communication resources affects the capacity to be an informed citizen. The second section gathers empirical data about economic inequality within and between the EU member states. Third, we elaborate why opinions about the EU matter. This is followed by empirical evidence concerning the opinions of European citizens about the EU. On these grounds, we seek relations between opinions about the EU and indicators of inequality in the fifth section of the chapter. To explain the results, we refer to findings about the news supply, including the digital news supply, and put forward the information detriment hypothesis as a possible explanation.

Communicative inequality and European coverage

In his conceptual chapter about media and equality, Denis McQuail raises the question of which effects the media have on the distribution of “knowledge” and the positive expectation that they could raise the general level of knowledge and reduce the differences in knowledge. His claim that “citizens need to be widely and sufficiently informed on public issues of contemporary relevance and being able to follow and take part in society wide debates or conversations” is relevant to the greater political space that has emerged within the EU as well. In terms of quality information and with respect to Europe, this was an expectation that is still maintained, although the media performance, as we will see, is far from living up to it.

Golding (2017) puts citizenship at the centre of his reflections on the relation of communications, inequality and social order and states that mainstream media fail to provide information that enables active citizenship. He argues that, despite the abundance of information available online, there is growing inequality of access to quality information and that this information detriment translates into a citizen detriment.

Golding further centres his argumentation on the ideal of a participating, informed citizen and searches for impediments to this condition that obstruct the possibility of fair participation. Therefore, a key question becomes whether the media, in their various forms, provide the means for fair participation. This is relevant not only on the national level but on the European level as well. We will use Golding's concept to determine whether an information detriment can be detected on the European level and what consequences it has for the formation of opinions about the European Union, its policies and the feeling of belonging that people have towards the EU.

Research on political communications during electoral times, allows Golding to extract five explanations for why the media have failed to provide sufficient information for an informed citizenship (Golding, 2017: 4308f):

- coverage is limited to a range of issues that are dominated by some,
- especially broadcast coverage reduces political quotes or material to a sound bite format,
- “the horse race preoccupation”, meaning that the latest polling results and the performance of political parties and actors are made more important than substantive aspects of the messages and issues at the heart of the political debate,
- the partisanship displayed by the newspaper coverage with a dominance of pro-Conservative coverage,
- personalization, which accounts for greater interest in the personalities and people in the political game than in the policies, processes and institutions behind them.

If we transfer these arguments to the European level, there is ample evidence about the coverage of European issues. Most of the research about European media coverage has been interested in whether something that can be called a European public sphere exists. However, the findings are as valuable to exploring whether European citizens have access to comprehensive reporting on European issues or not.

Reviewing the research about how Europe is reported in the media, the diagnosis has never been a positive one. In general, EU coverage is scarce (de Vreese, 2002; Machill et al., 2006). Serious debates, which are more difficult to cover, are dealt with in an inappropriate way. For example, the case of the Transatlantic Trade and investment Partnership (TTIP) only came to light for a broader audience after massive activities of NGOs. EU-related issues are mostly too complex to find their way easily into national news. Selling news consists of talking heads and pictures, and the EU, with its complex and non-transparent decision-making procedures, can be reduced to these even less than national politics. Public service broadcasting performs a better job of reporting on the EU than most of the commercial broadcasters (Thomass, 2011).

The limited range of issues that Golding finds in research results about national news is a ubiquitous phenomenon in European news coverage as well. This is true

especially as it is mostly conflict and conflict alone that brings European issues into national – and, more seldom, regional – newscasts. Various case studies have shown that European issues become prominent in the media when they concern scandals or conflicts or when a well-focused event happens, such as European Council summits or elections (de Vreese et al., 2012; Engesser et al., 2014; Pfetsch & Heft, 2009; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). The limited range of issues dramatically became obvious with the financial crisis of 2008, as its longstanding pre-developments had been neglected/ignored by almost all of the news media (Hepp et al., 2013; Möller, 2013; Offerhaus et al., 2014). In addition, national political themes and a domestic scope dominate media coverage of the European Parliament (EP) election campaign, while European issues are not present at all (Kovár & Kovár, 2012).

The reduction of political quotes or material to short sound bites, if reported at all, has also been documented in the European coverage (Kevin, 2003). This – in combination with the observed personalization, which overemphasizes personalities over policies, processes and institutions – is especially relevant to European coverage, as European politics takes place in a complex, multilayer setting in which decisive developments occur within negotiations (Erbe & Koopmanns, 2004).

Similar to national elections, Hanretty and Banducci (2016) observe a horse race preoccupation in European elections, especially in close elections and polarized party systems. They find that, in member states with pro-EU governments, media outlets even increase the occurrence of horse race news.

Blunt pro-Europeanness is an issue that plays into the point about partisanship displayed by the newspaper coverage that Golding observed. In the European context, it means that the majority of Brussels-based journalists embrace the position that the EU is a positive structure (Statham, 2007, 2008).

These findings considered together mean that there is a striking imbalance regarding European politics and the amount of coverage that it attains for the ordinary media user. Using Golding's argument, we can identify an information detriment with respect to the media coverage of European issues. We will see later whether digital media can make a difference in the news repertoire concerning Europe.

Inequality in the EU – Empirical evidence

The concept of inequality laid out in the introductory chapter reveals the manifold dimensions and aspects that can be analysed. We concentrate on economic inequality, as it produces many other forms of inequality as consequences. With respect to states as the unit of analysis, inequality may refer to the differences either between nation states or within a given nation state.

Several studies reveal differences in income and prosperity that have become aggravated in the EU in the years to date (European Commission, n.d.; Oxfam, 2015). Three indicators have been used to identify the differences between the EU member

states: the gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, the unemployment rate and the Gini coefficient.

Looking at the GDP per capita as an indicator of the general wealth of a country (Table 1), we find a group of eleven countries above the European average of €32,700, which is indexed at 100, and 17 countries under it (Eurostat, 2016).

Table 1. Gross domestic product in the EU

GDP index below average		GDP index above average	
Italy	96	Luxemburg	267
Malta	95	Ireland	177
Spain	92	Netherlands	128
Czech Republic	88	Austria	126
Slovenia	83	Denmark	125
Cyprus	81	Sweden	124
Portugal	77	Germany	123
Slovakia	77	Belgium	118
Lithuania	75	Finland	109
Estonia	74	United Kingdom	108
Poland	69	France	105
Greece	67		
Hungary	67		
Latvia	65		
Croatia	59		
Romania	59		
Bulgaria	48		

Source: Eurostat (2016).

These data give an approximate view of how and where a given country is situated in terms of wealth in the EU but are far from reporting the inequality experienced by the citizens. For that purpose, the unemployment rate and the Gini coefficient are more expressive indicators.

The unemployment rate is used as an indicator of inequality as it reveals the amount of people in a given country who are unable to make a living by working. However, the unemployment rate is heavily dependent on the quality of the data and cannot show underemployment or the fact that many people have to hold two jobs to make a living. In 2016, the average unemployment rate in the EU was 8.5 per cent (Eurostat, 2017a). Looking again at the countries above and below that average (Table 2), we find that 10 countries in the EU have an unemployment rate above 8.5 per cent and 18 countries are below this level.

Table 2. Unemployment rate in the EU – Above/below average

Unemployment rate above the EU average (percentage)		Unemployment rate below the EU average (percentage)	
Croatia	13.3	Austria	6.0
Cyprus	13.1	Belgium	7.8
Finland	8.8	Bulgaria	7.6
France	10.1	Czech Rep.	4.0
Greece	23.6	Denmark	6.2
Italy	11.7	Estonia	6.8
Latvia	9.6	Germany	4.1
Portugal	11.2	Hungary	5.1
Slovenia	9.6	Ireland	7.9
Spain	19.6	Lithuania	7.9
		Luxembourg	6.3
		Malta	4.7
		Netherlands	6.0
		Poland	6.2
		Romania	5.9
		Slovakia	8.0
		Sweden	6.9
		United Kingdom	4.8

Source: Eurostat (2017a).

The third economic indicator, the Gini coefficient, shows the inequality within a given country. The Gini coefficient is a measure of statistical dispersion intended to represent the income or wealth distribution of a nation's residents and is the most commonly used measure of inequality. In addition, it points to the differences in the degree of inequality between countries. A higher coefficient signals greater inequality and vice versa¹: 100 would express maximal inequality and 1 maximal equality. In the EU, the average Gini coefficient is 31.0 (Eurostat, 2017b). Table 3 shows the Gini coefficient for the EU member states sorted into two groups: those above and those below the EU average.

1. The Gini coefficient is defined as the relationship of cumulative shares of the population, arranged according to the level of equivalized disposable income, to the cumulative share of the equivalized total disposable income received by them. It is intended to represent the income or wealth distribution of a nation's residents, and is the most commonly used measure of inequality. A Gini coefficient of 100 expresses maximal inequality. The data are the latest available. The coefficient is relatively stable over the years.

Table 3. Gini coefficient in the EU – Above/below average

Gini coefficient above the EU average		Gini coefficient below the EU average	
Bulgaria	37.0	Austria	27.2
Cyprus	33.6	Belgium	26.2
Estonia	34.8	Croatia	30.4
Greece	34.2	Czech Republic	25.0
Italy	32.4	Denmark	27.4
Latvia	35.4	Finland	25.2
Lithuania	37.9	France	29.2
Portugal	34.0	Germany	30.1
Romania	37.4	Hungary	28.2
Spain	34.6	Ireland	29.8
United Kingdom	31.5	Luxembourg	28.5
		Malta	28.1
		Netherlands	26.7
		Poland	30.6
		Slovakia	23.7
		Slovenia	24.5
		Sweden	25.2

Source: Eurostat (2017b).

With respect to the GDP, Luxembourg, Ireland, the Netherlands, Austria, Denmark, Sweden, Germany, Belgium, Finland, the UK and France are above the European average (Table 1). This is an indication of the inequality between member states. To assess inequality within a given country, it is more useful to look at the unemployment rate and the Gini coefficient (Tables 2 and 3). Taken together, we can identify three groups within the EU (Table 4). Group I consists of countries with less severe indicators of inequality than the EU average. Group II is formed by countries placed below the EU average with regard to one of the inequality indicators. The member states in Group III show higher inequality than the EU average on two of the indicators. None of these groups is homogeneous with respect to old or new EU membership or the size of the markets.

Table 4. Economic inequalities within the EU

Country	Unemployment rate per cent (2017)	Gini coefficient (2016) ²	GDP per capita index (2016) ²
<i>Group I</i>			
Austria	6.0	27.2	126
Belgium	7.8	26.2	118
Czech Rep.	4.0	25.0	88
Denmark	6.2	27.4	125
Germany	4.1	30.1	123
Hungary	5.1	28.2	67
Ireland	7.9	29.8	177
Luxembourg	6.3	28.5	267
Malta	4.7	28.1	95
Netherlands	6.0	26.7	128
Slovakia	8.0	23.7	77
Sweden	6.9	25.2	124
<i>Group II</i>			
Bulgaria	7.6	37.0	48
Estonia	6.8	34.8	74
Finland	8.8	25.2	109
France	10.1	29.2	105
Lithuania	7.9	37.9	75
Poland	6.2	30.6	69
Romania	5.9	37.4	59
Slovenia	9.6	24.5	83
United Kingdom	4.8	32.4	108
<i>Group III</i>			
Croatia	13.3	30.4	59
Cyprus	13.1	33.6	81
Greece	23.6	34.2	67
Italy	11.7	32.4	96
Latvia	9.6	35.4	65
Portugal	11.2	34.0	77
Spain	19.6	34.6	92
EU	8.5	31.0	100

Source: Eurostat (2016, 2017a, 2017b).

2. Latest available data.

Attitudes towards the EU

Communication and media studies commonly feature an informed citizenship as the base of a working democracy and media that deliver content that aids the formation of opinions and intelligent decisions about what and how those in power should do or aspire to. This process is equivalent to the formation of policies on the European level.

Public opinions on the EU are surveyed on a regular basis by the Eurobarometer, a public survey commissioned by the European Commission, which takes place every spring and autumn. Although it has been criticized, because the commissioner of the survey is also the object of the questions (Höpner & Jurczyk, 2012), the Eurobarometer can serve as an indicator of opinions on the EU. Summarizing the general trends pointed out by the recent issues of the Eurobarometer, the results show a remarkable turn to a more positive trend in opinions on several subjects. This is true for the image of the European Union, the trust in the political institutions on the national and the European level and the optimism about the future of the EU. In the last available Eurobarometer (the spring 2017 edition), 40 per cent of the respondents indicated a positive image of the EU, while 21 per cent reported a negative image (European Commission, 2017).

Another survey commissioned by the European Parliament addresses the feeling of belonging to the EU. The feeling of belonging is an emotional dimension of opinions about the EU. Without a self-understanding of belonging, the idea of taking part in the discourse about European issues – either actively or passively – by consuming coverage on European issues, European citizenship has no solid ground and associated actions (i.e. taking part in European elections) become less probable. The European Parliament commissioned this study in 2017, two years before the upcoming European elections, with the objective “... to measure their level of belonging, and attachment to, the EU” (European Parliament, 2017: 5). Of the respondents, 57 per cent felt that their country’s membership of the EU “is a good thing” (European Parliament, 2017: 9). This is a significant contrast to the years between 2007 and 2011, when this appraisal of EU membership dropped from 58 to 47 per cent. In addition, 56 per cent feel attached to the EU. Again, this is in contrast to the previous developments, which showed a decline in feelings of attachment in the same years. The authors of the survey interpreted the results against the background of the growing uncertainties resulting from global geopolitical developments that give reason for concern. This might explain the increased tendency to favour a common European approach to address such developments. This interpretation seems to be plausible considering the fact that the feeling of belonging to the EU and the appraisal of EU membership have risen significantly and nearly reached the pre-crisis level of 2007. The election of Donald Trump as President of the United States of America might have been a tipping point for these worries. The chapter does not aim to interpret these surveys further. Instead, it sets out to determine whether there is any relation between these opinions and the empirical evidence of inequality.

Relations between attitudes towards the EU and inequality measured using the Gini coefficient

We now consider how the Gini coefficient relates to the feeling of the respondents that their country's membership of the EU "is a good thing" (in the table: "appraisal of EU membership") and the feeling of belonging. In the introduction, we set up the hypothesis that inequality of wealth in a given country corresponds to the opinions about the EU among the country's population. We expect that, in countries where inequality is higher than the EU average, negative opinions about the EU are prevalent and vice versa. More precisely, this means that a high degree of inequality corresponds to a low appraisal of EU membership of the individual's own country and vice versa. Accordingly, a high degree of inequality corresponds to a low feeling of belonging to the EU and vice versa.

Relating the Gini coefficient to the appraisal of EU membership, we identify four groups of member states:

1. **The Gini coefficient is above average, meaning that inequality is higher than the EU average, and the appraisal of EU membership is below average. This applies to nine countries.**
2. **The Gini coefficient is identical to or below average, meaning that inequality is identical to or less than the EU average, and the appraisal of EU membership is above average. This applies to eight countries.**
3. Both the Gini coefficient and the appraisal of EU membership are equal to or above average. This applies to five countries, meaning that a high appraisal of EU membership is given although the inequality is high.
4. Both the Gini coefficient and the appraisal of EU membership are equal to or below average. This applies to six countries, indicating that a low appraisal of EU membership is given although the inequality is low.

The pattern in the member states belonging to groups 1 and 2 (printed in bold) verifies the hypothesis, while the results for groups 3 and 4 are opposed to the hypothesis.

In 17 (of 28) EU countries, we can highlight the coexistence of inequality and appraisal of EU membership in the sense that a high degree of inequality correlates with a low appraisal of EU membership and a low degree of inequality corresponds to a high appraisal of EU membership. In 11 (of 28) EU countries, the hypothesis is not supported.

Table 5. Attitudes towards the EU and income inequality

Country	Gini coefficient	Appraisal of EU membership (2017) ³	Gini/appraisal	Belonging to the EU (2017) ⁴	Gini/belonging
Austria	27.2	42	4	47	4
Belgium	26.2	64	2	59	2
Bulgaria	37.0	53	1	49	1
Croatia	30.4	36	1	41	1
Cyprus	33.6	45	1	39	1
Czech Rep.	25.0	33	4	35	4
Denmark	27.4	71	2	56	2
Estonia	34.8	67	3	54	1
Finland	25.2	57	2	47	4
France	29.2	53	4	55	4
Germany	30.1	79	3	70	3
Greece	34.2	34	1	33	1
Hungary	28.2	48	4	63	2
Ireland	29.8	81	2	66	2
Italy	32.4	35	1	48	1
Latvia	35.4	45	1	65	3
Lithuania	37.9	65	3	57	3
Luxembourg	28.5	84	2	79	2
Malta	28.1	64	2	62	2
Netherlands	26.7	79	2	51	4
Poland	30.6	71	3	67	3
Portugal	34.0	54	1	45	1
Romania	37.4	54	1	55	1
Slovakia	23.7	50	4	54	4
Slovenia	24.5	45	4	49	4
Spain	34.6	62	3	60	3
Sweden	25.2	65	2	54	4
United Kingdom	32.4	49	1	51	1
EU	30.1	57		56	

Sources: Eurostat, European Parliament, own calculation.

3. The percentage of respondents answering in a affirmative way on the question “Generally speaking, do you think that our country’s membership of the EU is a good thing?”

4. The percentage of respondents who feel attached to the EU answering the question “Please tell me how attached you feel to the European Union”.

If we look closer at the countries showing a low appraisal of EU membership, nearly all of group III (see Table 4), which combines two of the indicators showing greater inequality than the EU average, is represented (Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Latvia and Portugal), except Spain. On the other hand, among those countries with a high appraisal of EU membership, those countries of group I (see Table 4) that have lower inequality than the EU average are strongly represented (Belgium, Denmark, Ireland, Luxemburg, Malta, the Netherlands and Sweden). This gives a hint that the appraisal of EU membership is linked to experiences of inequality.

Relating the Gini coefficient being above or below the EU average to the *feeling of belonging* to the EU being above or below the EU average, we can again identify four groups:

1. The Gini coefficient is above average, and the feeling of belonging to the EU is below average. This applies to nine countries.
2. The Gini coefficient is identical to or below average, and the feeling of belonging to the EU is above average. This applies to six countries.
3. Both the Gini coefficient and the feeling of belonging are equal to or above average. This applies to five countries, meaning that a strong feeling of belonging to the EU is given although inequality is high.
4. Both the Gini coefficient and the feeling of belonging are equal to or below average. This applies to eight countries, indicating that a weak feeling of belonging to the EU is given although inequality is low.

In 15 (of 28) EU countries, correspondence of inequality and the feeling of belonging to the EU is apparent in the sense that a high degree of inequality corresponds to a low feeling of belonging to the EU and a low degree of inequality corresponds to a strong feeling of belonging to the EU. In 13 (of 28) EU countries, the hypothesis is not supported.

Again, a closer look shows that a low feeling of belonging to the EU is mainly found in countries in group III (see Table 4), which combines two of the indicators showing higher inequality than the average (Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Italy and Portugal), except Latvia and Spain.

Overall, this rough juxtaposition of inequality, as expressed by the Gini coefficient, with the esteem of the EU, measured as the percentage of people who feel that belonging to the EU and their country's membership of the EU are a good thing, shows that there is a relation, although it is not very strong. In the next step, we will focus on the news supply in the national media markets in selected EU countries and see which developments can explain the correspondences found above.

News supply and European coverage

Studies show that the media affect attitudes about EU integration (Azrout et al., 2012; de Vreese & Boomgarden, 2006), the turnout in European elections (Banducci &

Semetko, 2003; Schuck et al., 2016) and general support for the EU (Norris, 2000). Based on those findings, we will look for patterns of news supply and trust in news media to find further tentative explanations for the above findings. Accordingly, we use the findings of the *Digital news report* (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2017), a comprehensive comparative study of news supply and trust in news media. The report is based on a survey of more than 70,000 people in 36 markets, with a focus on Europe. We use crucial findings of the report with respect to the above-mentioned research findings about how Europe is reported in the media.

Although the vast majority of news that people consume still comes from mainstream media, new online patterns of news consumption make it harder for European issues to get through to people. The limited range of issues covered is hence aggravated by the use of online provisions for news. Reuters's *Digital news report* finds stronger preferences for content that is selected by an algorithm (search, social and many aggregators) than content selected by an editor (direct, email and mobile notifications): "More than half of us (54%) prefer paths that use algorithms to select stories rather than editors or journalists (44%)" (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2017: 16). As news about European issues already has difficulties making it into traditional media, it is probable that algorithms will discriminate against it even more, as such news will not receive the number of clicks to rank it highly. In addition, social media, news aggregators and the trend of watching short videos rather than longer ones push the reduction of political quotes or material further to short sound bites (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2017: 19).

The fact that following the news in social media often means following those politicians whom a user agrees with and avoiding others (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2017: 17) is another disadvantage for European coverage, as many topics cannot be pinned down to one or another politician (however, the trend towards personalization is relevant on the European level as well).

Answering the question of why we should analyse inequality and the media, Nieminen (this volume, chapter 3) seeks to establish a correlation between the increasing inequality and the growing popular distrust in the media. We try to find evidence for this correlation by juxtaposing the findings from the *Digital news report* and those from this chapter. The *Digital news report* addresses the declining trust in the media. Our country-related findings from the previous section show correspondence between a relatively high degree of economic inequality and a low appraisal of EU membership – although it is not very strong. This correspondence clearly applies to Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Latvia and Portugal. Trust in the media is low in Greece, Croatia and Italy (below 40%) but not in Portugal.⁵ On the other hand, more than 40 per cent of respondents trust the media in Finland, the Netherlands, Sweden, Belgium and Denmark: countries approving of EU membership to a relatively great extent and displaying rather low indicators of inequality.

5. Cyprus and Latvia are not in the sample of the *Digital news report*.

In addition to these general observations, we use the findings of Reuters's *Digital news report* (2017) about the characteristics of the respective media markets. We concentrate on countries that show a high degree of economic inequality and low esteem for the EU as well as a low feeling of belonging, exemplified by Croatia, Greece, Italy and Portugal.

For Croatia, Peruško (2017) reports a media market characterized by a television sector in which threats to the editorial independence of the public service broadcaster (HRT) and financial stability are common. Ownership of the national press is highly concentrated, with falling print runs. In terms of online news, a digital-born news portal with strong (centre-left) opinions (Index.hr) is competing with the website of a tabloid newspaper (24sata), which is also the leader in the print market. The online presence of public service broadcasters (HRTi) is not very well used, possibly reflecting disillusion with changing editorial policies due to political influences. Peruško further points to an atmosphere of low trust, increasingly negative news and political populism, causing many (56%) Croatians to turn to social media as an alternative to traditional media. The survey responses also place Croatia in the bottom third of countries when it comes to trust in news overall (39%). Together, these attributes of the media market are not a favourable environment for fostering reliable and comprehensive reporting on EU and European issues.

The Greek media market is characterized by very low levels of trust in journalism, high use of social media for news and extreme fragmentation of the online news market. After the closure of the public broadcaster ERT in 2013, confusing government plans for allocating new TV licences and commercial pressure created quite an unstable media landscape. The *Digital news report* states "that news in Greece remains largely a way of gaining political and economic influence rather than being a viable commercial industry in its own right" (Kalogeropoulos, 2017). As 95 per cent of Greeks obtain their news online, news websites that regularly engage in conspiracy theories about health and political issues attract considerable attention. Facebook is the most widely used platform for news (62% use it), and 32 per cent of Greeks use Youtube for news content. These circumstances, together with the miserable economic situation in the country, which is mostly attributed to the EU, reliable news about the EU and in-depth coverage of European issues are more than improbable. In addition, Greeks have the lowest levels of trust in news in the Reuters survey (23%) and the greatest concerns about business and political influence over editorial content.

In Italy, Cornia (2017) holds the partisan nature of Italian journalism and a strong influence on news organizations responsible for the low levels of trust in the news (39%). The combination of public subsidies and private business sponsorship has made the media, print as well as TV, vulnerable to political and economic influence. The print press is considerably weak, while the TV market is highly concentrated. As the internet penetration is rather low compared with that in other European countries, television remains the main source of news for a majority, while the press rather addresses an elite audience. Public service broadcasting has not yet developed its online

news supply. These are market conditions that make it rather improbable that the EU and European topics attract the attention of broad media audiences.

In Portugal, reliance on television news is still relatively high, while an increasingly concentrated radio and print sector is struggling to remain relevant in a digital world (Pinto Martinho & Cardoso, 2017). The recession in 2011-2015 created an extremely precarious situation for journalists: over half (57%) of Portuguese journalists earn less than €1,000/month, and more than a third (34%) have no employment contract. The difficult working conditions of journalists will impede the reliable coverage of European issues, as these topics need expertise and a newsroom that supports the idea of reporting from the EU. Although the general media situation could give reason to doubt the independence of the media, we find a comparatively high level of trust in the media (58%) in Portugal. Pinto Martinho and Cardoso (2017) consider the low levels of political polarization to be responsible for this fact. The emergence and growth of social media pages acting as a watchdog against the mainstream media may also have contributed to this result.

This section studied the media markets of four countries, characterized by inequality in income higher than the EU average, a higher than average unemployment rate and low esteem of the EU and a low feeling of belonging to the EU among the population. These markets are characterized by deficits that are likely to cause weak coverage of European issues. This information detriment adds to the situation of inequality and feeds into the non-appraisal of the EU and the lack of a feeling of belonging that we found in our country examples. We cannot argue clearly that the perception of inequality is causal for the esteem of the EU, but we see obvious correspondences of high inequality and low acceptance of the EU. Critical attitudes towards the EU can be considered as an effect of both an information detriment about European issues and economic inequality.

Conclusions

This chapter provides evidence of the inequalities in the EU and establishes correspondence to the non-appraisal of the EU. Of course, it is a short circuit to relate attitudes about the EU in a monocausal and one-way explanation back to the real economic situation of citizens. It is similarly an oversimplification to make media coverage alone responsible for attitudes. Instead, we can assume that the complex concurrence of perceived inequality and media coverage will have an impact on attitudes.

The analyses of the data show a rather clear-cut result for countries that are in a worse position than the average of the EU member states, because they combine higher inequality, measured by the Gini coefficient, with a higher than average unemployment rate. In Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Italy and Portugal, the population has a lower appraisal of EU membership and a lower feeling of belonging to the EU (in Latvia this applies only to the appraisal of the EU). A quick look at media markets and news

consumption in these countries made it obvious that the EU, as a topic that requires solid reporting to be accessible, does not stand a real chance. The respondents of the Eurobarometer in those countries give further support to the argument that the lacking appraisal of decisions and institutions in the EU is an expression of a detriment of information that adds to the situation of inequality.

Apart from this, the results reveal that the relation of the economic situation and the attitudes towards the EU does not follow a simple pattern but is quite diverse: the relation ranges from Spain, where a comparatively disastrous economic situation did not destroy the sympathy for the EU, to countries that are economically better off than the average of the EU countries but value the EU less. Between them are countries that are quite ambivalent in their attitude towards Europe. For each of these cases, further research and a deeper analysis of the factors that have an impact on the opinions about the EU are needed. If it would be possible to find more detailed correlations between attitudes, inequalities and media coverage, the complex concurrence of perceived inequality, media coverage and attitudes about the EU could be clarified further.

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