

The Role of the News Media in the Construction of the European Identity: Informing, Educating, Promoting?

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SUMMARY

The author examines the role of the news media in the formation of European identity, presuming that they are expected to play a crucial role in both the perception and the construction of the emerging European identity as well as in the preserving and the developing of the national identity. One of the main problems at covering the EU-related issues is setting the boundaries between informing the public and promoting specific ideas leading to the construction of the EU identity. Providing the public with true, verified, accurate, relevant, unbiased, diverse and balanced information is the primary journalistic goal, in one way or another defined by the ethical codes of all the EU states, while one-sided promotion in the sense of supplying the citizens with selective truth and biased publicity should not be considered as part of any quality news discourse, even though it is occurring under the label of identity building. The author's thesis is that the news media are assigned an important role of informing the citizens about the relevant EU issues, without having a special task of promoting the EU. A critical distance should be established towards the information obtained from the Government and other public relations sources. Journalistic questions should be asked. To be able to implement their task, journalists need to be equipped with the knowledge and skills to cover the EU politics, they should aspire to follow the standards of the classical paradigm of journalism as the public service, and maintain the professional ethical attitude in all phases of the communication process.

Key words: European identity, national identity, media roles, journalistic ethics

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Introduction

With the new members' accession to the European Union (EU) on 1 May 2004, questions of preserving the national identity on the one hand and constructing the European identity on the other became ever more relevant. Issues referring to the identity building have been widely discussed in different fields of research, including media and journalism studies.

In this article, we are going to examine the role of the news media at the formation of the European identity in the new Member States, presenting the case of one of them – Slovenia – a young state which already has historical experience of being part of a larger union.¹ During its transition period to democracy and after the democratic changes of 1991, Slovenian mass media were eagerly adopting journalistic practices, ethical standards and professional journalistic ideology of the “Western and developed world” (Erjavec, 2003: 98)². On the declarative level, the so-called “Western concept” is widely emulated in Slovenian journalism today. In the 1991 *Code of Journalists of the Republic of Slovenia*, the “true and genuine informing of the public” was declared to be a journalist's fundamental obligation. In preparing the new *Code of Ethics of Slovenian Journalists*, adopted in 2002, special attention was paid to the *IFJ Declaration of Principles on the Conduct of Journalists* and the *Code of Ethics of the Society of Professional Journalists*. In this respect, the case of Slovenia might be taken as representative of the issue of defining the mission of journalism in the new EU Member States.

On the other hand, one can not ignore that differences among states exist: journalism is always dependent on the specific media tradition and culture, history, political, economic and social circumstances. The way the Slovenian journalists practice journalism is witness to the actual state of affairs in the journalistic profession as well as in the social framework in which it is happening, and the same can be said for journalism in other EU-states. Journalism varies from one historic period to another, from one country to another. Namely, it is an unstable and fluid occupation which is particularly responsive to social change (Splichal, Sparks, 1994: 20). Not only does the news reporting affect the social circumstances,³ but new social realities also affect journalism in many ways.⁴

Our presumption is that the news media are expected to play a crucial role in both the perception and the construction of the emerging European identity, as well as the preservation and developing of the Slovene national identity. Such expectations can be illustrated by Ernst's (2003) discussion, where she tries to demonstrate that the trans-national broadcaster ARTE can successfully contribute to creating the European identity. Her hypothesis is in fact based on the undisputable assumption that the mass media *do have* a role in the EU identity building.

We might accept the idea of identity building to be a significant mission and a great responsibility of the news media, yet we have to admit that it brings along many problems – one of them being setting the boundaries between informing the public and promoting specific ideas leading to the construction of the EU identity. Providing the public with true, verified, accurate, relevant, unbiased and balanced information is the primary journalistic goal, in one way or another defined by the ethical codes of the old as well the new EU states. One-sided promotion in the

sense of supplying the citizens with selective truth and biased publicity should not be considered as part of any quality news discourse, even though it is occurring under the label of identity building.

How to identify the boundary-lines between these two possible – and in practice often interweaving – functions of mass communication (*informing* and *promoting*) is one of the harder tasks that journalists have to face often, even in their every-day working routines. We believe that the new political circumstances of the EU place an even heavier burden on journalists who have to deal with such dilemmas under the pressure of expectations to play an active part in the processes of identity building. For example, a freelance journalist from Cracow, Pieklo (1999) argues that journalists “must begin to develop a European consciousness which follows their national consciousness forming the standards of future European journalism”. The so-called “European spirit” is thus making its way even into journalists’ views on their own professional identity.

Our thesis is that the news media are assigned an important role of informing the citizens about the relevant EU issues, without having a special task of promoting the common European identity. The question of recognizing the borders between informing and promoting is actually a question of defining boundaries between journalism and non-journalism; therefore it is also the question of the professional identity of contemporary journalism.

Rights and Obligations of News Media in Democratic Societies

Today, the mass media’s influence and pervasiveness are beyond doubt, although there are wide disagreements and conflicting views about just how we are influenced by the media in general and by journalism in particular (Hachten, 2001: xv).⁵ Besides, people’s opinions are influenced by so many factors that isolating news media effects is extremely difficult (Gans, 2003: 76). Yet much of the information that we need for our personal and professional lives comes from the news media, and it is impossible to imagine our society, economy, government to function without the continuing flow of news. The mass media undeniably have a considerable impact on citizens; we may assume this also on the basis of the public opinion survey (Eurobarometer, 2004: 17), showing that the most trusted among 15 institutions in Slovenia are radio (66%) and television (65%).

What is – or is supposed to be – the news media’s main role in the democratic EU societies? Christians and Nordenstreng (2004: 7) state that most of Europe takes social responsibility of the mass media for granted;⁶ it is the dominant, mainstream doctrine in journalism and media policies. According to the authors, the contemporary European approach to journalism and mass communication “has a distinct social and cultural orientation that separates it from the predominantly market-oriented philosophy of the EU” (2004: 9).

In 2003, the European Parliament requested a research report to examine the obligations for the media and the institutions in the EU concerning the citizen’s right to be “fully and objectively informed”. In the study performed by the *European Institute for the Media* and published in 2004, it was pointed out that the role of the media in a democratic system involves the provision of information about

political life and policy-making and assumes a transparent system allowing access to information. The media are expected to provide the citizen with a range of opinion and analysis regarding politics, and with platforms for debate on these issues; they are also expected to play a role as a watchdog for the public regarding the conduct of political and government institutions and actors (Deirdre et al., 2004: 4).

There are many documents which define the mass media's role in terms of their contribution to public welfare and democracy, yet we shall refer only to a few of them. "The right to information, the freedom of expression and criticism is one of the fundamental rights of man", as stated in the Preamble of the *Munich Declaration of the Duties and Rights of Journalists*.⁷ According to Article 17 of the *Council of Europe Resolution 1003 on the ethics of journalism*,⁸ information and communication – as conveyed by journalism through the media – has decisive importance for the development of the individual and society; it is indispensable for democratic life, since if democracy is to develop fully, it must guarantee citizen participation in public affairs. The *IFJ Declaration of Principles on the Conduct of Journalists*,⁹ which is proclaimed as a standard of professional conduct for journalists, states that in pursuance of their duty to respect the truth and the right of the public to truth, journalists "shall at all times defend the principles of freedom in the honest collection and publication of news".

The Preamble of the *Code of Ethics of Slovenian Journalists*¹⁰ asserts that the first principle of professional conduct of journalists is the right of the public to be informed: public enlightenment is the basis for the proper functioning of modern societies and the foundation of democracy. The journalistic codes of ethics in the other new EU Member States reveal similar emphases on the journalists' obligation to inform the public and the media's role in democracy (see Table 1).¹¹

The analysis of the ethical codes in the new EU Member States leads us to the conclusion that on the self-declarative level, journalists recognize true informing of the public to be their main responsibility. According to Vreg (1990: 51), informing the public is the central function of the mass media. Their main purpose is not to educate the public, although they do have a powerful influence in this respect, and it is also not to foreshadow or create public opinion, but "to offer varied information and opinions on topics of public interest, the knowledge of which will have a significant effect on the education, training and culture of citizens and, at the same time, serve as a basis for the formation of opinions of their own about people and institutions" (Encabo, 1995: 520). This classical paradigm of journalism as a social activity for the public good, aimed at disseminating true and balanced information about facts and opinions, should be kept in mind while discussing the news media's role in the construction of EU identity in the new EU Member States.

There is one other point that should be mentioned in our discussion: the question of local and international media. Due to the weakening of national borders throughout Europe, journalists become more international (Frost, 2000: 239). The contemporary discourse on the state of the world often refers to the metaphor of a *global village*; advances in communication and transport technology have made more contacts among people and nations a reality, yet most people still lead their

lives within the boundaries of the *local village* (Hamelink, 1995: 2). The same is true for the EU Member States media scenes. Most of the people are still going to get information within the boundaries of their nation-states. As Kurpas (2005) suggests, it would be a major misconception to imagine a European public sphere simply as a national one writ large. The mass media are very diverse across the EU, and most attempts at pan-European media have failed so far. Besides, “most people want to be informed and communicate in their own mother tongue and remain loyal to their customary sources of information, e.g. the local newspaper or television news broadcast” (Kurpas, 2005). Therefore, the media within each new Member State preserve their importance for the national public, even though the national borders have been loosening.

Table 1: Journalists’ obligations and mass media’s roles, as defined in the journalistic codes of ethics in the new EU Member States.

EU state	Journalists’ obligations and mass media’s roles
Cyprus	Respecting the citizen's right to objective, complete and reliable information.
Czech Republic	Giving truthful and correct information to the public.
Estonia	Serving the right of the public to receive true, fair and comprehensive information.
Hungary	Obtaining information, publishing, criticizing; revealing the truth.
Latvia	Providing the society with true and verified information.
Lithuania	Obtaining fair information, presenting true and accurate news and a full range of opinions.
Malta	Publishing verified and accurate information.
Poland	Seeking after the truth and publishing it.
Slovakia	Giving the public veracious, precise, verified, complete and professional information.
Slovenia	Presenting a comprehensive account of events, reporting accurately and conscientiously.

Covering the EU-Related Issues: Journalists as Informants of Promoters?

The role of the media is of great significance, since they are the most important and in many cases the only link between decision-makers and citizens, suggest Kurpas, Meyer and Gialoglou from the *Centre for European Policy Studies* (2004). Being profit-oriented, national media often ignore EU politics, which they believe to be complicated and uninteresting for a wider audience and therefore unattractive to cover. The authors argue that the EU suffers from a *communication deficit*, and that informing about the EU is the task of the EU institutions, national

governments, academic institutions and the mass media. In their opinion, media organizations and journalists “have a responsibility to adapt their coverage in order to provide their audience with better information about what EU governance is all about”.

The Slovenian mass media have played a visible role in the processes of Slovenia accessing to the EU. Their importance was confirmed by the research of Hafner Fink (2000), based on the data from the *Slovenian public opinion survey*: the analysis showed that the citizens’ participation in mass media (reading, listening and watching the EU topics) and the level of knowledge regarding EU as a result of that participation were among the most important factors on the attitudes toward Slovenian accession to the EU (Hafner Fink, 2000: 822). The most influential appeared to be the variables of “being informed”, “participating in the media” and “lacking of party affiliation”, thus the factors which indicate the consolidation of “European consciousness” through the processes of ideological mobilization within the framework of the crucial ideological apparatuses, such as the mass media and the political parties. The analysis proved that the bigger “media participation” and the higher level of “being informed” had led to the stronger support for the Slovenia’s accession to the EU (Hafner Fink, 2000: 825).

According to the last *Eurobarometer National Report on Public Opinion in the EU* (2004: 20), traditional news media are considered to be the most important sources of EU-related information. The most frequently mentioned source is television (82%), followed by daily newspapers (54%) and radio (52%). Slovenian citizens think that their media give them enough EU-related information: 60% said that coverage of the EU is adequate, while 23% think that the EU is not covered enough in their national media. The majority (54%) consider the EU is presented in an objective light, although the share of those who think that it is portrayed in a too positive light is quite high – 30%.

Covering the EU issues certainly is a task that journalists who are striving for the so-called classical or traditional paradigm of journalism – as explained in the first chapter of this article – cannot ignore. However, they should constantly be well aware of their aim here, which is not promoting the EU at any cost, but providing the citizens with diversified information on the relevant facts and opinions about the topics referring to the EU. Pieklo (1999), for example, argues that it is *up to the media to launch a public debate about the responsibility and future of Europe in a more general sense. This debate should stress that EU enlargement is not just a mechanical process which depends very much on the results of law scanning or the condition of applicant countries’ economies – it is also an important cultural and historical long-term process, without which it is impossible to create a common European identity.*

As we have already pointed out, the journalists’ main role is not to educate but to inform. On the other hand, it is hard to disagree with Pieklo’s (1999) argument that informing also means education: journalists (should) play the role of teaching people about present day Europe and its problems, which are often deeply rooted in the past; they (should) combat the national stereotyping and hatred; they should – as actively as possible – assist their audience in meeting the challenges of the new millennium. Information about facts and opinions should be reported in a re-

sponsible, unbiased manner, openly presenting problems and difficulties and exposing the possible positive, future outcomes. These recommendations should be taken into account regardless of a journalist's self-imposed or possible external pressures to report one-sidedly and to promote EU in favour of the European identity building.

We believe that the public interest – including the development of the European identity – is best served by the news reporting as it was shortly described in the previous lines. On the other hand, we should acknowledge the even though *informing*, *educating* and *promoting* are different functions of media, they often overlap. As Hansen and Paul (2004: 4) argue, messages may “inform, educate, entertain, persuade – or all of these”. A journalist can promote, proselytize, and editorialize, but often by informing. Facts – the essential part of informing – can have the affect of other functions. Carrying out a specific function can have very different effects (for more see Wright, 1966).

Necessity of the Critical Distance to the Public Relations Sources

Our discussion about covering the EU-related issues gives rise to a very relevant question regarding the use of information sources, especially the ones that widely dominate the contemporary journalism, since they routinize the newsgathering and reporting, are cheap and easy of access – the public relations (PR) sources. There is indeed a lot of information about the EU accessible from such sources, often on the Internet. For example, the *Slovenian Government PR and Media Office*¹² has created a special site named *The Government Portal with Information about the Life in the EU*. In 1997, the task of informing the public on Slovenia's accession to the EU had been entrusted to the *European Affairs Department* at the *PR and Media Office* of the *Slovenian Government*. After the accession in 2004, the *Office* “continues to inform about the EU membership and the consequences it has for the lives of the citizens”.¹³ In their *Communications Programme on Slovenia's Accession to the European Union 1997–2004*,¹⁴ they wrote that the *Office* “assumed the task of informing the Slovene publics on Slovenia's integration with the EU. In this way the Government wished to contribute towards greater awareness, understanding and public discussion of the process of integration with the EU and on the consequences that membership would have for Slovene citizens”. The so-called “*media partnership*” was defined as one of the main elements of the programme, consisting of the “regular and systematic supply of information and other material on the accession related activities of the government, the organization of specialized seminars, study visits to the European institutions and meeting with high ranking EU officials”. According to the *Office*, their web site <http://evropa.gov.si> “offered information on the EU and Slovenia's accession process, and was a valuable database of information intended for various target groups”.

On the basis of their programme, we might conclude that their primary goal is not that much different from the one that journalists are supposed to follow, i.e. informing about relevant facts and different opinions – the *pros* and *cons*. Still, the

Government PR & Media Office is PR and not journalism; therefore it is performing the mission of the first profession, not the second one.

It is true that some scholars and practitioners believe that contemporary PR has moved beyond persuasion and rhetoric, that its purpose is not to simply influence publics for the good of the institution, but also to help organizations and their publics accommodate each others' interests with a goal of mutual benefit (see Fitzpatrick, Gauthier, 2001: 194). According to the Article 8 of the *International Code of Ethics*,¹⁵ a PR practitioner shall "act, in all circumstances, in such a manner as to take account of the respective interests of the parties involved; both the interests of the organization which he/she serves and the interests of the publics concerned". The *Public Relations Society of America Member Code of Ethics* states: "We are faithful to those we represent, while honoring our obligation to serve the public interest."¹⁶

In spite of the fact that most of the PR codes point out not only the PR's responsibility to the client, but also to the public, there is a widely spread conviction among the practitioners that journalism "must serve the public interest and public relations must serve the client, regardless of what the codes of various public relations trade and professional associations say" (Kittross in Gordon et al, 1996: 279). We believe that the field of PR has very different goals from those of journalism; therefore information from the *Government PR & Media Office* cannot be published without journalistic questions asked.

Let us look at an example: in February 2005, at the Brussels journalists' meeting with the *European Commission's* Vice-President in charge of communication Margot Wallström, the president of the *Foreign Press Association* (API) Michael Stabenow expressed the concerns about communication between the *Commission* and the press, saying that journalists »often feel we get PR from the spokespeople, not information«. ¹⁷ Wallström agreed the *Commission* must stop using "Euro-speak" in its information materials. However, in our opinion it would be utopian to expect that the PR might ever totally vanish from the *Commission's* communication strategy or at least not dominate it. As Fitzpatrick and Gauthier conclude, the practice of PR involves a multitude of communication strategies and tactics which are designed to influence the targeted audiences – "generally for the good of the "sponsoring" organization and sometimes for the good of both the organization and others (2001: 194).

The modern technology is making it much easier for journalists to research in a foreign country from their desks, and it also provides quick access to domestic official information without ever leaving the office (Frost, 2000: 240). Even though information received that way often has the legitimate news value and is thus useful to journalists, it should not be merely transcribed into a journalistic text and signed by a journalist. Instead, it should be used as starting information for further research and analysis, as *one* information source, which can never be enough for a trustworthy news account. PR offices produce a discourse from one point of view, and this is in contradiction with the changing of places in communication, which is characteristic of the journalistic language practice. One of the principal characteristics that distinguish journalism from promotion can be described as *the constant use of questions*. It is the questioning of many people, different and diverse,

that makes journalism what it is; *a question* is a journalist's main instrument, asking questions is his/her basic occupation (Košir, Poler, 2003: 119).

Who does a journalist, covering the EU-related issues, question? As a reporter he asks protagonists and eyewitnesses of an event – not a single person, but different sources of information. The same questions are preferably addressed to many sources (official and unofficial), and the same source is asked different questions. The PR sources are used as the starting-point material to be further elaborated, and a critical distance is established towards the information obtained in such a way. At the press conferences, questions are asked. And even if questions are not explicitly stated in a journalistic text, it is evident from the contents as well as from the structure of the text that a journalist reports the answers obtained by means of his/her main instrument. A journalist uses questions also in the analytic, opinion types of texts (commentaries): he/she poses questions to the (independent) experts, the archive's documentation, the relevant sources, etc. A commentator does not write in the "what-do-I-think-about-the-issue" style, but gathers the answers to the relevant social questions from the existing corpus of political, economic, scientific and other texts. These questions are asked by the journalist himself/herself – in an internal dialogue, while he/she internalises the questions of the common referential universe of the people communicating in the community, which is created in the social context by the communicator along with the addressees by way of mass communication. This is also one of the reasons why journalism is a social activity *par excellence*.

Advertisements, paid announcements and commercials on the EU-related topics should be clearly and unambiguously distinguished from journalistic texts. "Hybrids that blur the line between advertising and journalistic contents are impermissible," states the Article 14 of the *Code of Ethics of Slovenian Journalists*. The *Code of Conduct for Journalism and Media in Brussels* likewise establishes that the mass media should ensure "clear *separation of advertising material* and paid for space from editorial content in all publications".¹⁸

Journalists' Contribution to the EU Citizens' Identity

In the previous chapter, we have indicated how the news media should participate in the EU citizens' identity building and still perform their journalistic mission within the limits of their obligations and roles, broadly defined by the codes of ethics. Or to be more precise – we have tried to present some landmarks of the boundary-lines between informing the public in a way that is compatible with the quality journalistic discourse, and the one-sided PR for the EU which should have no place in the discourse which declares itself as journalistic. The journalists covering the EU-related issues are repeatedly faced with the problem of finding the right way, even though some might not be quite aware of it. As Zupančič (2004) argues in her discussion on the *Slovenian Press Agency's* (STA) news reporting on the EU: "Reporting on the topics related to the EU is taking place on the thin line of the "European", pressed between the super-national and the national view. The first one can rapidly sink into the blind agency, the other into the a priori negative approach under the cover of defending the national interest."

Nevertheless, the *Eurobarometer National Report on Public Opinion in the EU* (2004: 13) shows that 57% of Slovenians identify with both Slovenian and European identity, while 40% identify exclusively with their national identity. Identity is connected to the level of knowledge about the EU; people with a lower level of knowledge about the EU tend to identify themselves more often exclusively with their national identity. Therefore we may conclude that the level of knowledge, gained above all through the mass media, is a very influential factor of the European identity building.¹⁹

Constructing the European Identity

In the last years we have been witnesses of different attempts to create common European identity, and the conception is still widely discussed (Pinterič, 2005: 81): on one side, there are defenders of the broader definition, where it is enough that the respondents of the public opinion polls say that they feel members of their own nation and also of the EU; on the other side, there is politically less supported idea that identity has and must have specific elements as strong feeling of belonging to the community, common history, symbols, etc. In this article, it is not our intention to take part in these discussions. Instead, we are focusing on the news media' role in the construction of the European identity regardless of its precise definition.

Whatever the conception of the European identity implies, it is probably beyond question that all Europeans – in one way or another – take part in the construction of Europe. The citizens are silent, but vital actors in the construction of Europe: “Nothing lasting could have been built, in fact, without Europeans wanting to live together in peace.” (Moussis, 1999: 32) While stressing the importance of the individuals' active role in the process of European construction, Moussis (1999: 466) argues that they are practically not aware of this role. On the conscious level, the average citizen has a very vague idea of what European construction means and of the role that he or she is called upon to play in it.

The main illustration of this can be given by the European elections, to which a large number of citizens in the Member States are largely indifferent. The similar finding – but on the side of the journalists – was reported in the research of Schönbach (in Fabris, 1993: 188): around 47% of German journalists said that it is not the role of journalists to promote the European integration – simply for the reason that “stimulating” special “wishes” is not compatible with the journalistic self-perception. However, as Fabris (1993: 187) pointed out more than a decade ago, the role of the media in the construction of the common European consciousness – at different processes of integration as well as disintegration – has yet to be researched.

Preserving the National Identity

It is beyond all questions that the news media have a key role in the processes of building identities. On which social level and through which social cultural practices different identities – and the national one among them – are being produced, reproduced and transformed today? In his essay on the national identity,

national interest and cultural politics, Vogrinc (2003: 43) argues that the communication practices are crucial. The mass media are decisive, since they produce the identities by themselves, and they also select, transmit and modulate the identity impulses from outside the media. The deciding factor is not the contents of art, but of sports, other fields of popular culture, political and economic topics.

As Šabič and Brglez (2002: 68) suggested before Slovenia's accession to the EU, questions like whether the acceptance of European integration translates into the giving up of national identity, preserving it, or at least accepting the possibility that national identity may take on a new meaning in the EU, have appeared to be very relevant at that time, and they remain to be so. In March 2003, the *PR and Media Office of the Slovenian Government* published 178 answers about Slovenia's accession to the EU. One of the questions was how we were going to preserve the Slovenian national identity (Čebular, Grahek, 2003: 160), and it was answered by the following:

The question of preserving the Slovenian identity, especially language, refers to Slovenia's place and role in the world that is becoming more and more globalized. These processes cannot be avoided by isolating from others. Instead, the whole society should be joining them by confronting openly all the challenges and risks that the globalization brings both to the individuals and to their traditional communities. Slovenian membership in the EU actually means the formal recognition of the specific Slovenian identity, especially culture and language, within the multicultural European space. Yet there is no a priori guaranty that the Slovenian identity will be really preserved by Slovenia's integration into the EU. Nobody can give us such an assurance; we have to take care of it by ourselves.

The news media are perhaps the most significant source of influence on the public perception of the Slovenian national identity within the EU (Šabič, Brglez, 2002: 72). Nevertheless, according to the authors (2002: 80–81), the Slovenian mass media appear to have played a minor role in developing the Slovenian self. Their analysis of media reporting in a period of particular significance in Slovenia's accession process indicates that the news media were not critical observers of the advantages and drawbacks in the integration process. Critical journalism and balanced information that the public needed in order to develop its relation towards Europe and the emerging European identity were clearly missing in this process.

In the *Eurobarometer National Report on Public Opinion in the EU* (2004: 29), the fear relating to the loss of national identity and culture is cited in 41%, and 53% of the respondents have a fear of the Slovenian language being used less. The Slovenians have broadly perceived the existence of a distinct language as the basis for a national identity (Kalin Golob, 1994, 2001; Roter, 2003). Slovenian standard language exists not only as a means of communication, but also as a carrier of nation and its connector. Slovenia's membership in the EU placed standard Slovenian next to the many major languages. This means that the language and its users have to accept the new situation as a challenge by suitable language planning, which should be future-orientated and should encourage respect for one's own language and its expressive power. Therefore, the role of the journalists is also connected to a responsibility they have as the most influential language users.

The media texts are namely a creator of average language use and consequently of the language norm/codification. The usage of the Slovenian language is “a sine qua non” for the development of the individual and community identity (Poler Kovačič, Kalin Golob, 2005: 440).

Conclusion

According to Kurpas, Meyer and Gialoglou (2004), the EU is still “an unknown entity for many journalists”: they lack basic knowledge about EU decision-making and institutions, do not know where or how to find the relevant information quickly and are hampered by language difficulties. The *Centre for European Policy Studies* offers some proposals as to what can be done to improve citizens’ information and enhance cross-national debate: editors should treat EU politics as a news item with domestic relevance, and there should be more collaboration and network-building among different national and regional news organizations and journalists.

All journalists covering the EU-related issues should commit themselves to the highest standards of journalism, being aware of the fact that the credibility of news depends on respecting the ethical standards at information gathering and selecting as well as the presentation of news. Journalists should aspire to responsibility based on the firm grounds of efficient national systems of self-regulation by setting up self-regulatory mechanisms “comprising publishers, journalists, media-users, associations, experts from the academic world and judges”, as suggested in the Article 37 of the *Council of Europe Resolution 1003 on the ethics of journalism*. One of the ways to improve the quality of journalism is adopting the supranational codes and other documents aiming at the responsible journalism. In July 2004, the alliance of journalists' groups in Brussels *Journalists @ Your Service*²⁰ launched a *Code of Conduct for Journalism and Media in Brussels*. “The code opens the door to a debate about the role of media and relations with political and commercial institutions that is long overdue,” said Aidan White, representing the journalists.²¹ The *Code*’s guidelines aim to help the media avoid conflicts of interest, improve transparency and strengthen the quality of journalism – by reaffirming the values of independent journalism in a city where lobbying interests and political policy-makers compete for influence.

It is clear from the foregoing that the news media do perform a visible and influential role in constructing and developing both the common European identity and the national identity within the EU Member States. Recognition and acceptance of this role calls for well-educated and responsible journalists who pay regard to the fact that “the aim of the media should not be to replace the public authorities or provide public services assigned to other institutions” (Encabo, 1995: 520). The news media’s role is not to construct the European identity by advertising or PR in the journalistic texts, but by true, verified, diverse and balanced informing of the public on the issues concerning the EU. To be able to implement this task, they need to be equipped with the knowledge and skills to cover EU politics, they have to follow the standards of the classical paradigm of journalistic

profession as the public service, and maintain the professional ethical attitude in all phases of the communication process.

ENDNOTES:

- ¹ Slovenia's history as an independent state has been very short – only 14 years. As Phillips and Ferfila (2005: 15) point out, this is not to deny the existence of a Slovenian cultural nationality in the Balkans since the Slovenians first arrived in the region in the 6th century, but to make the point that before 1991, the Slovenian peoples had always been part of larger political entities.
- ² According to Hachten (2001: 18–19), since the fall of communism the Western concept of journalism has already become the dominant model around the world.
- ³ Journalism is a disseminator of values as well as facts, and it has effects both on the individuals who make up its audiences and on the social formations through which it circulates (McNair, 1998: 31–57).
- ⁴ According to McNair (1998: 13–15), the social determinants of journalism can be divided in five categories: professional culture and organizational constraints, economic pressures, political pressures, source tactics and strategies, and technological possibilities and constraints. In the former Yugoslavia, Slovenian journalists were supposed to act as socio-political workers, having a fundamental obligation to protect and maintain the socialist system. In the last decade and a half, Slovenia has gone through enormous political, economic, and social modification: declaration of independence, war, formation of a new state, transition to democracy, pluralisation of the political scene, market economy, and other changes influenced and were influenced by the mass media (Poler, 1996). After 1991, journalists discharged the responsibility to the socialist state and the party leaders, replacing it with responsibility to the public (at least on the declarative level), while on the level of every-day journalistic practice, the socialist authority has been substituted by the authority of profits over serving the public.
- ⁵ We are well aware of the fact that findings from one cultural environment can not be merely transferred to another; therefore we should be careful in using conclusions reached for the American audience while describing the situation in Europe. On the other hand, the homogenization of media culture (see Hall, 1997: 28) induces us to take different research studies into consideration.
- ⁶ The social responsibility theory made its way in 1956, accepting the main conclusion of the Hutchins Commission report – that the press has a responsibility to the society: the media should provide a truthful, comprehensive, intelligent account of events; serve as a forum for the exchange of comment and criticism; project a representative picture of the constituent groups in the society; present and clarify the goals and values of the society; provide full access to the day's intelligence (Merrill, 1997: 17).
- ⁷ The Journalists' Unions of six countries of the European Community adopted the Declaration in 1971 in Munich. See http://www.presscouncils.org/library/Munich_Declaration_1971.doc, 8. 5. 2005.
- ⁸ The Assembly of the Council of Europe adopted the Resolution in 1993, believing that the ethical principles written in the Resolution "should be applied by the profession throughout Europe". See http://www.presscouncils.org/library/Inter_CoE.doc, 8. 5. 2005.
- ⁹ The Declaration was adopted by 1954 World Congress of the IFJ and amended by the 1986 World Congress. See <http://www.ifj.org/default.asp?Issue=ETHICS&Language=EN>, 8. 5. 2005.
- ¹⁰ Adopted in 2002 by the Slovenian Association of Journalists and the Union of Slovenian Journalists. See http://www.novinar.com/dokumenti/Code_of_Ethic.doc, 8. 5. 2005.
- ¹¹ The texts of the codes are available at <http://www.uta.fi/ethicnet/> and <http://www.presswise.org.uk>, 9. 5. 2005.

- ¹² On its web site, the PR and Media Office presents itself as an independent professional service of the Slovenian government with the responsibilities of: ensuring that the work of the government is public; informing the domestic public about the work of the Prime Minister and ministries; informing the public abroad; providing professional support to the government spokesperson and PR services within ministries and government offices; organizing communication campaigns and providing communication support during events of national importance in Slovenia; planning, carrying out and co-coordinating general promotional activities by the state. See <http://www.uvi.si/eng/office/responsibilities/>, 12. 7. 2005.
- ¹³ See the presentation of the PR and Media Office's activities at <http://evropa.gov.si/o-nas/>, 12. 7. 2005.
- ¹⁴ See <http://www.uvi.si/eng/office/responsibilities/eu/>, 12. 7. 2005.
- ¹⁵ The Code was adopted in 1965 in Athens by European Public Relations Confederation and International Public Relations Association. See <http://www.cerp.org/code/index.htm>, 13. 7. 2005.
- ¹⁶ Approved by the Public Relations Society of America Assembly in 2000. See http://www.prsa.org/_About/ethics/pdf/codeofethics.pdf?indent=eth10, 14. 7. 2005.
- ¹⁷ See "Europe's Communications Crisis: Truth-telling or Spin?", published on February 17th 2005, <http://www.brusselsreporter.org/?show=13>, 18. 7. 2005.
- ¹⁸ See http://www.brusselsreporter.org/graphics/centrepiece/files/coc/Code_of_Conduct_EN.doc, 18. 7. 2005.
- ¹⁹ A majority of Slovenians perceive their own knowledge of the EU, its policies and institutions as average, but the actual level of knowledge (respondents had to answer 'true or false' to a series of statements about the EU) about some basic facts relating to the EU is higher in Slovenia than in the EU25 overall (Eurobarometer, 2004: 23).
- ²⁰ *Journalists @ Your Service* is a partnership project between the Belgian Journalists' Union, Association de La Presse Internationale, the European Journalism Centre, the International Federation of Journalists, the International Press Centre Résidence Palace and the local branch of the British and Irish Journalists' Union. It provides professional advice, assistance and a wide range of services to journalists visiting or working in Brussels. See <http://www.brusselsreporter.org/about.php>, 18. 7. 2005.
- ²¹ See "Challenge to European Union as Journalists Launch", published on July 6th 2004, <http://www.brusselsreporter.org/?show=2>, 18. 7. 2005.

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Melita Poler Kovačič

Uloga medija u konstrukciji europskoga identiteta: Informirati, obrazovati, promovirati?

SAŽETAK

Autorica istražuje ulogu medija u formiranju europskog identiteta, pod pretpostavkom da se od njih očekuje da igraju ključnu ulogu u percepciji i konstrukciji europskog identiteta te razvitka i očuvanja nacionalnih identiteta. Jedan od glavnih problema u izvještavanju o temama vezanim za Europsku uniju je određivanje granica između informiranja javnosti i promocije ideja koje vode stvaranju identiteta Unije. Pružati javnosti istinite, provjerene, točne, važne, nepristrane, različite i izbalansirane informacije primarni je novinarski zadatak definiran etičkim zakonom svih država Unije. Jednostrana promocija i snabdjevanje građana selektivnom istinom i pristranim informacijama ne bi trebali biti smatrani dijelom kvalitetnog novinarskog diskursa, iako se događaju pod krinkom izgradnje identiteta. Autoričina teza je da mediji imaju važnu ulogu informiranja građana o temama relevantnim za Uniju bez promoviranja Unije. Kritički odmak od informacija dobivenih od vlade ili od izvora za odnose s javnošću mora postojati. Moraju se postavljati novinarska pitanja. Kako bi ispunili svoju zadaću, novinari moraju biti opremljeni vještinama i znanjem o politici Unije, moraju slijediti standarde klasi-

čne paradigme novinarstva kao javnog servisa i zadržati profesionalni etički stav u svim fazama komunikacijskog procesa.

Ključne riječi: europski identitet, nacionalni identitet, uloga medija, novinarska etika