

Supporting the EU's approach to climate change: The discourse of the transnational media within the 'Brussels bubble'

Abstract

The Union's global climate change policy has been widely seen as an expression of its normative power, where it is committed to act through multilateral frameworks in order to tackle the effects of changes in the climate and safeguard the future of peoples around the world. Internally, the EU's approach to climate change is complemented by high levels of support from citizens. This article explores another internal source of support for the EU's leadership in global climate change policy, namely the media. The focus here is on the transnational media's reporting and coverage of the Copenhagen summit, which is widely considered to be one of the key points in the development of global climate change policy. The article shows that within the 'Brussels bubble', the transnational media supported through its reporting the EU's ambitious agenda in global climate change policy around the time of the Copenhagen summit.

INTRODUCTION

In contrast to other issue areas in its foreign policy, the European Union (EU) has managed to achieve a significant level of coordination among the member states in its approach to climate change. The Union's global climate change policy has been widely seen as an expression of its normative power, where it is committed to acting through multilateral frameworks in order to tackle the effects of changes in the climate and safeguard the future of peoples around the world (Bäckstrand and Elgström 2013; Karlsson et al. 2012). Leadership in global climate change policy has been high on the EU's agenda; the Union aiming to serve as an example for other

countries, but also behaving as a norm setter (Parker et al. 2012). Internally, the EU's approach to climate change is complemented by high levels of support from citizens, who recognize the need for the Union to take the lead in tackling the global effects of climate change (European Commission 2011).

This article explores another internal source of support for the EU's leadership in global climate change policy, namely the media¹. Support is understood in this case to be the favorable discourse of the media towards the EU, which has the potential to grant more legitimacy to the Union's policies – as the media is often thought to portray the view of the general public (Williams, 2006). The article enquires whether the transnational media² expressed support for the EU's approach towards climate change around the 2009 Copenhagen summit. In doing so, the article highlights the way in which and why the transnational media constructed its discourse in this case. In the literature the transnational media has attracted little attention (both in the case of climate change and in general). Studies focusing on national media (with a preference for the Old member states) have underscored that media in the members states have backed-up the EU's ambitions to act as leader in global climate change policy, but at the same time have not always been convinced that climate change should be a top policy priority for the Union (Smith 2005; Carvalho 2007; Carvalho and Burgess 2005). Moreover, these studies have shown that in national public spheres dominated by Eurosceptic media reporting, journalists portrayed a deep sense of doubt regarding the EU's ability to convince states such as the US or China to agree to a progressive global agreement that could effectively tackle climate change. The EU's failure at the Copenhagen summit was perceived by the UK or Swedish media as a sign that their states would be more effective acting unilaterally rather than through the common framework of the European Union (Gavin and Marshall 2011, 1138; Olausson 2010; Gavin et al. 2011).

In turn, this article shows that within the ‘Brussels bubble’, the transnational media supported through their reporting the EU’s ambitious agenda in global climate change policy around the time of the Copenhagen summit. The focus on transnational media is justified by the fact that within the ‘Brussels bubble’ EU policymakers tend value more the quality of the reporting of transnational media than that of national media (Baisnée 2007). This provides transnational journalists with a greater ability to make their discourse salient in the EU’s circles of power in Brussels. The ‘Brussels bubble’ is commonly understood to be ‘limited to an elite circle of mostly Brussels-based politicians, lobbyists and interest groups and the sphere of <<arcane>> policy, i.e. a setting in which participants exclusively operate behind closed doors and with a prime emphasis on interpersonal communication’ (Spanier 2012: 93). The ‘Brussels bubble’ is thus focused on specific European issues, mainly targets experts, interest groups, or journalists, and seeks to feed into debates around the EU’s decision-making. Additionally, those who read transnational publications (such as EUObserver, European Voice or the Financial Times) tend to be part of a mini audience based around and within the ‘Brussels bubble’. In order to analyze the effects of the ‘Brussels bubble’ the article relies on data from interviews and questionnaires with journalists working for transnational publications. These enquired into the motivations behind the discourse of transitional media and the way it was influenced by the ‘Brussels bubble’.

By focusing on the discourse of the transnational media the article seeks to contribute to the literatures on media reporting on climate change and Euroscepticism in the European public sphere. More broadly, it also contributes to the literature on informal policy networks in EU policymaking as it highlights that the ‘Brussels bubble’ embedded journalists within a culture which made them less likely to adopt Eurosceptic views. In the ‘Brussels bubble’ journalists working for transnational media have been able to construct informal networks with EU

policymakers, who in turn value the quality of their reporting (Firmstone 2004). The article starts by exploring the EU's engagement with global climate change policy. The characteristics of transnational publications together with the methods employed in the article are presented in the next two sections. Frame analysis is the primary method used for empirically analyzing the discourse of transnational media – and is supplemented by data from anonymous interviews and questionnaires with journalists from the three transnational publications. The reporting of the transnational media is analyzed empirically and discussed in the fourth section, followed by the conclusions of the article in the last section.

THE UNION'S GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE POLICY

The EU's policy towards climate change can be seen to be the fusion between domestic and foreign policy, but also between supranationalism and intergovernmentalism. It reflects both the EU's (and especially the Commission) aim to become a leader in tackling global climate change and the member states' own ambitions and interests (Skovgaard 2014). Hence, in the case of international climate change negotiations the Commission negotiates on behalf of the member states, having a clear mandate from the Council presidency which acts as the EU's main voice. This article focuses on the Copenhagen summit which took place in December 2009 and was widely seen as an opportunity for the EU to draw on its global leadership and drive forward a progressive agreement. Although the EU displayed leadership in the run-up to the Copenhagen summit, by promising funding to developing states, the events during the summit point to the idea that the Union lost its position as global leader in climate change policy. The US and the BASIC countries (Brazil, South Africa, India and China) drafted the final version of the Copenhagen Accord, constraining the EU to accept the deal. Curtin (2010: p.25) highlights that

at the time among worldwide media ‘there was a recognition that the EU had been upstaged at best and humiliated at worst’. The Union’s multilateral approach had been replaced by a more unilateral approach supported by the US and China. Even the European media argued that ‘the truth about Copenhagen is that (...) the EU completely failed to show leadership on environmental matters’ (Kilian and Elgström 2010: 258)

According to Egenhofer and Georgiev (2010), Europe’s failure at the Copenhagen summit must not come as a shock, for the EU was at the time a minor power in global emissions – and only developing countries can matter in terms of implementing sustainable solutions. Moreover, at the time, China and the US were highly constrained by their domestic institutions and circumstances to search for unilateral solutions (Christoff 2010: 644). Nonetheless, following the Copenhagen summit, the Commission argued that its efforts were a success because the member states (which were also committed to ambitious emission reduction targets and to the use of environmental friendly technology) managed to provide a worthy example to small and island states. The EU also managed to attain a significant degree of coordination among the member states, ensuring that they acted unitedly – an example on which the EU drew during the following summits on climate change in Cancun, Durban and Doha, where it managed to form a broad coalition with small and island states. Conversely, at latter summits, the EU had a much better performance as it decreased its goals, siding with small and islands states, whilst also acting as a ‘bridge-builder between the major blocs trying to tilt the balance’ (Oberthür 2011: 10). The Copenhagen summit can also be seen as a ‘wake-up call for the EU’, as it made the Union change its strategy from leading by example to building wide coalitions that could effectively negotiate with the US and China in multilateral frameworks (Bäckstrand and Elgström 2013: 1380). The next section discusses the characteristics of the transnational media, by focusing on the habits of journalists

within the ‘Brussels bubble’ and the three transnational publications selected for empirical analysis.

TRANSNATIONAL MEDIA WITHIN THE ‘BRUSSELS BUBBLE’

The analysis included two newspapers and one online publication: the Financial Times (FT)³, the European Voice (EV)⁴ and the EUObserver.com – which has a similar readership and coverage to the other two publications. None of these publications can be considered to be truly a ‘European newspaper’ because they do not aim to direct their discourse towards the general public living in the member states. In a 2004 EUROPUB report on the way transnational European media report on EU topics, Firmstone (2004: 8) found that transnational journalists believe that their European message cannot get across to individuals in the member states due to national media which report mainly through domestic perspectives. However, these publications can be thought of as ‘European wide’ or transnational media because their discourse usually transcends the boundaries of nation states and is almost never solely concerned with covering domestic politics within a single member state. Transnational publications frequently employ freelancers and their articles are quoted or even translated by publications in the EU’s member states, as they are seen to contain expert and in-depth analysis of EU issues. Moreover, according to Panichi (2012), national correspondents do not have the same level and quality of access to inside information about the EU’s policies or decision-making, and rarely do more research than that presented in the transnational media or made available by the EU’s institutions through formal channels.

Transnational journalists share a cosmopolitan ideology underpinned by deep Euro-optimism, which also compels them to maintain high professional standards (Lecheler and Hinrichsen

2010; Lecheler 2008; Williams 2006). On the other hand, Heikkilä and Kunelius' (2006: 73) study emphasizes that generally the EU is very successful in influencing the discourse of the transnational media. They point to the overarching power of the 'Brussels bubble' to entrench a certain sphere of values in the writing styles of transnational journalists. In their extensive report on the habits and culture of journalists based in Brussels, they find that individuals working for transnational media tend to approach European issues from a 'cosmopolitan' perspective. More specifically, this involves refraining from vigorously criticizing the EU and not publishing articles that contain negative stereotypes or references to the Union. Transnational journalists also have a tendency 'to develop a reaction of protecting the institution, a kind of self-censorship which they justify by their belief that the Commission is acting for the public good' (Baisnée, 2002, p.120). Moreover, according to the interviews, transnational journalists often take cues from spokespersons and accept planted questions during press conferences or even publish stories requested by their contacts (Interviews 1, 2, 3, 4).

Journalists working for transnational publications that have been based for a considerable time in Brussels have largely pro-EU attitudes and are in a better position to influence the Union's agenda (Baisnée 2002). They have had the opportunity to build close ties with EU policymakers, making them responsive to their (transnational journalists) discourse. Their ability is in stark contrast to that of 'newcomers' and especially correspondents for national media who do not keep their posts for more than a few years and are more prone to be constrained by the scrutinizing needs of their editorial offices back home and by their lack of access to policymakers. On the other hand, journalists working for transnational media either see themselves as trying to enact the highest journalistic standards or trying to campaign for a certain point of view and policy initiative, almost never portraying any sense of Euroscepticism

(Lecheler and Hinrichsen 2010). Through their campaigning efforts they usually try to build support in order ‘to reinforce [their] own opinions among those who are politically close’ within the EU’s institutions (Mancini 1993: 49). On the other hand, data from the interviews conducted for this article correlates with the findings of EUROPUB project, in that according to transnational journalists, spokespersons working for the Commission do have not sufficient expertise in their area, and behave merely as PR staff or even salesmen of the benefits of European integration (Firmstone, 2004, p.24).

The Financial Times (FT) is widely considered to be the most important transnational newspaper (Baisnée 2002; Raeymaeckers and Cosjin 2006; Balčytienė et al. 2006). Raeymaeckers and his colleagues (2007: 115) found that the FT has a privileged position within the ‘Brussels bubble’. It enjoys a considerable amount of prestige, often being considered by policymakers in Brussels the only true European newspaper. Its status is built on greater access to resources than other transnational media and a commitment to thorough and critical reporting, providing a prime example of quality journalism. The FT has the largest press bureau based in Brussels which reports both on the day to day activities⁵ of European institutions, and also on political and economic developments in the member states and other countries in Europe. However, articles tend to be tailored for a European business oriented readership, the newspaper affording the majority of its space to issues concerning stocks and shares, financial markets, or companies in Europe. The FT shapes its discourse in order to cater for the interests of ‘national governments, EU institutions and European political parties as well as its readership’ (Firmstone 2004: 34).

European Voice (EV) focuses on presenting information and analyses about the EU and its institutions on a weekly basis, catering for ‘everyone involved in European Union policy making, those who seek to influence the decision-making process from outside, and those whose

work is directly affected by decisions taken in Brussels' (Firmstone 2004: 2). It reports on the day to day activity of the EU's institutions, portraying an overt optimism towards furthering the European project, which matches the views of its readership. However, due to its weekly publication cycle it does not cover day to day events, but provides in-depth analyses of events that have happened throughout the previous week. Finally, EUObserver.com is an online publication which aims 'to support the debate on – and development of European affairs'⁶. It publishes daily analyses and news reports which focus on the day to day activity of the EU. With four to five stories published online each day written in a similar manner to newspaper articles, it is comparable in terms of space and coverage to both the FT and EV⁷. Similarly to EV, it practices a type of cosmopolitan journalism, highly optimistic regarding the European project. The readership of EUObserver tends to have considerable knowledge of and interest in EU affairs. Nonetheless, due to its online open-source character, articles and points of view published by EUObserver are more often quoted in national media. The next section explores the methods employed for empirically analyzing the selected transnational media.

METHODOLOGY

This article surveys the discourse of the transnational media within two six month periods before and after the Copenhagen summit (1 July 2009-1 July 2010). Media items were selected keyword searches on Lexis-Nexis, table 1 detailing the distribution of the selected articles in the transnational publications. Frame analysis was the primary method used for analyzing the discourse of transnational media. Through framing the media articulates its discourse and gets it across to the general public, and more importantly to policymakers. A focus on frame analysis allows for the identification of the way in which the discourse of the media is categorized around

a series of central opinions and ideas. Frame analysis underscores the connections made by the journalists between different events, policies or phenomena and their possible interpretations (Carvalho and Burgess 2005). In the first instance, the frame analysis implied a quantitative descriptive analysis of the frames constructed by the media was operated. More specifically, for each frame, the number of articles containing it was weighed against the total number of selected articles. The same process was then broken down and repeated for each publication, thus providing greater comparative depth to the study. At this stage, media coverage was also correlated with the frames constructed by the media as a means of uncovering their temporal relevance. The final part of the frame analysis focused qualitatively on the strategies employed by the media in order to select and emphasize certain aspects of reality, events, ideas or perceptions, whilst downplaying others. The analysis shows that in most cases the three transnational publications constructed the same frame. Throughout the next section these frames are emphasised through quotes from various articles in the sample which capture the framing activities of all three publications. Conversely, the analysis also focuses on the few cases where the three publications reported differently on similar frames.

The frame analysis was triangulated with data from anonymous interviews and questionnaires with 6 journalists who covered climate change issues in the three transnational publications during the period analysed⁸. The interviews and questionnaires with journalists covered topics related to the internal and external factors that influence the way policy definitions are constructed by the media, in this way taking into the account the complex nature of the relationship between journalists and policymakers. The internal factors included issues concerning: perceptions of readers' demand, resources made available by various actors, quality of information from the EU as a source; while the external touched upon topics related to:

framing and commenting strategies, targeting strategies or reporting strategies. More specific questions focused on the discourse of journalists within the ‘Brussels bubble’ and the way they reported on the on the EU’s climate change policy during the period analyzed.

ANALYSIS

The most salient frame identified in the sample referred to the long term risks associated with climate change and defined it as a top policy problem due to its broad and indiscriminate effects on peoples around the world. About 98 per cent of the total articles (see table 1) included this frame, advising but also praising EU policymakers for considering climate change as a policy priority, because it possessed the potential to harm the livelihood of future generations. This frame also converged with EU policymakers’ own approaches, as the Union’s rhetoric highlighted the major challenge that climate change brought to global governance and to the security and economic development of the member states. Both before and after the Copenhagen summit, the Union overtly stated its commitment to a low carbon society – by increasing its reduction targets from 20% to 30% (European Commission 2010a; European Commissioner for Climate Action 2010a) – which was thought to ‘create new jobs and industries and will contribute to a more energy secure future’ (Council of the European Union 2009). Transnational journalists took cues here and drew on EU policymakers’ discourse in order to make their readers conscious of the medium to long term consequences of climate change (Interviews 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6). The three publications also provided detailed scientific evaluations and reports from transnational NGOs which highlighted the malign effects that climate change could have on a global scale.

Insert table 1 here

Defining climate change as a major risk also resonated with views from other influential international actors such as the UN, or various transnational environmental NGOs, which made the frame even more salient – together with the fact that it was perceived to affect populations globally. Keeping to its deep commitment to objective reporting, the transnational media presented statements and points of view from actors outside foreign policy circles. These statements were featured in order to highlight the weaknesses of defining climate change as a major problem that the EU had to tackle. Conversely, although most articles framed climate change as an important threat to the wellbeing of future generations, not all of them considered that the need to tackle the effects of climate change had to be backed-up by substantive financial commitments. EUObserver (11 November 2009) noted that finances could be better spent on creating jobs. On the other hand, the FT highlighted that by committing itself to progressive measures meant to tackle climate change, the EU might be placed in a disadvantaged position, running the risk of driving ‘industry out of the region if it continues to push for deeper cuts in carbon dioxide emissions than other economies’ (Financial Times, 7 July 2009).

A considerably lower number of articles (than those which framed climate change as a medium to long term threat) suggested that climate change was a present emergency that had to be addressed urgently. According to the FT (7 July 2009), the world had no excuse for denying the short term-risks associated with climate change. World leaders were advised to add urgency to the negotiations on climate change in order to achieve a progressive agreement (EUObserver, 6 October 2009). Transnational journalists constructed this frame by frequently featuring detailed scientific reports and analyses, together with official assessments from the UN and various transnational environmental NGOs. Moreover, the views of the general public were at times

portrayed by the three transnational publications through letters and comments from their readers. This happened because some transnational journalists perceived themselves as educators who had the duty to inform individuals regarding the EU's approach which was infused with principles and values related to justice, human rights and equality (Interviews 1, 2, 3, 5, 6). Transnational journalists also aimed to encourage public debate within the 'Brussels bubble' by providing individuals with detailed scientific accounts regarding the effects of climate change.

Table 1 shows that central to the way in which the media reported during the period analyzed was the idea that the Copenhagen summit represented a crucial moment – which is also highlighted by the spike in coverage in the period around the summit seen in figure 1. There the EU was expected to lead the adoption of a binding agreement that could tackle the effects of climate change. Multiple articles drew on scientific reports or academic assessments in order to capture the magnitude of the summit which was seen as the 'biggest show on Earth, and, for scientists at least, the most important meeting the world has ever known' (EUObserver, 7 December 2009), where more than 15.000 delegates from 192 countries met. At the same time, the three transnational publications often published reports which contained views from the general public or from various environmental groups and NGOs, together with public opinion polls (which emphasized the high level of public expectations associated with the summit).

Insert figure 1 here

The importance of the summit was an idea promoted by the EU from as early as 2008, the European Parliament even claiming in a resolution that it was the most important international

meeting of the last decade (European Parliament 2009). Moreover, both the three transnational publications and EU policymakers associated high hopes with the prospect of national leaders for the first time having the opportunity of negotiating a climate change agreement face to face, as Connie Hedegaard stressed: ‘the negotiators have been sitting opposite each other for years arguing from the same positions (...) that is why it is so crucial that the leaders say forging an agreement in Copenhagen is what they want to do. That will let [the negotiators depart from here]’ (Financial Times, 7 July 2009). In this sense, transnational journalists view the EU as the most complex administrative system in the world that has the potential of being more open to public debate than the nation state (Lecheler and Hinrichsen, 2010). They contend that the EU has the potential, and widely expect it to behave as a normative actor and live up to its commitments and ambitious rhetoric in the case of climate change, but also more generally (Interviews 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6).

High expectations were associated by the transnational media with the EU’s potential to draw on its global leadership and drive forward a fair and progressive agreement on climate change. Before the summit, the Union was praised for its key role in supporting the Kyoto Protocol and its ability to arrive at a common stance between member states, in this way serving as a model for other countries. On the other hand, the FT frequently covered disagreements between member states, which were framed as a major hurdle that could have damaged the EU’s capacity to act as a leader by example. It argued that the EU’s approach could have attained credibility and legitimacy globally only if member states managed to work together and synchronize with the efforts of the Commission. Among the member states, the three transnational publications underscored that Britain was at the forefront of the EU’s efforts, proposing deeper commitments than any other member state.

Throughout the six month period before the summit, the wavering position of the member states – which continuously moved from supporting a 30 per cent cut in emissions to only 20 percent and back – was seen by the transnational media as a sign of weakness that could have endangered the Union’s negotiating power and credibility in Copenhagen. Poland and Estonia were among the most vocal opponents of committing the EU to ambitious emissions reductions. They went as far as challenging in court the proposals of the Commission, in order to develop burden-sharing agreements that involved the new member states from Central and Eastern Europe being compensated for their emissions (EUObserver 30 October 2009). Conversely, in situations when the possibility of forging a common European position was bleak, being overrun by discussions of downgrading the EU’s commitments, the three transnational publications were keen to argue that the Union had the duty to set and promote ambitious goals in global climate change policy. On the other hand, especially EUObserver, drawing on the perceived support of public opinion, highlighted Europe’s duty and potential to lead in global climate change policy, because the environment, as a whole, was ‘one of the few areas where the EU has consistently won respect and recognition from its citizens’ (European Voice 19 October 2009). Moreover, with the adoption of the Lisbon treaty, the three publications were optimistic about the prospect of the Commission having a better position in coagulating a common EU approach, which would have increased its power and role in global climate change negotiations. Moreover, according to the interviews, through its reporting the transnational media reinforced the fact that the EU was justified in trying to secure a global deal on climate (Interviews 1, 2, 3, 6).

The transnational media also framed an expectation which argued that the EU should commit even more resources in order to tackle climate change globally. Journalists acted here as activists drawing on the EU’s own ambitions of leading in global climate change policy, together with the

pleas coming from various environmental groups for immediate action. In this way, they exerted pressure on EU policymakers to adopt even more ambitious goals and implement them. Moreover, transnational journalists' tendency to argue that the EU should engage even more in tackling climate change was fuelled by their belief in the ability of the Union to act in the international arena for the well-being of other peoples (Lecheler and Hinrichsen 2010).

The transnational media found itself in agreement with the Union's institutions all of which advocated an agreement where both developed and developing countries would 'contribute adequately according to their responsibilities and respective capabilities' (European Commissioner for Climate Action 2010b). The EU was praised for proposing that rich countries should step up and commit up to 50 billion Euros each year until 2020. However, failing to convince states such as the US, China, Australia or Japan to aid developing and poor countries, made the Union back down from its ambitious stance, committing to offer in the run-up to the Copenhagen summit only around 7 billion Euros over the following three years. This downgrade was severely criticized by the transnational media (EUObserver, 11 December 2009; European Voice, 3 December 2009). The three transnational publications viewed equality, burden-sharing and solidarity to be integral to any solution meant to tackle the effects of global climate change. The construction of this frame involved acknowledging that the larger part of the emissions which have caused changes in climate were produced during the 18th and 19th centuries by Western developed countries – contributing to their development and increasing the welfare of their citizens. Hence, rich countries were seen as having the duty to compensate developing countries for the cost that adopting progressive climate change policies would entail: 'the world's poorest countries who are already struggling to survive in a changing climate, need action, not more hollow promises' (EUObserver, 6 November 2009).

Putting the blame on other states for hampering the EU's efforts to drive forward a progressive agreement was a strategy employed by EU policymakers in order to pressure states such as China or the US, and build internal consensus (and confidence) within the EU. Numerous statements from EU policymakers were featured in the three publications in order to give weight to this frame: for example, according to Connie Hedegaard, Commissioner for Climate Action, 'climate change can be controlled only if all major emitters take action (...) the most convincing leadership Europe can show is to take tangible and determined action to become the most climate friendly region in the world' (European Commission 2010b). However, EU policymakers felt that the high degree of transparency that the EU creates in its approach to climate change by making expectations clear – to the media, the general public and other states – can have a damaging effect on its ability to negotiate with China or the US (Christoff 2010). Due to the activity of the media which publicizes and multiplies the Union's ambitions in climate change, the EU was deprived of any leverage in its intergovernmental negotiations with other states, which were aware of the EU's position and could disregard it. The reverse argument claims that enhanced publicity for the EU's approach to climate change can gather support from less influential states, which feel disaffected by the US and China's attitude (Kelemen 2010).

The outcome of the summit was largely framed by the transnational media as a failure, where the EU drafted ambitious plans which were not matched by policy successes. The transnational media defined the disappointing result of the Copenhagen summit as a problem which had to be urgently tackled in the near future. Moreover, the outcome of the Copenhagen summit prompted the media to argue that because the EU had not materialized its ambitious goals it had effectively lost its leadership in global climate change policy. For example, according to an environmental analysis featured in the FT, the summit represented a 'climate Waterloo for the EU' where 'there

was the motivation to be the clear driver in the negotiations, but they were more or less kicked out at the end' (Financial Times, 22 December 2009). The EU was criticized for not being able to take lead of the negotiations and not striking a deal 'directly with China, India, South Africa and Ethiopia' (European Voice, 14 January 2010). Nevertheless, EV maintained its supportive tone, highlighting that the most important achievement for the Union at the summit was captured by its ability to harmonize the attitude of the 27 member states before Copenhagen.

Articles also warned about a stalemate at Copenhagen in the run-up and during the summit, arguing that the EU didn't manage to build a successful negotiating position that would have allowed it to discuss on equal footing with China and the US. This frame was constructed by the transnational media featuring views from academia and the global NGO community which criticized the EU for not having a stronger position that could have made the agreement more transparent. However, the transnational media linked this frame to division among the member states which resonated with the views of the Commission. Here, the three transnational publications anticipated the breakdown of the negotiations, underscoring the Union's isolation and the tendency of a small number of the member states to promote different agendas during the summit (EUObserver, 3 May 2010).

Although a large number of articles considered that Europe's achievements at the Copenhagen summit fell short of its ambitious goals, in the six month period that followed the summit transnational journalists emphasized that the EU had the potential to regain its leadership position, or had not even lost it in the first place. The EU's official rhetoric argued that the Copenhagen summit represented a success for the Union and a crucial step forward in tackling global climate change. The Copenhagen accord was supported by 109 states, whilst small and island states took account and seemed to be convinced by the Union's global approach as it

showed the ‘determination of most countries to act on climate change now’ (European Commission 2010b). This frame was forged around a rather biased interpretation of the outcomes of the summit promoted by the European Commission (2010a). Here, the Union’s capacity to cooperate with small and island states or poor countries was perceived to be a major breakthrough that could have led in the near future to a binding global agreement. In this way transnational journalists fuelled and legitimized a new approach from the Commission based on convincing small and island states, rather than major actors (Interviews 1, 2, 4, 5, 6) – a strategy which proved successful during the subsequent summits in Cancun and Durban (Roberts, Parks and Vásquez, 2011).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The analysis points to the fact that transnational journalists, deeply immersed in the ‘Brussels bubble’, rarely go out of their way to criticize the EU’s approach to climate change. The ‘Brussels bubble’ infuses journalists with a sense of optimism regarding European integration and the EU’s ability and duty to play a key role in tackling the global effects of climate change. This policy area can be seen as the overlapping between supranationalism and intergovernmentalism. Consequently, this article contributes to the literature on media reporting within the European public sphere, but also sheds light on the effects of the ‘Brussels bubble’ on the reporting of the transnational media. This is in contrast with the reporting of national media within the member states which emphasized around the time of the Copenhagen summit to the EU’s inability to convince China or the US to bind themselves to a progressive agreement, or was characterized by Euroscepticism (Gavin and Marshall 2011; Christoff 2010; Curtin 2010).

On most occasions, the transnational media acted as a third arm of the EU, publicizing and aiming to gather public support for its policies (Interviews 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6).

The prime expectation put forward by the transnational media involved the EU's ability to drive forward negotiations on a progressive agreement at the Copenhagen summit. Accordingly, the transnational media underscored the magnitude of the international event and its overall importance and meaning for the future of peoples around the world. By presenting numerous statements from EU policymakers who expressed high hopes regarding the potential outcome of the summit, the transnational media reinforced and unpacked EU official discourse for the understanding of the general public. Linked to this, media frames expressed an expectation that if the EU was to lead in global climate change it would need to act united. At times, journalists working for the three publications also acted as activists pushing for a stronger EU presence in global climate change policy, because, as one article in EV put it, climate change was 'one of the few areas where the EU has consistently won respect and recognition from its citizens' (European Voice, 19 October 2009).

According to the journalists interviewed, their support for the EU's policy towards climate change was legitimized by the conviction that individuals across the member states supported a progressive and strong stance from the EU (Interviews 2, 3, 4, 5, 6). Moreover, transnational journalists' tendency to argue that the EU should engage even more in tackling climate change was fuelled by their belief in the ability of the Union to act in the international arena for the well-being of other peoples (Interviews 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6). Transnational journalists tend to perceive that the interest of individuals in European issues is continuously growing due to the increasing role of the Union in tackling the financial crisis, global climate change, or its overall status in the international arena (Interviews 1, 2, 3, 4, 5). The most pervasive role that transnational

journalists assume is that of educators or mediators within the public sphere. This provides them with the power to fill the knowledge gaps of individuals surrounding the EU and to teach them how to view the Union – and its policy towards climate change. More specifically, this involved refraining from vigorously criticizing the EU and not publishing articles that contain negative stereotypes or references to the Union.

Transnational journalists' networks of informal ties with EU policymakers within the 'Brussels bubble' allowed them to convey their perceived image of public opinion, which facilitated linking individuals to EU decision-making. Trust relations were enhanced by the fact that some EU policymakers dealing with climate change also had experience of working within the media (Interviews 2, 4, 5, 6). Information is usually acquired through informal means, which, in time, build a deep sense of trust between transnational journalists and EU policymakers. This leads to the fact that sometimes transnational journalists publish articles that are fed by the EU's institutions and support various policies. On the other hand, these relationships gave the opportunity to transnational journalists to put pressure on EU policymakers through their efforts to define two pervasive frames: around the crucial moment that Copenhagen represented in development of global climate change policy and the fact that the EU should make even more ambitious commitments (Interviews 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6). At times, journalists working for the three publications also acted as activists pushing for a stronger EU presence in global climate change policy. Journalists acted here as activists drawing on the EU's own ambitions of leading in global climate change policy, together with the pleas coming from various environmental groups for immediate action. In this way, they aimed to exert pressure on EU policymakers to adopt even more ambitious goals and implement them.

The three transnational publications claimed that the Union failed miserably and lost its leadership at the Copenhagen summit, being shunned by China and the US – in this way damaging the Union’s reputation. The failure of the Copenhagen summit was defined as a problem by the transnational media, which urged the EU to take visible steps in order to convince other states to bind themselves to a progressive agreement – in contrast to the frame focusing on the loss of leadership. In the six month period that followed the summit, the transnational media underscored that the EU still had the potential to lead in global climate change policy. In this way, transnational journalists fuelled and legitimized a new approach from the Commission based on convincing small and island states, rather than major actors – a strategy which proved successful during the subsequent summits in Cancun and Durban.

These findings also point to the fact that within the ‘Brussels bubble’ Eurosceptic journalism seems to be almost non-existent in the discourse of transnational media towards global climate change policy. Criticism towards the EU only surfaced in relation to the Union’s inability to live up to its ambitious goals or the tendency of some member states to act individually while disregarding the common values shared by the Union. Moreover, the Copenhagen summit should be seen as a point of reference for the way in which the transnational media presented the EU’s leadership in global climate change policy. During the next summits, in the background of the financial crisis, the EU and its member states afforded less attention to climate change. Hence, future research should enquire into whether coverage by the transnational media and its support for the EU’s leadership in global climate change policy has also decreased in this period. The focus on climate change could be complemented by comparing it with other policy areas or issue areas in the EU’s foreign policy. However, global climate change policy is made salient by the fact that is an issue area of foreign policy where member states are willing to a greater extent to

deal through the common framework of the EU and delegate more power to the Commission (Christoff 2010; Kilian and Elgström 2010).

A further step in the analysis would be to look at how social media is used in the ‘Brussels bubble’ by the EU’s institutions and other actors (such as transitional publications, lobby groups, civil society groups). Nonetheless, Lambrecht emphasizes that the effect of conversations within the ‘Brussels bubble’ on digital platforms have been limited as ‘<<normal>> citizens are excluded from debates and conversations delivered in highly technical <<jargon>>’. He concludes that social networking has transformed the ‘Brussels bubble’, but has not expanded it or made it more inclusive (Lambrecht 2012). Moreover, as Gareth (2014) shows the number of national correspondents in Brussels has been constantly rising in the background of the financial crisis, future research could also focus on the discourse of national media and their correspondents within the ‘Brussels bubble’, and their reporting on the EU’s global climate change policy or other policy areas.

NOTES

- 1 In this article the term ‘media’ is used mostly as a singular noun to express the aggregate of journalists and publications – together with the underlying communities and institutions they create. ‘Media’ is also rarely used throughout the text as a plural noun to refer to the plurality of publications within the transnational landscape.
- 2 Transnational media are considered here to aim to transcend national boundaries and address audiences in more than one EU member state.
- 3 The FT refers here to its European edition which should be distinguished from the British edition. It is mostly similar to the British version, but has a larger emphasis on European issues.
- 4 Owned by the Economist Group.
- 5 Simultaneously, it tries to be a ‘paper of record’, following closely and mapping the activity of the EU’s institutions.
- 6 Available at <http://euobserver.com/static/about>.
- 7 The similarity in coverage between the three publications adds validity to the comparative approach employed here. However, journalists writing for the EUObserver benefit from less

stringent space restrictions – due to the nature of online media – which allow them to develop more detailed analyses. Articles published in EV very often also contain complex analyses because of its weekly publication cycle.

- 8 The interviews and questionnaires were conducted between April 2011 and March 2013. Since around two journalists from each publication in the sample covered the issue of climate change this cross-section paints a reliable picture.

Interviewee list:

1. Freelancer and Financial Times, interview and questionnaire, Brussels, 08/04/2011.
2. Freelancer and EUObserver.com, interview and questionnaire, Brussels, 12/04/2011.
3. Freelancer and European Voice, interview and questionnaire, Brussels, 09/04/2011.
4. European Voice, interview and questionnaire, 26/03/2013.
5. Freelancer and EUObserver.com, questionnaire, 26/03/2013.
6. Financial Times, questionnaire, 27/03/2013.

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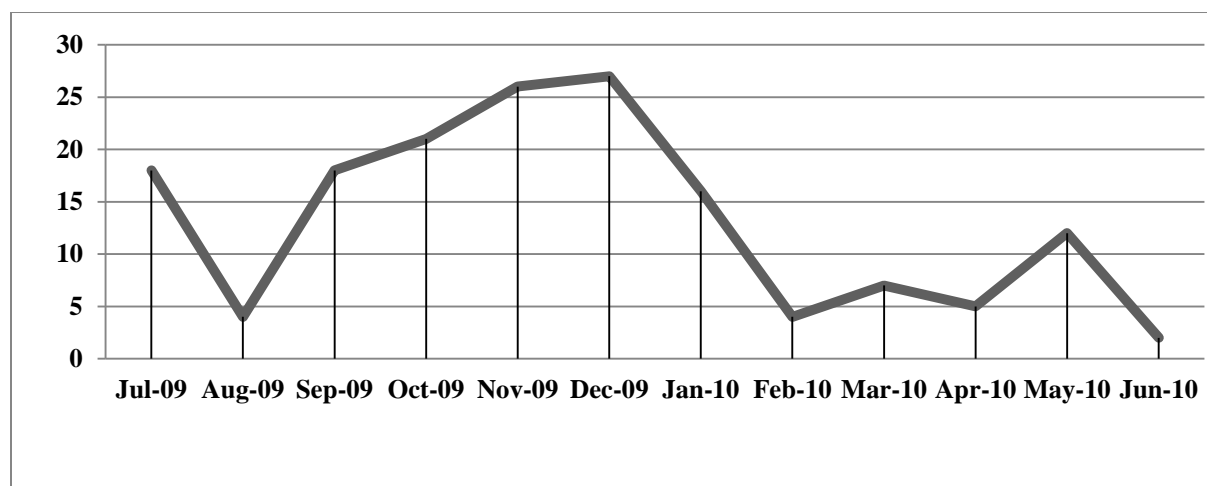
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Figure 1: Coverage in transnational media of climate change (number of articles/month).



Source: Author's own calculations

Table 1: Frames present in the transnational media – climate change policy¹

Frame	Number of articles	Rate of occurrence (%)	EUObserver (%)*	European Voice (%)*	Financial Times (%)*
Climate change – medium to long term threat	156	97.50	100.0	93.00	97.30
Disappointing outcome at Copenhagen	38**	80.90**	85.70***	70.60***	88.90***
Copenhagen – a crucial moment	123	76.90	86.30	58.10	78.40
The EU lost its global leadership after Copenhagen	32**	68.10**	71.40***	58.80***	77.80***
Climate change is happening now	102	63.80	66.30	58.10	64.90
The EU is the only actor that can forge a global agreement on climate change	101	63.10	68.80	65.10	48.60
The EU still has the potential to globally lead in climate change	28**	59.60**	76.20***	41.20***	55.60***

¹ Table 1 highlights that the variation in the discourse of the three transnational publications was low, except in relation to a small number of frames which are discussed in this section.

The EU should do more	92	57.50	57.50	67.40	45.90
Blaming other states	89	55.60	62.50	30.20	70.30
Equal climate change deal	62	38.80	46.30	37.20	24.30

Source: Author's own calculations.

Notes: * Percentages show the proportion of articles from each newspaper that feature the frames identified.

**Takes into account the articles published after the Copenhagen summit (N=47).

***Takes into account the articles published after the Copenhagen summit: EUObserver (N=21); European Voice (N=17); FT (N=9).

Source: Actor's own calculations: (N=160) / EUObserver (N=80); European Voice (N=43); FT (N=37).