



Europe is all around you

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Practical tools for the practice of local European journalism

Jean Lemaître,
Director of IHECS International & Formation continue

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I. A worthwhile challenge

Unsure if it's helpful to include Europe in local information? Well, yes it is!

It's worthwhile for two reasons:

- you can raise people's awareness of (European) issues that affect them directly but from which they may feel disconnected: this is the democratic and political challenge;
- you can create new professional opportunities for an emerging generation of young journalists, expand the local media audience (local print media, radio and TV, web media, community and public media): this is the economic and social challenge.

The democratic challenge

- You may or may not be a fan of the European Union (EU). But there is no denying that it affects our daily lives even at the local level – be it work, study, health, retirement, the environment, social security, Internet or transport. The EU is everywhere we are. And the EU takes an interest in us, even when we show no interest in it. Some 70% of the legislation in force in each Member State comes directly from European legislation.
- The EU started out with few powers. But over the years, that has changed radically –with the single market, euro, the six original Member States now numbering 27, a European Parliament elected by universal suffrage, and more powers.
- The EU is not an unchanging technical concept. It is a political construction capable of evolving, moving and improving – and its form is shaped by organised pressure. Although citizens do not get involved in defining EU policies, others do this on their behalf. But not necessarily in the way that citizens would like. Brussels is the world's second-largest lobbying capital. Some 15,000 lobbyists, three-quarters of whom represent the interests of 'big business', are always looking to influence European legislative projects to match their own interests – often non-transparently. There are over two lobbyists for every European civil servant with a university degree. The ratio rises to 20 lobbyists for every European Parliamentarian. For every journalist with EU accreditation, there are 10 lobbyists. Around 1,400 journalists are accredited to the European institutions. Working as European correspondents, they cover Europe more from an institutional angle, yet still only represent a tiny minority of the media (above all national media) in European countries.
- In reality, the more power the EU acquires, the less interested all the EU's citizens seem to be in it. Since 1979, when the first European Parliament elections were held by universal suffrage, the participation level in these

elections has continually fallen. In 1999 this rate dropped below 50% and has fallen ever since, tumbling to 43% in 2009.

- To 'communicate' (in the widest sense of the word) Europe to its citizens, three main types of 'mediator' (intermediaries) can explain anything in general terms by adapting their message to their targets: teachers, civil society organisations, etc. ... and journalists.

The economic and social challenge for local media

Many people think that media coverage of Europe turns off audiences and readers. There is some truth in that. But if Europe is viewed in the right way, by linking political and institutional questions to practical and local concerns, this coverage can be very lively. Readership may even be increased, offering new opportunities to the media willing to get involved in this adventure.

The 'European niche' (local European journalism) can also open up new job opportunities to young journalists. However, these journalists should also be project 'organisers' – capable of being proactive, making proposals to news editors, helping to change mentalities through their initiatives, and so on.

➤ Three factors make the case for investing in local European journalism:

1) In the medium term, there will be greater demand for local European information, linked to some emerging 'major' trends.

Below are two practical examples, highlighting new areas where we can expect more Europe.

SCHOOLS. Ministries of education will increasingly encourage teachers to include Europe in their classes. This will result in the media publishing more maps, teaching material and so on for both teachers and students.

SOCIAL ASSOCIATIONS, TOWNS. The EU spends a third of its budget on European Structural Funds. They finance projects for poorer regions or social insertion projects for the most disadvantaged social categories. Projects like these (which are run by associations, companies, regional bodies, etc.) receive a great deal of European money and are managed in a highly decentralised manner. There are thousands of them across Europe. Nowadays though, the European Commission includes a condition: in return for all this money, the projects must make extensive reference to Europe – wherever these projects are operating. Project owners are under obligation to contact the media, put together communication plans, and demonstrate the impact of these plans. So there is plenty of fresh European material for local journalists to mine here.

2) Key events coming soon

- The Belgian presidency of the EU, from 1 July 2010 to 31 December 2010.
- 2010: European Year for Combating Poverty
- 2011: European Year of Volunteering

3) The European question, a way of increasing interest in Europe

It is said that Europe is an unattractive subject and that European topics cannot be 'sold'. But that is just not true....

In spring 2005, France's referendum campaign on plans for a European constitutional treaty underlined the extent to which Europe can engage the wider public – and boost newspaper sales.

Yes or No? The outcome of the French vote was uncertain and dramatic. There was lively debate about it across the country. The media played a major role in keeping people informed. Many French citizens voted. A book featuring the Treaty's provisions and a range of comments on it sold a million copies. A website/blog on the topic, written by an anonymous teacher from the south of France, received 600,000 hits over several months.

Two things explain all this excitement:

- the media's ability to shine a spotlight on the link between European and national challenges
- the media's ability to get Europe talking (showing the contradictions and opposing viewpoints).

II. Local European journalism, a promising niche. Fair enough... But which areas really need more European information?

➤ Which gaps need to be filled?

Some people say that we already have too much information on Europe and that we just don't need any more. But that is plainly wrong!

The truth is that there are areas where we have either too much information or too little information. It all depends what you are looking at. As far as 'local European journalism' is concerned, the emptiest 'areas' are by far the most promising niche. These are the areas with glaring information gaps on Europe, despite the tremendous public demand for such information.

➤ Four variables

Generally speaking, everything depends on several variables: information flow, information timeliness, information subject, and the target audience for European information.

If we place these four main variables into box tables, we can see the volume varies significantly – depending on the different levels of European information.

Put another way, depending which boxes are taken into consideration, there can be either 'too little information' or 'too much information'.

➤ European information flows

There are three kinds:

- Top-down information, provided to citizens by the European institutions and/or national institutions;
- Bottom-up information: opinions are gathered from citizens/or local events, to ensure they are taken into account in European superstructures;
- Horizontal information: opinions and events are exchanged between European regions.

Note that as you move further to the right along the table, the volume of European information becomes scarcer (from the darkest to the lightest boxes).

Top-down information ↓	Bottom-up information ↑	Horizontal Information ↔
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➤ Timeliness of European information

Three levels:

- after the taking of a European decision
- during the taking of a European decision
- before the taking of a European decision

The same applies here: the further to the right you move along the table, the scarcer the volume of European information.

Information after the decision →	Information during decision ↔	→ Information before the decision
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➤ European information subjects

We can see four main European information subjects:

- Explaining the decisions, legislation, policies
- Communicating the financial opportunities
- Encouraging debate and active European citizenship
- Raising awareness of the situation and culture in each European country

As you move further down the table, the volume of European information grows scarcer.

Explaining the decisions, legislation, policies
Communicating the financial opportunities
Encouraging debate and active European citizenship
Raising awareness of the situation and culture in each European country

➤ Target audience for information

GEOGRAPHICALLY

The Schuman roundabout in Brussels, in the heart of its European quarter, could be said to be 'more distant' from the city's working-class neighbourhoods (such as Molenbeek, just four km away as the crow flies) than the centre of London or Milan.

Central regions, Capitals of the Member States
Peripheral regions

As you move further down the table, the volume of European information grows scarcer.

SOCIALLY

Upper and highest educated social classes
Middle classes, middle education level
Poorest classes, lowest education level

As you move further down the table, the volume of European information grows scarcer.

➤ Geographic and economic crossing

	Central regions	Peripheral regions
Upper classes	Greatest volume	Middle area
Middle classes	Middle area	Middle area
Working classes	Middle area	Lowest volume

As you move further to the right and down the table, the volume of European information grows scarcer. So from a journalistic viewpoint, it makes more sense to 'invest' in the boxes below and to the right... (low volume).

➤ Three tables superimposed: flow, timeliness, and subject

	Top-down flow/After	Bottom-up flow/During	Horizontal flow/Before
Legislation, policies, decisions	Highest volume	High volume	Middle area
Finance	High volume	High volume	Middle area
Active European citizenship	Middle area	Low volume	Low volume
Raising awareness of other countries	Low volume	Low volume	Lowest volume of European information

III. What approach angles should be adopted for 'local European journalism'?

Two practical challenges

In broad terms, the interesting 'niches' have been identified (flow, timeliness, audience, subject). They are the niches that are especially worthwhile for a journalist covering the EU from a local viewpoint.

The next question is: How do I actually approach the subject? This raises two further practical questions:

- How do I find the right approach angle?
- How do I find the right sources of European information?

Local European journalism, it's essential!

In many ways, journalists covering Europe are the very essence of the profession, because they bring together the human and political dimensions.

Yet this basic challenge can be taken a step further... by practising local European journalism.

This requires the combination and integration of three key tasks:

1. Popularising especially complex subjects. Explaining tricky concepts in simple terms and clear language, and refusing to use official language and jargon. It can be a really tough task turning (administrative) 'English' into '(good) English'.

2. Having a critical mind and a feeling for nuance: these things are crucial for a journalist. But where Europe is concerned, there is a strong temptation to succumb to the juggernaut being driven by the communicators (there are many of them) and propagandists (there are even more of them).

3. Linking policy to concrete matters: without doubt, this is the most important function for those practising 'local European journalism'. Traditionally (and it has to be said that many journalists do conform), covering Europe (remember there are 1,400 European journalists accredited to the institutions in Brussels, from all 27 Member States) is the hardest task:

- showing how Europe (separately from the Member States) makes its mark in very concrete and daily ways on the lives of the majority of its citizens ('It affects us all');
- linking institutional Europe to the lives of everyone.

Connecting these two aspects is harder still, due to the great distance between the highly informed minority (elite) working in the heart of the European machine (the Brussels 'village' around Schuman) and the rest of the EU's 500 million or so inhabitants – who speak 23 languages, live in 27 different countries, and are part of a territory that is two-thirds rural.

Eight tips, in random order

... to help you combine these three vital tasks

... and showing the broad range of potential approach angles and ways of doing something.

1. Two possibilities: you can start with a local event and try to use it as an illustration of something happening at the European level. Or you can start with a European issue, before going on to show its local impact. The value of starting with Europe and adding something 'local' is that you can build on news, on a subject that already features prominently in the media.
2. Covering Europe from a local viewpoint is helpful, not only when explaining a decision, but before a decision is taken – so as to explain the challenges and get a reaction from the people involved. You could call this an 'alarm function'.
3. Getting Europeans to talk is always beneficial. Show the challenges, the arguments FOR and AGAINST.
4. Take an educational approach: use maps, graphics, documents and so on to explain European issues in the simplest (but not simplistic) way. And do this in the most practical way possible, focusing on the majority of the population. See the above-mentioned 'teachers' and 'students' niche.
5. Sharing Europe also means covering Europe 'horizontally'. This sort of coverage differs from that for a subject of local interest, because it involves showing how people experience and solve the same issue in other towns and cities across Europe.
6. Show the very practical and local impact of projects financed with European money. We already mentioned the ERDF, the European Regional Development Fund (which accounts for a third of the EU budget). There are numerous European projects in the fields of education, youth, training, culture, citizenship, etc., taking place near you. They can provide good European human-interest and society subjects. Also worth covering are school exchanges, partnerships and twinning between neighbourhoods of cities in different countries, European voluntary service, etc.

7. Cover Europe from a fun (and popular) angle. Competitions, games and so on make good subjects.
8. The EU is an institutional machine and the European Commission (the EU's 'government') is not the only part of it. The Member States play a key role in the decision-making process, just like the European Parliament.

IV. How do I quickly and easily find the right sources of European information?

1. The difficulties you will face

You should know how to find European information quickly and easily

- head over to the portal europa.eu
- europa.eu includes information that is classified by institution, administratively, etc.
- the site is a goldmine of useful information, but beware of getting lost among the wealth of information there!

You should know how to find European information that is comprehensible, speaks for itself, and is useful for journalists

SEARCHING IN YOUR OWN LANGUAGE

Problems:

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- English increasingly dominates all the European institutions and the Brussels village around the Schuman roundabout.
- English is the leading language on the europa.eu portal. But any official information featured on this portal (white papers, green papers, legislative proposals, etc.) must be made available in all 23 official EU languages.

Solutions:

- You can find lots of European information near you, in your own language.
- The best contact is the nearest Europe Direct centre. Next identify the following sources:
 - European advisors in local neighbourhoods and ministries
 - National federations that belong to European confederations

- European Parliamentarians, elected regional officials, members of the EU's Committee of the Regions, and members of the European Economic and Social Committee.

GETTING PAST THE ADMINISTRATIVE 'JARGON'

Problems:

- The official European articles found on europa.eu are often drafted in an abstract and technical style, making them hard to understand.

Solutions:

- To understand the scope of a European policy or legislative proposal, or to grasp their real impact on people's daily lives, try contacting a European interest group (union, managerial, community). The city of Brussels is home to around 5,000 of these bodies – which focus on decoding policy or legislative proposals. Their task is to make sense of and explain such proposals to their member. They also look at the proposals' potential impact on their own areas of European interest.
- In the non-governmental sector alone, Brussels has some 1,000 European representative organisations. They have multilingual offices and will be delighted to discuss European proposals with journalists. These European offices have offices or federations in the Member States. In the national office of these organisations, you can also contact the person responsible for 'European liaison'. The advantage is that they speak your language.
- To 'play your trump card' and identify a useful contact organisation, for the subject you have selected, check out the links below. The best solution is to identify the European organisation (a register with the details of the organisations can be checked, using keywords).

AVOIDING THE PROPAGANDA TRAPS

Problems:

- The European institutions' communicators can provide lots of useful information. But this information is often carefully worded, in order to influence the viewpoint of journalists or to disguise certain issues. Do not be satisfied with a single viewpoint.

Solutions:

- There are numerous solutions, but they can be time-consuming. If you want to throw some light on the issues, grasp any contradictions, understand the 'for' and 'against' arguments of a European project, then there are two

avenues open to you. You can put your questions to a civil society organisation working at the European level (see above), or you can ask the European Parliament's political groups (they all have a press contact).

GETTING PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Problems:

- It goes without saying that readers/listeners/viewers want something that will be practical and meaningful to them. But in terms of European information, it can be tough to find practical examples for illustrating a topic.

Solutions:

- The technical assistance offices (TAO) in the Member States are an interface between the European Commission, which funds the projects, and the projects. To identify a European project close to you, try contacting a TAO. These projects are often devoted to improving 'mobility' between different countries, especially the mobility of young people. They are a great source of quotes about Europe and are located close to you.
- European opinion surveys can provide very useful material.
- European statistics can be viewed online via Eurostat.
- Official European documents, available online via europa.eu, often include in their 'expected results' (first part) useful and concrete figures.
- The europa.eu portal features many European studies. These often include useful statistics and figures for journalists.

GETTING A VARIETY OF DIFFERENT INFORMATION

Problems:

- The European decision-making machinery is bewilderingly complex, and for the average man about as clear as a bottle of ink. How does anyone find what they are looking for?

Solutions:

- You need not become a specialist, but should try to acquire some understanding (as a generalist) of the European decision-making machinery. This will help you become a practitioner of 'local European journalism'. To keep things simple, imagine the three points of the institutional triangle: the European Commission (the EU's government) alone may put forward

legislative proposals; the Council of the European Union (made up of national ministers) has most of the legislative power; and the European Parliament, which in some areas (also known as 'co-decision') has gained powers equal to those of the Council of the European Union.

- By way of example, anywhere the environment is concerned, for everything to do with the 'European single market', and for some social policy, the European Parliament is part of 'co-decision'. Thus it now does more than give an opinion. In cases like these, it is well worthwhile investigating the opinion of the Parliament and its different political groups, since these will have a real influence on decisions taken.
- In every case, it is well to remember that each institution plays its own role in the European decision-making process and its views may differ from those of the other institutions.
- Don't forget the consultative role played by two European bodies: the Committee of the Regions, and the European Economic and Social Committee. Both institutions are made up of 'advisors' appointed by the EU Member States. Here's a tip: identify the 'advisors' who are geographically closest to you. These advisors can be excellent sources of information of specific subjects. This is particularly true for the members of the Committee of the Regions (notably mayors, regional representatives, etc.), who play an increasingly important role in the construction of Europe.

2. Practical tips

1) Basic general information

<http://ec.europa.eu>

Information guide on all the sources:

http://europa.eu/geninfo/info/guide/index_en.htm

Europe Direct call centre: 00800 67891011 and mail@europe-direct.cec.eu.int

Free of charge. But the information provided this way comes (after sending an email) rather slowly and in most cases just links to a page on the European institutions' portal site, <http://europa.eu>. Help is offered in all 23 official EU languages.

Eurojargon: http://europa.eu/abc/eurojargon/index_fr.htm

This site helps decode baffling European terms and jargon.

European Commission offices in the Member States: Go to Europa -> Commission section -> Commission at work -> Departments -> Communication Directorate-General.

Note: the European Commission 'representation offices' are located in the Member States and the European Commission 'delegation offices' are located in countries outside the EU.

2) Europe Direct decentralised centres

These centres welcome visitors and one of their missions is to help local journalists. They can provide basic information, look for specific information, offer advice on the best avenues for follow-up, etc.

http://ec.europa.eu/eurodirect/index_en.htm

3) European press releases, European press room

Go to Europa -> 'Media centre' -> Through 'EU press services' you will find the virtual 'Press room', which gives instant access to the RAPID press releases, Podcasts and so on.

4) Contact the European interest groups and their national federations

To search the European NGOs and other European civil society organisations:

Go to Europa -> European Commission -> Commission at work -> Departments -> Secretariat General -> Transparency -> List of European interest groups = Register.

5) Understanding policy proposals, decision-making, voting etc.

Understanding the policies: http://ec.europa.eu/policies/index_en.htm

Understanding the passage of legislation: EUR-Lex (Commission), ORE-Lex (European Parliament) more detailed, CEIL (summaries)

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/oel/>

6) Numbers, studies and statistics

Eurobarometer: EU surveys, www.ec.europa.eu/public_opinion

Eurostat: European statistics, www.eurostat.eu

7) European Parliamentarians

The European Parliament's information offices in the Member States

European Parliament site: <http://www.europarl.eu>

Emailing Parliamentarians: firstname.name@europarl.europa.eu

List of European Parliamentarians:

www.europarl.europa.eu/members/pubic.do?language=EN

8) How to contact a civil servant at the European Commission

Internal directory: <http://ec.europa.eu/staffdir/index.htm>

Email for civil servants: firstname.name@ec.europa.eu

Telephone: +32 2 299 11 11

Inter-institutional directory: <http://europa.eu/whoiswho>

9) Texts under discussion

Viewpoints of European civil society and documents that are being consulted

YOUR VOICE: http://ec.europa.eu/yourvoice/consultations/index_en.htm

All the Commission's official documents submitted for European consultation can be found here. The site includes comments from the various organisations offering advice and is very useful for understanding a legislative proposal, issues around it, the positive and negative sides, and the practical impact on citizens.

This site is most useful when you are setting out the different sides of an EU debate and informing people BEFOREHAND, before a policy decision is taken. So it is useful background when you want to inform people and stimulate active European citizenship.

Euractiv.com: a leading European online information agency. Access is free of charge. You can receive daily updates by email. Euractiv is well structured and easy to navigate, and offers user-friendly searches by theme.

10) National technical assistance offices

To reach the technical assistance offices in the Member States, go to the sites of the European Commission's Directorate-Generals.

Examples include youth programmes, education, youth, citizens for Europe, culture, media, citizens projects, European voluntary service: visit the site of the European Commission's DG Education and Culture; all the TAO addresses are listed.

11) Information 'by' and 'for' young people

Eurodesk, European federation of youth-information centres:

<http://www.eurodesk.org/edesk/welcome.do>

12) Getting the viewpoint of European unions

European Trade Union Confederation: <http://www.etuc.org>

13) Free online European information newsletters

Newsletter Europa, twice a month, English, French, German:

Press-newsletter@ec.europa.eu

(free subscription): http://europa.eu/newsletter/previous_en.htm

14) Café Babel

European network of young journalists. Articles online. Organises 'café meetings' for European citizens, and many debates: <http://www.cafebabel.com>