

THE FUTURE OF EUROPE LOOKS BRIGHT

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“**F**east of the awards” (my translation) is an article that was published by the Dutch national newspaper *De Volkskrant* (Van Ewijk, 2014) and depicts the chances that eight different candidates – with eight different nationalities – have to gain a position in the European Commission. Since the division of positions is framed as a contest between different member states, the article is a clear instance of how the media can create and strengthen division between the different member states of the European Union.

The article shows a clearly national focus, in which nationality is made explicit both verbally, through subheadings with the names of the countries, and visually, through pictures of national flags. The division of portfolios is compared to a sporting competition in which the contestants defend their country’s dignity. They are drawn with medals around their necks. Phrases such as: “The Spanish have hit the jackpot” and “It seems that the Dutch have won the first prize” indicate a European Union of rivals rather than allies. This kind of framing suggests that the most important characteristic of politicians is their nationality rather than their competence. This hinders a common European sense of unity.

Framing that focuses on national aspects rather than European ones should not necessarily be considered the result of a reluctance to relate to people in other member states. In many cases, national framing is the direct outcome of the audience’s decreasing interest in current affairs and journalists’ attempts to deal with this trend. Such attempts include simplification of the news and disproportional attention paid to dramatic aspects. The game framing that was used in *De Volkskrant*’s article is an understandable attempt to try to popularise a political topic that is generally considered complicated and dull. But despite the comprehensibility of such a practice, the consequences stand in the way of fruitful European collaboration.

One way to deal differently with the audience’s disinterest in European politics is by ensuring a higher level of basic understanding of the field, which could and should be enabled through more attention being paid to politics in educational curriculums. If a higher degree of common

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understanding among members of the audience can be assumed, this leaves more possibilities open to journalists to report substantially on developments and events at the European level. This would help to avoid a simplified, nationalistic focus and enable a move towards more nuanced coverage.

Despite many concerns that were raised during the seminar, I believe a certain degree of optimism is justified when it comes to the future of European collaboration. History has shown that the presence of a common enemy or threat plays a great role in strengthening ties between allies. In the context of ever-increasing globalisation, increasing competition from emerging economies and the threat of terrorism, European countries will increasingly realise that their commonalities are stronger and more important than their differences.

References

Van Ewijk, Willem. "Super, die commissaris". *De Volkskrant* (6 September 2014).