



# The Role of Mass Media in Building Perceptions of EU-GCC Relations and Related Impacts

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## Introduction

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the European Union (EU) have been trying since 1989 to strengthen the links between the two regions, including by moving towards a Free Trade Agreement (FTA). Unfortunately, this agreement has not seen the light to date, and the negotiations are likely to remain stalled for the time being. However, in the past few years Europe has been the recipient of substantial investments from the Gulf region. The Gulf, in turn, has been a destination for many European companies and businessmen looking for an untapped and fast-developing market. These economic and financial developments have attracted great attention from the media that contributed to the spreading of related perceptions and misperceptions. Hence the capability of the media, as relevant theories affirm, to affect the economic environment, in our case by standing in the way of sustaining and fostering this business partnership through their influence on public opinion. Indeed, as several media theories<sup>1</sup> have proved through the years, mass media play a significant role in shaping and reflecting public opinion, perceptions, and stereotypes. Recently, Edward Herrmann<sup>2</sup> exposed the link between the media's ability to shape opinion trends and perceptions with the routes of international investment, providing the theoretical ground on which our analysis is based.

In the case of EU-GCC relations, the lack of effective communication and significant media exposure has been acknowledged already in the relevant literature as a key factor at the root of several setbacks in the interregional dialogue. However, this paper argues that even if this obstacle has been acknowledged, very little has been done to concretely overcome it, in particular within the media environment directly, and that under the current economic conjuncture it becomes more urgent to take action.

1 Mark Balnaves, Stephanie Hemelryk Donald, Brian Shoemith, *Media Theories and Approaches. A global Perspective*, Basingstoke and New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009; James W. Carey, *Communication as Culture. Essays on Media and Society*, Revised ed., New York, Routledge, 2009; David Holmes, *Communication Theory. Media, Technology and Society*, London, Sage, 2005.

2 Edward S. Herrman and Robert W. McChesney, *Global Media. The New Missionaries of Corporate Capitalism*, London and Washington, Cassell, 1997.

The paper will start by providing an overview of the role of the media in transmitting images and perceptions. It will then describe the intensified economic and financial exchanges between the two regions and the stereotypes that have subsequently spread across the public discourse, pointing to their disruptive potential. Later on the analysis will provide the results of a survey conducted among journalists from the EU and the GCC countries and a focus group held with them at a later stage. By interviewing the sources of news and content-creators in the media environment, i.e., the journalists, it was clear how their knowledge, understanding, and familiarity with the other region were poor. This lack of familiarity inevitably makes the newsmakers more vulnerable to a misuse of the power and functions of the media and affects a high-quality coverage. Our assessment calls for concrete measures that could enhance the accuracy of the image of the other region and possibly clear the stereotypes rooted in the general public, with a view to facilitating smoother interregional relations.

## 1. Contextualising EU-GCC Relations and the Role of the Media

### *The importance of accurate communication*

Undoubtedly the rise of advertising and the diffusion of mass media profoundly changed communication, as well as the modes, paces, and magnitude of the diffusion of messages to society. The mediated space has become through the years a space of social practices, acquiring a reflexive and dialectical relation with society by being a socially-conditioned tool and conditioning society at the same time.<sup>3</sup>

As various theorists have proven, mass media indeed play a significant role in shaping public perceptions on a variety of important issues, mainly through two of their main functions: agenda-setting, i.e., the information that is dispensed through them, and framing, i.e., the interpretations they place upon this information. The agenda-setting function is the first step in public opinion-shaping. It dictates what is newsworthy, and how and when it will be reported. According to the theory, through this function mass media have the power to put issues on the public agenda and therefore to decide which issues will become a matter of public opinion and which will not.<sup>4</sup> At an international level, it has been proven that news exposure was significantly related to positive perceptions of a country and to the perception of this country as successful. In addition, due to the fact that for many people the only source of knowledge about the world is the press, if a nation mainly receives negative coverage, the negative attributes mentioned in the news reports will cause individuals to mentally link those attributes to the nation itself and vice versa.<sup>5</sup> More specifically, by portraying a

3 David Holmes, *Communication Theory*, cit.

4 Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, "Are We Asking the Right Questions? Developing Measurement from Theory: The Influence of the Spiral of Silence on Media Effects Research", in Cees J. Hamelink and Olga Linné (eds.), *Mass Communication Research. On Problems and Policies*, Norwood, Ablex Publishing, 1994, p. 97-120.

5 John T. McNelly and Fausto Izcaray, "International News Exposure and Images of Nations", in *Journalism Quarterly*, Vol. 63, No. 3 (September 1986), p. 546-553. See also Matthew A. Baum and Philip

certain interpretation of reality, the media can shape the public perception of that reality to be more in line with their interpretation<sup>6</sup> through framing. Framing is when a story or piece of news is portrayed in a particular way and is meant to sway the audience's attitude one way or the other. Lakoff systematised this framing through his narration theory.<sup>7</sup> According to him, narrations are made of a script and mental *frames* that include roles and settings. Some schemes of narrations are innate due to their connection with a people's cultural background and can be automatically recalled in the audience's mind simply by using the right words, that is to say, by presenting the events in a way that connects them to a particular narration. For example, everyone knows about the narration "from rags to riches": these words automatically recall the idea of a man, born poor, who managed thanks to his capabilities to gain wealth. Generally, the narration generates esteem for that man, even without knowing anything about him, as well as empathy for his previous condition and relief for the happy ending. This is precisely what happens when a narration is activated in our brain. Furthermore, Lakoff infers that most of the time the public debate is not understood by what the audience hears but by the unconscious interpretation that is given because, when a narration is accepted, the facts that contradict it are ignored or concealed. When the framing is built around a particular political ideology, mass media can easily become a very powerful vehicle for instrumental stereotypes. This is mainly due to their strong ability to convey a particular set of beliefs, values, and traditions (an entire way of life) as socially desirable, i.e., in line with the general opinion of the group that the viewer identifies with.

From an economic perspective, as Herman and McChesney<sup>8</sup> explained, the characteristics and functions of the media make them an indispensable component of the global market economy. For example, mass media have the power to influence consumer trends – i.e., economic trends – both at the national and international level by shaping their social desirability. Most importantly, they have a significant ability to shape the general public's perceptions of international business, investments, and companies by acting as gatekeepers, thus controlling their exposures, as well as by framing them through a (positive or negative) political or cultural script. This function is known as cultivation of perceptions, and its effects can be very powerful in encouraging a given community to welcome or reject international business. On the other hand, the way a given country is portrayed can be instrumental in encouraging or discouraging investors to bet on it. In the Gulf context in particular, where often the biggest investments come from state-owned investment funds sustained through revenues from the country's national resources, investing abroad can easily be turned by the media into a political issue in front of the general public.

B.K. Potter, "The Relationships Between Mass Media, Public Opinion, and Foreign Policy: Toward a Theoretical Synthesis", in *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 11, 2008, p. 39-65, [http://www.hks.harvard.edu/fs/mbaum/documents/BaumPotter\\_AnnualReview2008.pdf](http://www.hks.harvard.edu/fs/mbaum/documents/BaumPotter_AnnualReview2008.pdf)

6 Rowland Lorimer with Paddy Scannell, *Mass Communications. A Comparative Introduction*, Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press, 1994.

7 George Lakoff, *The Political Mind. Why you can't understand 21st-century politics with an 18th-century brain*, New York, Viking, 2008.

8 Edward S. Herrman and Robert W. McChesney, *Global Media*, cit.

## *Business and perceptions*

In response to the events of 9/11, the United States' government embarked on a series of counter-terrorism policies, such as imposing substantial restrictions on the movement of capitals, freezing even slightly suspected accounts held in American banks, and introducing much stricter border controls. These kinds of measures, particularly harsh on Muslim Arabs, stirred up significantly the Gulf domestic opposition to the regimes' dependency on the US, actually damaging economic and financial interests that investors from the Gulf had in the US.<sup>9</sup> In response, the Gulf states began to move their investments to European countries, and particularly to the United Kingdom. The move came in part because Gulf investors saw Europe as having a safer and more favorable financial climate with bigger potential returns as well as being more welcoming of their investments. After 2008, European governments started working to facilitate these investments as much as possible in order to recover from the harsh financial and economic crisis that had hit the Eurozone. Accordingly, the number and extent of Gulf investments in Europe has skyrocketed, and the idea of GCC countries' nationals as the "big spenders" has become more vivid.<sup>10</sup>

In 2008 the Abu Dhabi investment group bought Manchester City FC, and a couple of years later the Spanish football club Malaga became property of the Al-Thani family from Qatar. The UAE has also invested in the UK through a Masdar investment to construct the largest offshore wind farm in the world, and made sporting investments in the Olympic Village and London's ExCel Centre. In 2012, Gulf investment reached \$160 billion in Great Britain alone, of which more than a third came from Saudi Arabia, a significant share from Qatar, and to a lesser extent from the UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Oman. The most sensational case, though, both in terms of coverage in the news and the extent of investments relative to its economic size, has been Qatar. Harrods, London's largest and most venerable department store, has been bought by Qatar's Sovereign Wealth Fund for \$2.2 billion. The Fund has also bought all or large parts of Sainsbury's supermarket, Porsche, Volkswagen, Barclay's bank, the London Stock Exchange, Canary Wharf, and Credit Suisse, to name but a few acquisitions. Qatar invested significantly in France as well, targeting major companies like Vinci and Veolia. Qatar Investment Authority has become the sole shareholder of Paris-Saint German, and Qatar Airways is now the official airline of the Tour de France. The Qatari-French deals were extensively written about in the French press, causing a stir and raising eyebrows, especially following the announcement of a €150 million allocation for investments in French suburbs inhabited by a Muslim majority, *les banlieues*. As soon as they were announced, the French media launched a fierce campaign against these investments,

9 Helle Malmvig, "An Unlikely Match or A Marriage in the Making? EU-GCC Relations in a Changing Security Environment", in *DIIS Briefs*, November 2006, [http://www.diis.dk/files/Publications/Briefs2006/hma\\_eu\\_gcc\\_relations2.pdf](http://www.diis.dk/files/Publications/Briefs2006/hma_eu_gcc_relations2.pdf)

10 Information and data about Gulf states' investments in Europe are taken from Sven Behrendt, "Gulf Arab SWFs. Managing Wealth in Turbulent Times", in *Carnegie Policy Outlook*, 2009, <http://carnegie-mec.org/publications/?fa=22776>; Taher Al-Sharif, "Two-Way Traffic", in *The Majalla*, 24 July 2013, <http://www.majalla.com/eng/2013/07/article55243729>; Peter Beaumont, "How Qatar is Taking On the World", in *The Guardian*, 7 July 2012, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/jul/07/qatar-takes-on-the-world>

claiming they were instruments of religious, cultural, and political penetration.<sup>11</sup> Many journalists voiced concerns that these investments were politically motivated and indirectly aimed at supporting political Islam in Europe. Furthermore, in an article in *The Huffington Post*,<sup>12</sup> the influential French philosopher Bernard-Henri Lévy spoke of investments by these “emirate” as a source of charity and a source of “humiliation for the recipient country, which appears to be broke, reduced to panhandling.” In particular, he accused Qatar of using investments as instruments of propaganda to clean up its poor human rights record. It is undeniable that Qatari investments in the French suburbs came amid general concern by the French over political Islam, but it is also clear that most of these concerns are the result of a stereotyped understanding of the country, and the mass media cannot but be both a reflection and a source of this distorted view.

In the same way, some Gulf media have voiced domestic discontent at the EU-GCC economic partnership. In particular, the fact that Gulf rulers have invested vastly in Europe from their state-owned investment funds, while the Gulf region itself is in need of sustained investments, has triggered some perplexity. For example, when Qatar bought the Paris-Saint Germain football club, several columnists and bloggers criticized the decision to invest in European football teams instead of supporting local teams.<sup>13</sup> More recently the GCC itself, through its Chambers of Commerce and Industry Union, has brought up the issue of Gulf entrepreneurs investing in tourism abroad rather than regionally, particularly given the fact that the GCC is trying to strengthen its tourism sector. Ibrahim Al-Nabhani, chairman of the Tourism Committee at the GCC Chambers of Commerce and Industry Union, went so far as to declare that “despite the effort of GCC countries to boost tourism investments, Saudi investors still prefer investing in Europe and the Far East and avoid investment in GCC countries. [...] Such capitals and investments operating abroad represent a depletion of local funds and resources.”<sup>14</sup> When these capitals emigrate to the West, it is particularly easy to frame these investments negatively, in a way that stirs public opinion to disapprove the deals. This happened in particular in the wake of the wave of anti-Americanism that shook the region after the 2003 war in Iraq and which reflected badly on Europe as well, as the EU is still generally perceived as the US “bridesmaid.” This metaphor has been employed in some literature<sup>15</sup> to describe the role of the EU vis-à-vis the US in the Middle East. A free-rider on American Middle East policies, the EU has been following the US lead in the Middle East from several points of view and has struggled to differentiate its approaches or stances from Washington’s. Consequently, many in the Arab world, and in the Gulf in particular, tend

11 Harvey Morris, “Qatar’s Latest Investment Stirs the French”, in *IHT Rendezvous*, 25 September 2012, <http://rendezvous.blogs.nytimes.com/?p=25526>; Ivan Rioufol, “Le Qatar n’a rien à faire dans les banlieues”, in *Ivan Rioufol Figaro Blog*, 24 September 2012, <http://blog.lefigaro.fr/rioufol/2012/09/si-liberation-de-ce-lundi.html>

12 Bernard-Henri Lévy, “Money, Qatar and the Republic”, in *The Huffington Post*, 2 October 2012, <http://m.huffpost.com/us/entry/1933860>

13 Dr. Saleh Bakr al Tayyar was particularly harsh on this in his column on the Saudi al Madina available at <http://www.al-madina.com>

14 Diana Al Jassem, “Saudis avoid GCC tourism investments”, in *Arab News*, 15 August 2013, <http://www.arabnews.com/news/461290>

15 Philip Robins, “Always the Bridesmaid: Europe and the Middle East”, in *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (Winter/Spring 1997), p. 69-83, at p. 78.



to perceive the European Union as part of the “West” that also includes the United States of America and even (sometimes) Russia.<sup>16</sup> Again, this misperception partly stems from (but could also be corrected by) the media. An extended and effective coverage of the EU could indeed shed light on all the numerous features that make the EU a quite different economic, financial, and political actor vis-à-vis the US. Given the relevance of EU-GCC relations in their respective economic and financial systems and the implications for development, it seems of utmost importance to try and make an effort to overcome the communication bug that favours the proliferation of stereotypes, which in turn can play a role in creating an unfavorable business environment and potentially even missing future opportunities.

## 2. The Voice of the Media

### *Journalists surveyed*

This section discusses the survey conducted among journalists across the European Union and the Gulf Cooperation Council countries to show what these media professionals’ basic understanding of the other region is and how much more potential there is to engage them as carriers of a more accurate image of the two regions. During a time frame of one month, the researchers collected information from media members from both regions to assess their familiarity with the other region (the cause and effect of *agenda-setting* in the public discourse) and their perception of how their region is portrayed in the other region’s media (the cause and effect of *framing*). Indeed, being journalists, the main creators and conveyers of messages, assessing them is the most effective way to understand how the two functions of *agenda-setting* and *framing* happen and why. In turn, acting on their understanding and mindset is the most effective way to alter both agenda-setting and framing. In particular, a questionnaire has been designed to cover a number of topics related to: areas of interest to journalists about the other region, general level of information about the other party, and perceptions of how their own region is covered in the other party’s media. In these regards, the lack of fluency in English, encountered amongst some if not most Gulf interviewees, is a key factor to take into account. The survey has also tried to capture the level of interaction with locals of the other region and the main sources of information – whether traditional or news media – used by the journalists. As social media (SM) have become a vital source of information, the questionnaire discussed the level of dependency on social media to form an opinion about the other region and to report on it.

The researchers took a random sample approach, focusing on a small but representative sample. The only criteria considered while sending these questionnaires is that the surveyed sample consist of local, practicing journalists without focusing on a certain age group nor other socio-economic factors, as the aim was to get the views of random, local journalists from the two regions and there was no way to guarantee equal number of responses from all the categories like gender, age group, provenance, etc. Thus, the random sample

<sup>16</sup> Ana Echagüe, “The European Union and the Gulf Cooperation Council”, in *FRIDE Working Papers*, No. 39 (May 2007), <http://www.fride.org/publication/43/>

approach was the most suitable method to adopt in this paper. Two sets of questions<sup>17</sup> were sent via email to journalists and other media members holding representative positions within journalist unions, federations, and associations.<sup>18</sup> The targeted sample was made up of the nationals of these two regions, as it is believed that they are better positioned to represent their own media than their expatriate colleagues and the responses were given under condition of anonymity. From the EU region, only 12 responses were received during the period between 7 February 2013 and 18 March 2013. During the first four weeks of the same period, only five respondents from the GCC took the survey. During the last week of the same period, the questionnaire was sent again to most of the same sample from the GCC in Arabic. By 18 March 2013, the GCC surveyed sample increased to 10. As this was an early, exploratory survey intended to start exploring the problems discussed in the introduction, without the pretense to generalize from this small sample but considering the representativeness of it, the results can still be considered worth exploring. This is particularly the case after complementing the findings of the random sample of the questionnaires with a selected focus group held with journalists, scholars, diplomats, and decision-makers from both regions.

### Comparative data analysis

The first and broadest question received a largely positive answer. 60% of the surveyed sample from the GCC claimed they had a positive impression of the EU region (see figure 1). On the other side, EU journalists also had a positive impression of the GCC region, with 75% saying they had either a good or very good impression of the region, while 25% had an average rating for the way they see the region (see figure 2).

Figure 1. Impression of the EU

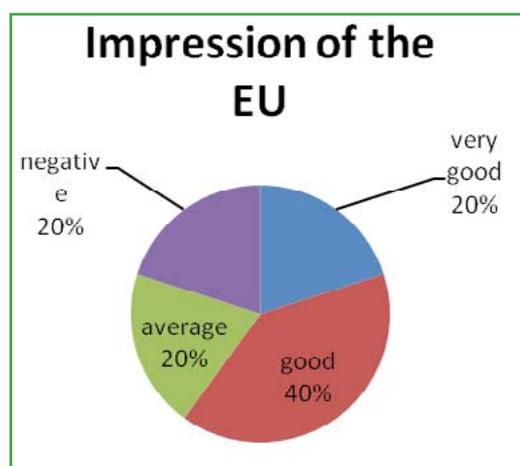
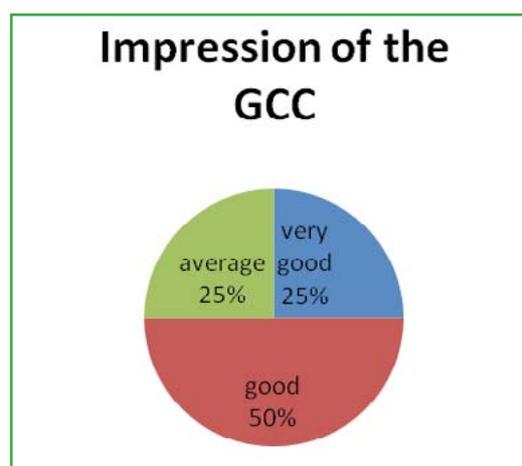


Figure 2. Impression of the GCC



Given that reporting should hold to a central principle of first-hand witnessing, and that newsmakers' direct experiences usually find a way into how they frame the news, we

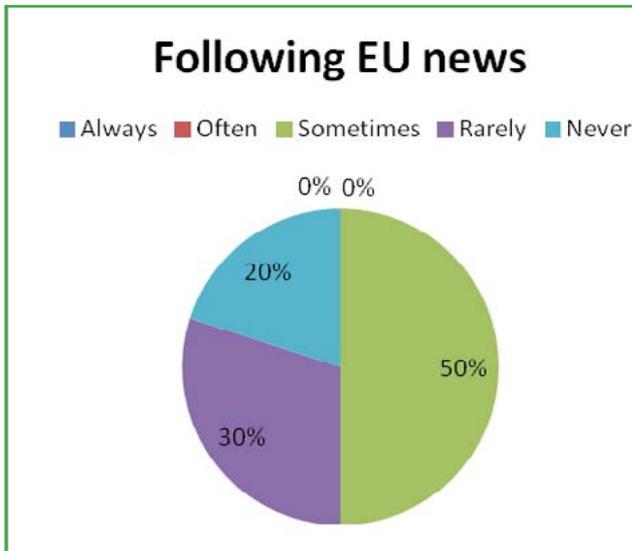
<sup>17</sup> See appendix 1.

<sup>18</sup> For a full list, see appendix 2.

questioned the interviewees about their direct experience with the other region. 67% of the surveyed sample from the EU responded that they had visited the GCC region at least once, and 75% said that they had interactions with GCC locals. 80% of the GCC sample had been to at least one European country and visited the region at least once for official or personal purposes, or even both, and all of the respondents said that they had been interacting with Europeans. On the other hand, the observed increase in the number of responses after sending the same survey in Arabic to the sample indicates a certain level of language barrier in communicating with the other region. Indeed, 60% of the respondents among the GCC journalists did not speak any European language. This limitation prevents them from following European media that could provide an insider perspective and forces them to depend more on news agencies' reports and translations or on Arabic channels broadcasting from the EU region, which inevitably look at the region from an outsider perspective. The same applies to EU journalists who weren't found, for the majority, to be fluent in Arabic.

Even though 60% of the GCC journalists surveyed were interested in reporting on the EU region, none of them followed the EU region regularly. 50% of them followed the EU news channels sometimes and 20% never (see figure 3).

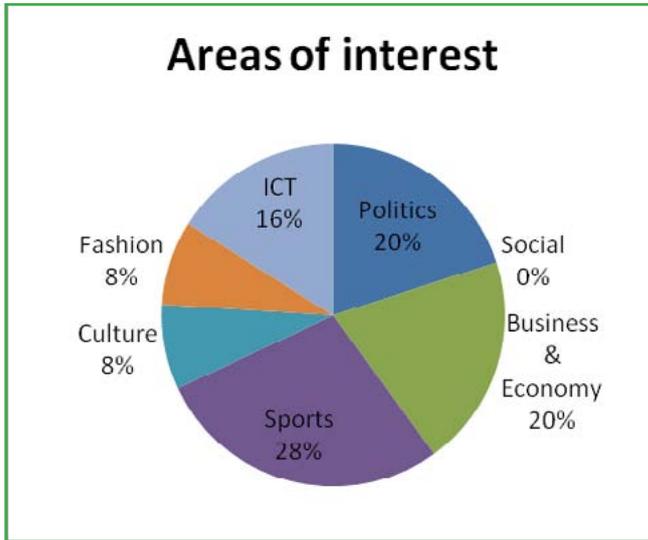
Figure 3. Following EU news



Regarding how the journalists' interests are catalyzed, we found that most of the GCC sample showed some interest in sports (28%), followed by political and economic issues (20% each), information and communication technology (16%), and fashion or cultural areas (8%). None of the journalists showed any interest in the social issues of the EU region (see figure 4).

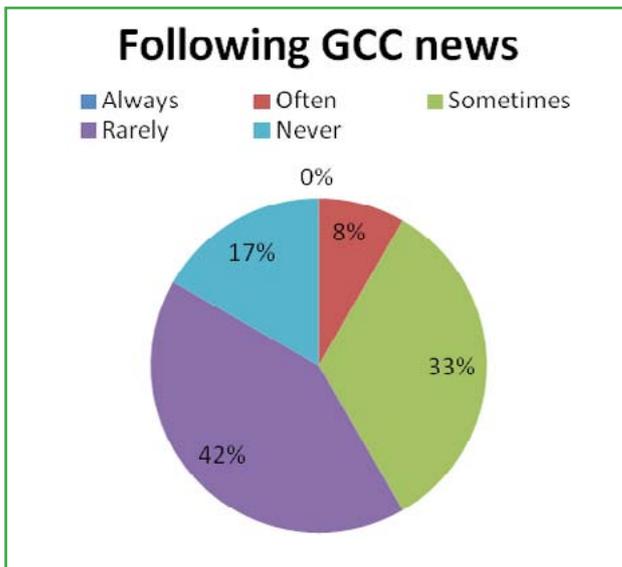


Figure 4. Areas of interest



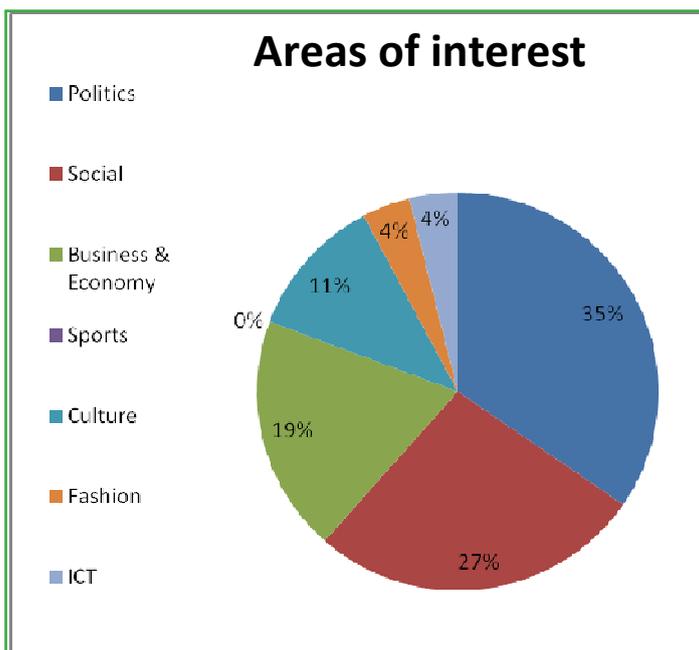
The EU journalists showed a little higher level of interest compared to their GCC counterparts in the other region's news, with 8% of them following the GCC news often, 33% following the region's news sometimes, and 17% never (see figure 5).

Figure 5. Following GCC news



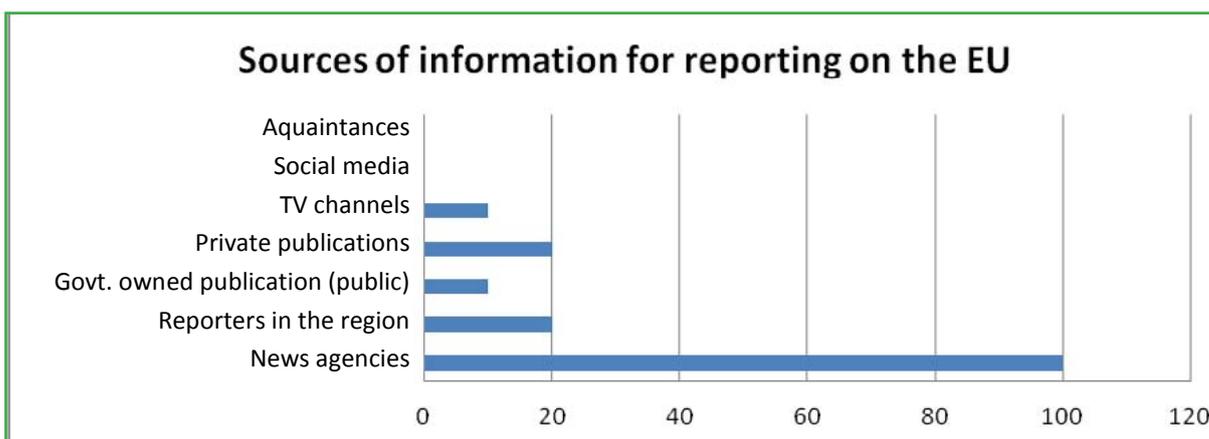
It is noteworthy to underline how the areas of interest among European journalists were completely different from the ones indicated by Gulf respondents. While sports were the main interest with regard to the EU, Gulf sports held 0% interest for the EU journalists. And while the GCC respondents showed no interest in the EU's social issues (0%), the social issues of the GCC were one of the main areas of interest for European journalists (27%) (see figure 6).

Figure 6. Areas of interest



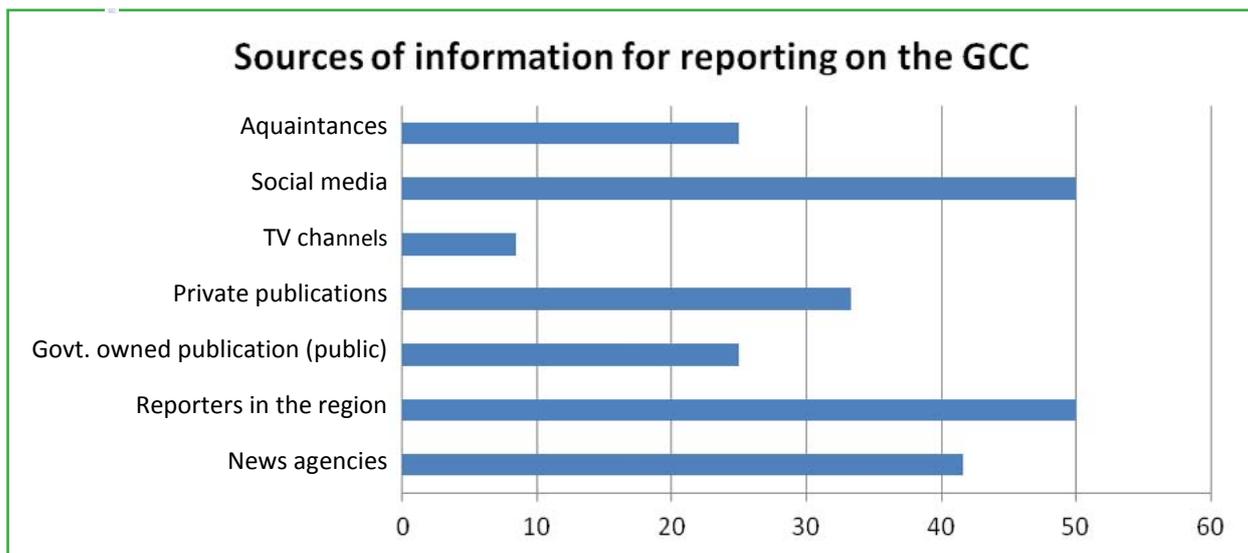
As suggested, the journalists in the GCC tend to rely heavily on news agencies. The sample interviewed was given a choice to select the three main sources of information they use when reporting about Europe. All of the respondents said that they rely on news agencies. 20% of them rely on privately owned publications or reporters from the EU region. 10% rely on TV channels or public publications (see figure 7).

Figure 7. Sources of information for reporting on the EU



The EU sample showed a higher level of diversification with regard to the sources of information when compared to the GCC sample. 50% of the respondents declared that they rely on social media or reporters on the ground, 42% on news agencies, 33% on private publications, 25% on acquaintances, 25% on public publications, and less than 10% on TV channels (see figure 8).

Figure 8. Sources of information for reporting on the GCC



Although none of the samples from either region said that they depend on social media to collect information for reporting purposes, 50% of European journalists declared that they rely on social media content to form some kind of opinion while reporting on the Gulf region. This figure confirmed a tendency of EU journalists to work densely with the new media, in particular Facebook, Twitter, blogs, and YouTube. In contrast, journalists from the GCC region seem to have a very low degree of trust in new communication technologies as sources, in particular in relation to reporting about foreign (EU) issues. It's widely acknowledged that user-generated content (USG) has created an important extra layer of information and diverse opinion: the concept of the "citizen journalist" has played a role in allowing any individual to publish different sorts of data, visuals, and videos. Sometimes, the news can be published on websites and shared by normal individuals before the traditional media. This is true for Europe as well as for the Gulf. In Europe, however, mainstream news organizations, which have a long-standing tradition of reporting and fact-checking and have thus earned the audience's trust, are relied on to sort fact from fiction within USG and serve up a filtered view.<sup>19</sup> In the Gulf, where the awareness about codes of conduct in reporting, guidelines, and fact-checking is quite recent, and where there is a lack of variety in content and views, foreign media practitioners and in particular European journalists, aware of the above-mentioned weaknesses of traditional media in the Gulf, are naturally more prone to rely on duly self-filtered USG. On the other hand, the complete dependence of GCC journalists on traditional media, in particular news agencies, could be explained by the fact that journalists in the region are not yet familiar with fact-checking techniques to filter USG, which they heavily distrust.

<sup>19</sup> Nic Newman, "The Rise of Social Media and its Impact on Mainstream Journalism", in *RISJ Working Papers*, September 2009, [https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/fileadmin/documents/Publications/The\\_rise\\_of\\_social\\_media\\_and\\_its\\_impact\\_on\\_mainstream\\_journalism.pdf](https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/fileadmin/documents/Publications/The_rise_of_social_media_and_its_impact_on_mainstream_journalism.pdf)

Finally, to assess the perceived level of accuracy in both the media and the way journalists feel about how their home region is featured, the questionnaires asked questions such as “How balanced, accurate, and objective are the reports about the EU in the GCC media?” and vice versa. While the EU sample felt that their region is being featured in a balanced, accurate, and objective way, 30% of the GCC participants did not feel likewise (see figures 9-10).

Figure 9. GCC

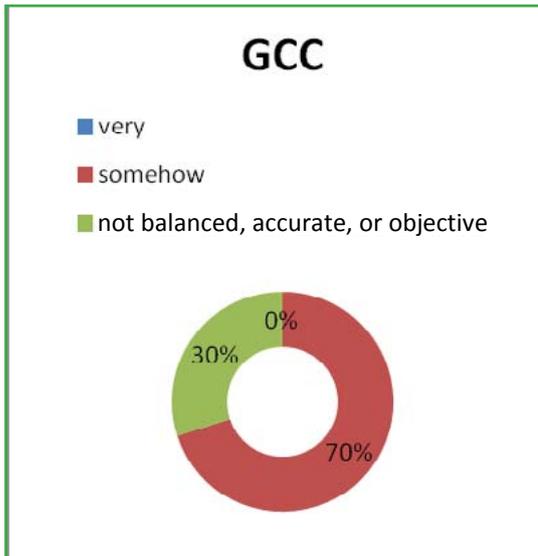
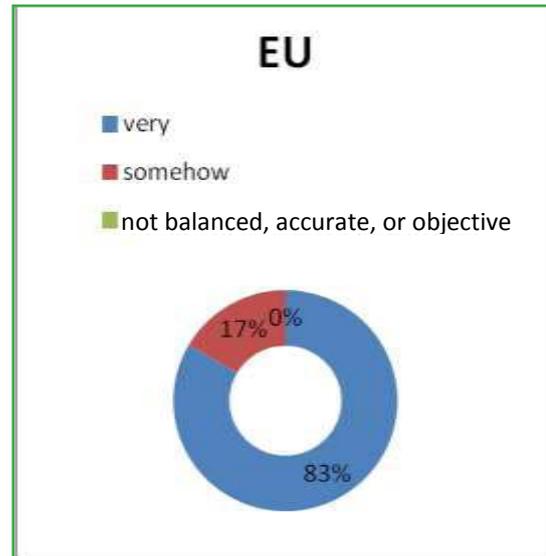
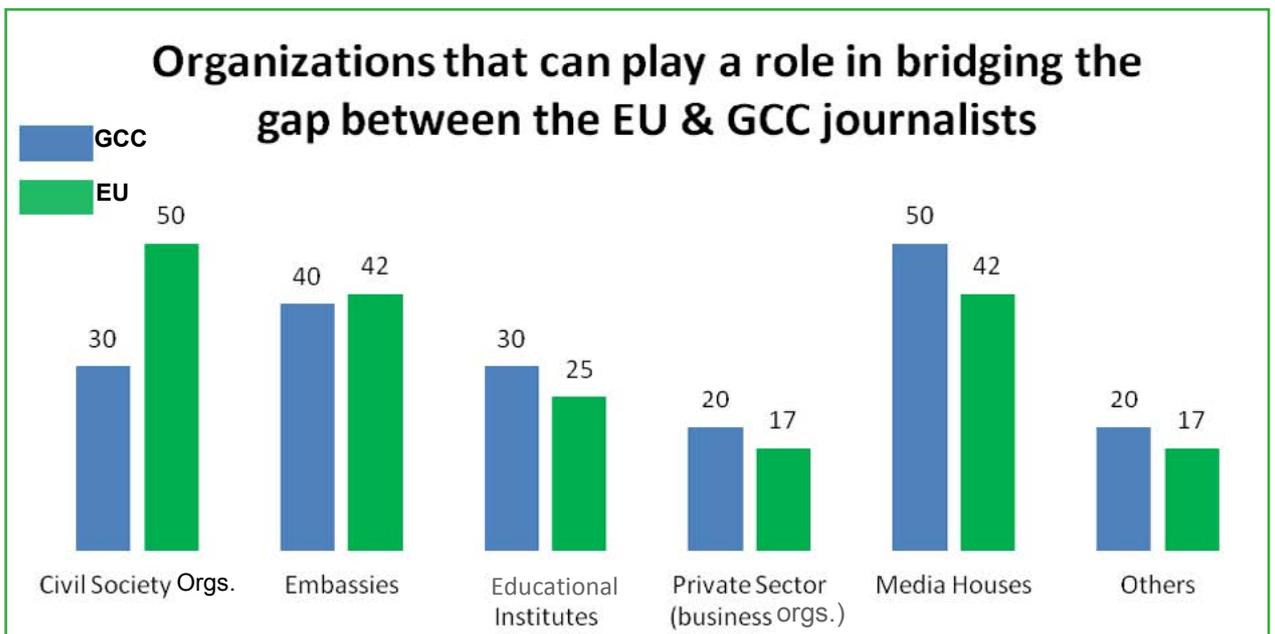


Figure 10. EU



Finally, journalists from both surveyed regions were asked about the organizations they believe can play a bigger role in developing better mutual understanding. A few options were given to the sample, while they were also asked to add any other organizations that, according to them, can participate in bridging the gap of perception (see figure 11).

Figure 11. Organizations that can play a role in bridging the gap between the EU and GCC journalists



25 of the Gulf-based and European-based journalists, scholars, diplomats and policy-makers had the chance to debate more on the topic of what direction to take during a focus group held in Muscat in March 2013, on the occasion of a workshop organized by the Sharaka project.<sup>20</sup> The group discussed some of the flaws they perceive in the Gulf media landscape, as well as what the most effective EU-GCC joint actions in these fields could be. A number of interesting ideas emerged from the focus group as well as from the survey, which have been subsequently elaborated upon by the researchers into a series of recommendations presented below.

## Conclusions

The lack of an effective and sustained communication flow between the Gulf region and the European region has led to the diffusion of collective stereotypes that have the potential to harm the development of interregional cooperation. This is true especially if looking at economic exchanges and strategic investments, which are also sensitive political issues, especially in the Gulf economies. These misperceptions can partly be attributed to an underdeveloped coverage of the two regions in their respective media, which in turn could also represent effective instruments to correct them. In light of the key role that media play in shaping perceptions, the survey presented here has been addressed to media members, who are content-creators and main message-carriers. The survey showed a poor level of familiarity with the two regions, but an overall good perception and latent interest, particularly in areas such as politics and the economy. When it comes to the sources used to form an opinion about the other region, the GCC media members depended mostly on news agencies to report on the EU, while the sample from the European region showed a more diversified set of sources and a high reliance on people-to-people links in reporting on the GCC region. Language seemed to be a significant barrier when it came to consuming the other region's homegrown media channels. Finally, there was a diverging assessment in how the journalists perceived their own region to be portrayed: in particular, 30% of the journalists from the Gulf who took part in the survey perceived the way their region is portrayed as "not balanced, accurate, or objective." This might be related to the fact that the number of expatriate journalists in the Gulf is high, as journalism suffers from low prestige, suspicions, and stereotypes among Gulf nationals.<sup>21</sup> Along with the language barrier, which results in a limited exposure to the EU media, this might explain the gloomy perception by the GCC sample.

<sup>20</sup> Sharaka workshop on "Dialogue on Opportunities for Enhancing Understanding and Cooperation in EU-GCC relations in the fields of Media and Communications and Higher Education and Scientific Research", Muscat, 26 March 2013, <http://www.sharaka.eu/?p=1147>. The workshop, organized in two panels followed by focus groups, hosted around 25 Gulf-based and European journalists, scholars, diplomats, and policymakers.

<sup>21</sup> Jim Naureckas, "Media on the March: Journalism in the Gulf", in Jim Naureckas and Janine Jackson (eds.), *The FAIR Reader. An Extra! Review of Press and Politics in the '90s*, Boulder, Westview Press, 1996, p. 20-27; Carolyn Wakeman (ed.), *The Media and the Gulf: A Closer Look*, Berkeley, University of California Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism, 1991.



From these data and subsequent discussion in an ad-hoc focus group, some ideas emerged to foster know-how exchange and mutual understanding, thus potentially triggering positive fallout on the interregional communication system in general. Those ideas can be summed up as follows, and are further developed below as policy recommendations: intensifying interactions through exchange programmes, organizing joint seminars and workshops, and upgrading the technical skills of the media members through language courses and greater exposure to the other region. Many actors have been identified as stakeholders, including civil society organizations, media houses, embassies, and educational institutions.

The policy recommendations developed below could indeed prove effective, provided that the parties share the long-term goal of nurturing the public perception of their relations. Media is indeed one of the main ways to form a public and political opinion: by helping press members of one region to understand the other, EU-GCC cooperation on media could bring the two regions closer and provide a more accurate image for the general public. Only in this way would it be possible to properly uncover and assess some of the existing weaknesses in this relation as well as display a whole set of disregarded possibilities that could do nothing but boost the existing ties, eventually bringing tangible benefits to the people of both regions.

### Policy Recommendations

1. Create, as a preparatory step, a Media Task Force composed of members of the journalists' associations in the Gulf countries to start a debate about how to overcome the problems besetting the media landscape in the Gulf region.
2. Enhance the quantity of research and papers on EU-GCC relations in different areas of interest – in Arabic as well as English – and the extent of research dissemination.
3. Encourage media houses and journalists' associations from both regions to communicate and interact more, including through joint seminars and workshops as well as exchange programmes for journalists, with the cooperation of media associations and federations.
4. Enhance the ability of GCC journalists to produce their own reports – particularly on foreign policy topics, given the lack of homegrown foreign policy reporting – instead of relying on the products of news agencies. In this regard, it would be helpful to have more interaction between journalists and representatives from the embassies. Embassies could be encouraged to have official spokespersons, official social media pages, and regular meetings with the press.
5. Arrange a framework for joint events by civil society organizations from both regions in the field of media and communications, in cooperation with higher educational institutes and media houses. This might include journalists' associations or think tanks.
6. Enhance the English language skills of journalists from the Gulf as well as the Arabic language skills of European journalists to reinstate the primacy of primary sources.
7. Form a committee with members of civil society, media, educational institutes, and other concerned stakeholders to carry these recommendations forward, with the support of the GCC Secretariat as well as the EU Delegation in the GCC.

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## Appendices

### Annex 1. Questionnaires

#### A. To the GCC

1. You are currently working...
 

In the GCC	Outside the GCC	
------------	-----------------	--
  
2. How is the EU region featured in the GCC media?
 

Positively	Balanced	Negatively
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3. What are the main sources of information that you rely on to gather news about the EU region?
 

News agencies	Reporters in the region	Public publications
Private publications	TV channels	Social media
Acquaintances	Other	
  
4. What are the main areas of interest about the EU region shown in the GCC region's media?
 

Politics	Social	Business
Sports	Culture	Fashion
ICT	Other	
  
5. How do you describe the way your region is being featured in the EU region's media?
 

Positively	Balanced	Negatively
------------	----------	------------
  
6. How interested are the journalists from the GCC in reporting on the EU region?
 

Very interested	Somewhat interested	Not interested
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7. How balanced, accurate, and objective are the reports about your region in the EU media?
 

Very	Somewhat	Not balanced, accurate, or objective
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8. How balanced, accurate, and objective are the reports about the EU in the GCC media?
 

Very	Somewhat	Not balanced, accurate, or objective
------	----------	--------------------------------------
  
9. What are the different organizations that can play a role in bridging the gap between the EU & GCC journalists to help them report more comprehensively and accurately on the other region?
 

Civil society organizations	Embassies	Educational institutes
Private Sector (business)	Media houses	Other (please specify)
  
10. What is your impression of the EU region?
 

Very good	Good	Average
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	Negative	No impression	
11. Have you ever been to the EU region?	Yes	No	
12. How many times have you been to the EU?	1-2 More than 10 visits	3-5 Not Applicable	6-10
13. What was the nature of your visit?	Official Not applicable	Personal	Both
14. Have you ever been in touch with EU citizens?	Yes	No	
15. How often do you read or follow EU channels?	Always Rarely	Often Never	Sometimes
16. How often do you rely on social media (Facebook, Twitter, blogs, YouTube, etc.) to form an opinion about certain issues taking place in the EU?	Always Rarely	Often Never	Sometimes
17. Do you speak any of the EU languages?	Yes	No	
<i>B. To the EU</i>			
1. You are currently working...	In Europe	Outside Europe	
2. How is the GCC region featured in the EU media?	Positively	Balanced	Negatively
3. What are the main sources of information that you rely on to gather news about the GCC region?	News agencies Private publications Acquaintances	Reporters in the region TV channels Other	Public publications Social media
4. What are the main areas of interest about the GCC region shown in the EU region's media?	Politics Sports ICT	Social Culture Other	Business Fashion





16. How often do you rely on social media (Facebook, Twitter, blogs, YouTube, etc.) to form an opinion about certain issues taking place in the GCC?

Always	Often	Sometimes
Rarely	Never	

17. How do you describe the way your region is being featured in the GCC region's media?

Positively	Balanced	Negatively
------------	----------	------------

**Annex 2.** List of federations and associations contacted for participation in the survey

- Gulf Press Association
- Dubai Press Club
- Bahrain Journalists Association
- Saudi Association for Media & Communication
- Kuwaiti Journalists Association
- Doha Centre for Media Freedom
- European Journalists Association
- German Journalists Federation
- The British Association of Journalists

Apart from the above-mentioned organizations, individual reporters and editors in both regions were contacted via email, Facebook, LinkedIn, or their personal website.

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**ABOUT SHARAKA**

**Sharaka** is a two-year project implemented by a consortium led by Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI).

The project, partially funded by the European Commission, explores ways to promote relations between the EU and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), through the implementation of policy-oriented research, outreach, training and dissemination activities.

The overall project aim is to strengthen understanding and cooperation between the EU and the GCC, with particular attention to the strategic areas identified in the Joint Action Programme of 2010, such as trade and finance, energy, maritime security, media and higher education.

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