POLITICAL PARALLELISM

As the history suggests, the media in the Mediterranean countries are relatively strongly politicized, and political parallelism is relatively high. The style of journalism tends to give substantial emphasis to commentary. Newspapers tend to represent distinct political tendencies, and this is reflected in the differing political attitudes of their readerships. At times newspapers play an activist role, mobilizing those readers to support political causes. Public broadcasting tends to be party-politicized. Both journalists and media owners often have political ties or alliances, and it remains fairly common for journalists to become politicians and vice versa.

Greece is a strong example of this pattern. From the time of the exile press, Greek newspapers have always been political instruments above all, rooted culturally in passionate ideological divisions, and often tied to the state and/or parties, which have provided financial subsidies, help with distribution, and other forms of assistance. The many Athens newspapers, especially, still reflect a wide range of ideologies, and their writing is often highly polemical. Zaharapoulos and Paraschos (1993) give examples of their headlines when U.S. President George Bush visited Greece in 1991, ranging from "National Success, the Cyprus Issue Is Solved," to "Frigid Bush: Cyprus Is Not Kuwait, said the Caesar." Greek journalists tend to be strongly opinionated and politically engaged, and often run for political office.

The political identification of French newspapers varies, from clearly ideological papers such as *L'Humanité* and *La Croix* to relatively apolitical regional papers. The major Paris dailies reflect broad political tendencies, *Le Monde* and *Libération* representing the left-center, and *Le Figaro* and *France-Soir* the right-center. The polemical style that can often be found in Greece and could once be found in France is mostly gone (Charon 1990). Still, as Albert (1983) put it:

> French Journalism has always been more a journalism of expression than a journalism of observation: it gives precedence to the chronicle and the commentary over summary and reportage. As much as in the presentation of facts, it has always been interested in the exposition of ideas. . . . In this, it is fundamentally different from Anglo-Saxon journalism, for which news always has priority over commentary.

Ferenczi argues that when the mass circulation press began to develop in France, key elements of the news- and information-based

Table 5.1 *Functions of Paragraphs in U.S. and French News Stories*

	Reporting Only	Background	Interpretation	Opinion
Le Monde	76.6%	7.5	17.1	6.6
Le Figaro	70.0	11.3	13.4	5.2
The New York Times	90.3	4.5	4.8	0.4

Anglo-American model were embraced. Articles of pure "doctrine or reflection" gave way to a form of journalism that combined reporting and commentary. But a strong emphasis on commentary remained, as did an emphasis on style, creating a French model of journalism distinct from the Anglo-American. Information-oriented journalism, as we shall see in greater detail near the end of this chapter, has made even greater inroads into French journalism in the last couple of decades of the twentieth century, as investigative reporting, for example, has become common. But French journalism still includes a relatively strong emphasis on commentary that reflects its political roots. Table 5.1 shows the results of a content analysis of *The New York Times, Le Monde,* and *Le Figaro*, with samples from coverage of national politics in the 1960s and 1990s, showing the percent of paragraphs devoted to four journalistic functions: reporting events and statements, giving background, giving interpretation (usually involving comments about the motives, causes, or consequences of an action or event), and giving opinions.[4] In all three papers, the reporting function predominated, accounting for 90 percent of *The New York Times* paragraphs and more than 70 percent of those in the French papers. The French press, however, clearly put more emphasis on background, interpretation, and opinion, the latter, for example, accounting for 6.6 percent of paragraphs in *Le Monde* and less than 1 percent in *The New York Times.* When *Times* stories were coded for opinion it usually involved the journalist drawing conclusions about disputed facts; in the French press it was more likely to involve policy advocacy or value judgments about political actions. We did not find consistent differences between the two decades we studied, the 1960s and 1990s.

---

[4] The sample includes 318 stories and 1,479 paragraphs from *Le Monde*; 308 stories and 1,350 paragraphs from *Le Figaro*; and 358 stories and 3,189 paragraphs from *The New York Times.* Dates were selected randomly from 1965–7 and 1995–7, and every other story dealing with national politics was coded. Paragraphs were coded for their predominant function and in paragraphs that clearly had multiple functions, more active forms of journalism were coded over less active forms – opinion over interpretation, over background, over simple reporting. Coding of the French papers was done by Rod Benson and coding of the U.S. paper was done by Mauro Porto.

Here is a fairly typical example of commentary-oriented political reporting in the French press. On June 21, 1991, the lead story in *Le Monde* concerned a "polemic on immigration" between Socialist Prime Minister Edith Cresson and conservative President Jacques Chirac. Under the headline was a "*chapeau*" or "hat," a paragraph reporting what American journalists would call the "peg" for the story, a statement the previous day by Cresson criticizing Chirac. Below it was a story by Bruno Frappat, one of the paper's top political editors, which began like this (insofar as a translation can do justice to the typically literary French style!):

> Yes, immigration poses a problem for France. No, over thirty years, governments have neither seen it coming nor been able to prepare themselves properly [*n'ont rien vu venir ni rien su maîtriser*]. Yes, ineffectiveness is general and imagination failed, except at the base [i.e., at lower levels of society]. Yes, economic gloom augments the bitterness of the tensions.
>
> Against a background of impotence two discourses confront one another: denial and hysteria. The angelic left cannot hide its discomfort with the stubborn facts. Right wing extremists are gaining ground every day with their simplistic local-bar-style "send'em back where they came from" solutions.
>
> What's new: the right, its eye fixed on ballot box, is falling into line behind a common message. The 19th of June, in Orléans, Jacques Chirac spoke of an "overdose" and complained of the "French worker," same-floor neighbor of immigrants, driven "crazy" by the "noise and the smell." Michel Poiniatowski [a conservative politician] flatters himself, in [an interview in] *Le Figaro*, to have gone "further" than Jean Marie Le Pen [leader of the anti-immigrant National Front].
>
> There are words which emit a foul odor.

In Italy – as also in France – earlier traditions of a politicized press were reinforced by the experience of Fascist dictatorship and the Liberation. Under Fascism, of course, the media were expected to serve political ends – Mussolini was a journalist. And with the Liberation the first newspaper licenses went to anti-Fascist political forces. As we have seen, the party press was extremely important in the immediate post liberation period. As commercial papers reemerged, they too would have political orientations, for reasons we will explore a bit later.

Commentary-oriented journalism was the rule. To quote Forcella (1959) once again:

> When I first started doing journalism, I thought journalism was before all else information, facts, news. . . . But I sadly learned, slowly, too slowly, that I was greatly deceived. Facts for a political journalist never speak by themselves. They either say too much or too little. When they say too much you have to make them speak more softly, when they say too little you have to integrate them to give them their proper meaning. Clarity in this work is a cumbersome virtue (454).

The dominant form of political reporting through the fifties and sixties was a kind of article known as the *pastone*, written by the most prestigious journalists and appearing on the front page (Dardano 1976), which combined a review of the major political developments of the day with comments by the journalist (a form similar in many ways to what the French call the *chronique* and the Spanish call the *crónica*). Even as more market-oriented papers emerged, beginning in the 1970s, they did not abandon political identities or commentary-oriented journalism (Mancini 2000a; Roidi 2001). *La Repubblica* was the pioneer in the shift toward a more market-oriented newspaper industry in Italy. It introduced more colorful writing and graphic presentation; broadened its agenda to include more entertainment and culture and eventually sports and crime; hired women reporters; and increased female readership. Yet it is clearly a paper of the left and a prime example of a paper that offers "orientation rather than just news facts," in the words of its founder, Eugenio Scalfari (quoted in Poggioli 1991: 6). In the first issue of *La Repubblica* (January 14, 1976, p. 6), Scalfari wrote:

> This newspaper is a bit different from others: it is a journal of information that doesn't pretend to follow an illusory political neutrality, but declares explicitly that it has taken a side in the political battle. It is made by men who belong to the vast arc of the Italian left.

In the 1990s two other Italian papers, *L'Indipendente* and *Il Giornale*, moved toward a still higher level of sensationalism in the search for readers, characterized by screaming headlines of a sort previously unknown. Both are also highly political – *L' Indipendente*, close to the right-wing Northern League and *Il Giornale*, the voice of Berlusconi's Forza Italia. The history of *L'Indipendente* is very illustrative of Italian journalistic

Table 5.2 *Party-Press Parallelism in Italian Newspaper Readership, 1996*

	Communist Refounding	Democrats of the Left	Popular Party	Northern League	Forza Italia	National Alliance
Corriere della sera	64	89	120	100	111	100
La Repubblica	124	156	122	54	34	62
La Stampa	71	105	81	215	98	65
Il Giornale	28	22	8	57	260	188
Il Giorno	0	75	61	246	164	93
La Nazione	84	70	193	0	88	153
Il Mattino	97	88	135	13	99	162
Resto del Carlino	126	111	135	56	83	85
Gazzetta Mezzogiorno	50	87	27	0	97	203
L'Unità	165	245	19	19	19	35
L'Avvenire	47	47	613	60	27	60

Source: Sani (2001: 205).
Figures show the number of voters of a given party that read each paper, per hundred readers of that paper in the population as a whole. Thus figures over 100 indicate that voters of that party are overrepresented in the paper's readership; figures below 100 indicate that they are underrepresented.

culture: it was started to be the Italian counterpart of the Anglo-Saxon "objective," neutral newspaper, with "cold" headlines and a very low level of news dramatization. But the attempt was not successful. Its circulation remained small and soon its editor and founder was forced to resign and the owners appointed a new editor, Vittorio Feltri, well known as a combative journalist willing to take part in political struggle. Soon the daily became the "unofficial voice" of the Northern League. Some Italian papers, *La Stampa* or *Il Corriere della Sera*, especially, tilt more toward information and less toward commentary than papers such as *La Repubblica*. But in general, commentary-oriented journalism has survived the shift toward a stronger market orientation in the Italian press. Indeed it could be argued that partisanship has been particularly intense in the Italian press since media mogul Berlusconi entered politics.

One common manifestation of political parallelism is a significant differentiation of media in terms of the political orientations of their audience. Table 5.2 shows the political orientations of the readerships of Italian papers from 1996. The figures make clear that the choices of Italian newspaper readers are still strongly influenced by politics.

Italian newspapers have also often taken an activist role, mobilizing their readers to support political causes and participate in political events. Of course, this role was central to the party press; but it was never exclusive to them. Commercial papers as well often include information on how to get to a political demonstration, and will at times campaign for political causes. In 1974, to take a particularly dramatic example, when a key referendum was being held to overturn Italy's new law permitting divorce, the entire front page of *Il Messaggero* was taken up with the word "**No!**" Individual journalists often play activist roles; the head of the journalists' union led a demonstration protesting the actions of the police against protestors at the World Trade Organization meeting in Genoa in 2001.

In Spain and Portugal, the tradition of a pluralistic and politically engaged press was cut off by dictatorship. In Portugal, it reemerged dramatically with the revolution of 1974. As the revolution radicalized, newspapers and radio stations were taken over by politicized journalists; the Journalists' Union described their role in these terms:

> Newspapers should be defined as organs of anti-fascist, anti-colonial and anti-imperialist combat, intransigently on the side of the interests and struggles of laborers, workers, peasants, popular masses and the exploited (quoted in Agee and Traquina 1984: 13).

Eventually, as political parties developed, newspapers became aligned with them, and often were funded by parties or by the state – many newspapers had been owned by banks before the revolution, and became state property when the banks were nationalized. In the 1980s, however, state-owned newspapers were privatized, the press and radio industries moved more into the commercial sphere, and the degree of party-politicization has declined considerably.

The Spanish transition to democracy was a more gradual, elite-managed transition. In the absence of fully formed democratic institutions, "media served as conduits for information about the strategy for political change being implemented by the reformist Suárez government, as well as platforms for the articulation of political demands by newly emerging political and trade union organizations" (Gunther, Montero, and Wert 2000: 45). This new pluralist press, the so-called *Parlamento de Papel* (Parliament of Paper) emerged in a commercial context, though with strong political ties. The key event was the launching of *El País* by the commercial media conglomerate PRISA in 1976; "its principal stockholders included all the representatives of the political families that would govern during the transition to democracy" (Gunther, Montero, and Wert 2000: 45). *El País* was joined several months later by *Diario 16*. In the transition period, an advocacy orientation was common among Spanish journalists, who often saw it as their role to promote the new democratic regime and to oppose Francoism. Canel, Rodriguez, and Sánchez (2000: 128–32) and Canel and Piqué (1998) found that in the late 1990s 40 to 50 percent of Spanish journalists still considered it an important part of the journalists role to "promote certain values and ideas" and to "influence the public"; advocacy orientations were most common among older journalists who had worked during the transition period.

While political parallelism has declined in most of Europe in the last decades of the twentieth century, it is reasonable to argue that it has increased in the new Spanish democracy, resulting in a division of most of the media into two rival camps. In this sense there is a parallel with the Italian case, where media partisanship has also increased in recent years. When the Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE) came to power in 1982, ending the initial phase of transition to democracy, PRISA, which also included the most important radio network, publishing, and eventually television interests, became fairly closely aligned with the new governing elite, as its owner was an important advisor to President Felipe González. Eventually an opposition camp began to form around the traditional conservative newspaper *ABC* (historically associated with the monarchist movement), the Church-owned radio network COPE, and a new newspaper, *El Mundo*, which was formed in 1989 following a conflict within *Diario 16* and was read while the PSOE was in power by supporters of the two principal opposition groupings, the conservative Partido Popular (PP) and Izquierda Unida (IU), the United Left, whose core is the Communist Party. Gunther, Montero, and Wert (2000) report figures from a Spanish election survey – reproduced in Table 5.3 – that show that in Spain, as in Italy, the readerships of national newspapers continue to reflect political divisions. *El Mundo* built its popularity as an opposition newspaper to a significant extent by breaking a series of scandals involving PSOE finances and human-rights violations in the war against Basque terrorists, and Gunther, Montero, and Wert also show that readers of *El Mundo* and *ABC* were much more likely to consider corruption a serious problem than readers of *El País*.

Both media partisanship and government pressures increased as elections became increasingly competitive in the 1990s. After 1996, when the Partido Popular came to office, media grouped around PRISA became the opposition camp. A progovernment camp formed around *El Mundo*,

Table 5.3 *Party-Press Parallelism in Spanish Newspaper Readership, 1993 (percentages down)*

	Newspaper Read Most Frequently		
	El País	*ABC*	*El Mundo*
Voted for PSOE	36%	13%	10%
Voted for PP	14	74	38
Voted for IU	24	3	21
Voted for other party	7	5	2
Did not vote	19	5	29

Source: 1993 Spanish CNEP Survey reported in Gunther, Montero, and Wert (2000: 46).

COPE, and the privatized state telecommunications company, Telefónica de España (headed by a childhood friend of President José María Aznar), which gained control of the private television company Antena 3 and the radio network Onda Cero, and launched a rival satellite television operation to compete with PRISA's Canal Plus (Bustamante 2000). Among major national media, only the private television channel Tele 5, largely owned by foreign capital, has remained more or less outside of these camps. Regional media reflect the often special political alignments of the autonomous regions – the Barcelona paper *La Vanguardia*, for example, being close to the Catalan Nationalist CiU.[5]

With the tradition of the political press interrupted in Spain, the influence of the American form of professionalism has been fairly great, at least as far as the newer papers are concerned (the traditional conservative paper *ABC* has been characterized by a much more explicitly ideological style).[6] The Style Book of *El País* (1996) says on its first page, "information and opinion shall be clearly differentiated from one another." Nevertheless, even at the newer Spanish papers, advocacy traditions coexist with the influence of neutral professionalism. Pedro J. Ramírez, director of *El Mundo*, for example, wrote in his initial article introducing the paper that it would be "un órgano radical en la defensa de sus convicciones" – "a radical organ in defense of its convictions" (quoted in Barrera 1995: 126).

---

[5] Barrera (1995: 106ff) gives a much more detailed discussion of the evolution of its political orientation during the period of PSOE rule.

[6] Gunther, Montero, and Wert (2000: 55) argue that both *ABC* and *El Mundo* mix news and opinion more than *El País*.

On contentious issues one can often see sharp political differences in the Spanish media, manifested in contentious headlines, patterns of selection and emphasis (including both articles and photography) and bitter polemics in editorials. To take one typical example – a fairly subtle one by Spanish standards – when Spanish judge Balthasar Garzón moved to bring former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet to trial in Spain, the media belonging to the different camps treated the case in widely varying ways: the Left in Spain thinks of the Right as still in some sense Fascist at heart, so the Pinochet case had important ideological implications. Thus when Spanish Foreign Minister Matutes commented on the decision of Chilean President Frei to contest the Spanish extradition order in the World Court of Justice (September 20, 1999), *El País* carried the headline, "Matutes applauds the decision of Chile to take to the Tribunal of the Hague the 'Pinochet case'" – associating the Partido Popular government with the defense of Pinochet. *El Mundo* saw no such defense of Pinochet in the Minister's statement: "Matutes says Frei acted under pressure in the 'Pinochet case.'" One survey of Spanish journalists found that more than 85 percent believed information and opinion were often mixed (Ortega and Humanes 2000: 168).

POLITICAL PARALELLISM IN PUBLIC BROADCASTING

Public broadcasting systems in the Mediterranean countries have also tended to be party-politicized, "politics over broadcasting" systems. French television under de Gaulle was the quintessential case of what we called in Chapter 2 the "government model" of broadcast organization. De Gaulle considered control of television essential to effective government. The top personnel of the public broadcasting company Radio Television Française (RTF) were appointed directly by the Minister of Information until 1964 and were under tight political control even later (Kuhn 1995). Through the 1960s and 70s changes in government in France would be reflected directly in the personnel and policies of public broadcasting, as in any other agency of government. After a series of reforms in the 1980s that failed to establish an independent broadcasting regulator – mainly because governments were unwilling to make appointment on a basis other than political loyalty – France moved significantly away from government control with the formation of the Conseil Supérieur de l'Audiovisuel (CSA) in 1989 (Kuhn 1995; Hoffmann-Riem 1996). One third of the members of the CSA are appointed by the president of the Republic and one third each by the