Researching the European Public Sphere and Its Political Functions. A Proposal [1]

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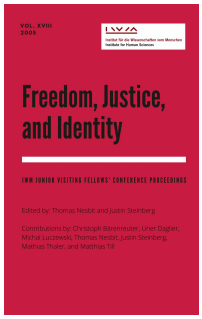

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1. Introduction

With the signing of the treaties of Maastricht (1991) and Amsterdam (1997), the European Union (EU) reached a degree of integration that clearly exceeds heretofore known forms of intergovernmental cooperation. Nowadays the life of EU citizens is affected in many ways by regulations made in the EU's institutional labyrinth. Due to these far-reaching competencies, a debate on the democratic foundations of the EU polity developed in the 1990s, involving both the social sciences and partly also the broader public. In 1998, Beetham and Lord stated that this debate "takes place in rather narrow terms, where democracy is defined as an institutional arrangement' with a focus on government structures and their interrelationship". (Beetham / Lord 1998: 17) Today, this observation is no longer valid. In recent years, one of the long-neglected aspects of European integration increasingly attracts the attention of a growing number of scholars: the political role of a European Public Sphere (EPS). Especially since 2000, a vivid debate developed on how to theoretically and empirically investigate the EPS. In this short period, a number of divergent approaches were developed, using differing theoretical and empirical backgrounds for the study of the EPS. In much of this literature, however, the connection between the theoretical background and the empirical indicators used to study the EPS remains rather unclear. This observation is also made by Mayer, who argues that many political scientists do not sufficiently take into consideration the findings and methods developed within the realm of communication studies and, one should add, applied linguistics. Scholars working within the latter fields, however, often do not make use of the "'State of the Art'" political scientific studies on European integration. (cf. Meyer 2004: 129) In this paper, I would thus like to make a contribution to clarifying the link between political theory and empirical research. The scope of this paper's relevance is restricted to the study of the EPS in the media. I am well aware, however, that the public

sphere may be misconceived if we restrict our inquiry solely to the media. Other aspects, such as the role of institutions or of organizations of civil society, require separate treatments with regard to both the theoretical and the empirical study.

In the first section, a brief overview of recent attempts to empirically study the EPS in the media will be given. Based on this summary, some research desiderata will be identified. In sections three through five, a suggestion will be made on how to conceptualize the link between the various functions of the EPS and the empirical investigation.

2. Research on the EPS: The Status Quo

2.1. A Pan-European Public Sphere

In one of the early articles on the question of a EPS, Jürgen Gerhards made a crucial distinction between two ways in which to conceive of the entity. First, a EPS can be understood as a pan-European public sphere, based on a pan-European media system. Gerhards, however, is skeptical that such a media system could develop. His skepticism is based on arguments, such as the linguistic diversity in Europe, the financial problems involved in the production and distribution of pan-European (print) media, and differing cultural traditions. (cf. Gerhards 1993: 100ff) Considering the scant amount of truly pan-European media, Gerhards' skepticism seems justified. With regard to the cultural dimension of his argument, a study conducted by Meinhof on the TV-channel *Euronews* supports his arguments. The Lyon-based broadcasting corporation currently presents its programs in seven languages, whereas the program's content remains the same in all languages. *Euronews* explicitly aims at a "European audience" and tries to overcome national news traditions by presenting a "European perspective". (cf. www.euronews.net) However, as Meinhof points out, this attempt is hardly successful. *Euronews* currently obtains its reports from the various national broadcasting corporations. These reports are then edited to fit a European audience. When doing so, the makers of *Euronews* have to make sure that the national peculiarities of reports (e.g., a Belgian report), which might not be understandable or might seem odd in other countries, are taken away or explained. As a consequence, the reports either loose their "Lokalkolorit" (i.e. their particular national or local "color") or they have a tendency to become more complicated. (cf. Meinhof 2001:119) Furthermore, national references always have to be made explicit. On *Euronews*, it is not possible to simply refer to "the Parliament" or "the Prime Minister". Rather, it always has to be clarified whether one talks of the *Polish* Parliament, the *Spanish* Prime Minister or the *European* Parliament. Finally, *Euronews* cannot use one of the most common techniques of TV-news production, namely, the direct, personal addressing of viewers by anchors, as this would lead to problems with lip synchronization. Meinhof thus concludes, that *Euronews* "is hardly more than a collage of various elements of national broadcasting corporations with an added 'Euro-Text'". (ibid.: translation C.B.)

2.2. The Europeanization of National Public Spheres

While Meinhof's study points to the difficulties that come with the production of truly pan-European media, one should not conclude that a EPS in the media is not possible. According to Gerhards, a EPS can also be understood as existing of "Europeanized national public spheres". (cf. Gerhards 1993: 102) With the notion of a Europeanization of national public spheres, Gerhards has created an important concept that influences most current research. There are disputes, however, over how exactly to conceive of the notion of a "Europeanization" of national public spheres. According to Gerhards, Europeanization of national public spheres should be understood as an increase of "European topics" in national media as well as the evaluation of these topics from a European, rather than a national perspective. (cf. ibid.) His definition thus includes both quantitative and "qualitative" aspects. Since this early attempt to define the notion of "Europeanization", a number of differing definitions have been developed. The debate on this topic becomes increasingly complex and one can hardly find two studies in which exactly the same definition of "Europeanization" is applied. In order to give an overview of this debate, what follows attempts to group the different approaches into categories.

2.2.1. Quantitative Approaches

Quantitative approaches focus on the sheer amount of news reporting on European issues in national media. This kind of approach is based on the assumption that the increasing Europeanization of both economic transactions as well as political decision making processes has to be accompanied by an increased share of reporting on European issues. (cf. Gerhards 2000: 288) Gerhards thus, in a secondary analysis of data that were collected for another research project, investigates the share of reports on European issues in comparison with the reporting on domestic or non-European international issues in three German broadsheets. His findings reveal that the share of reports on European issues remained very low from the early 1950s through 1995. (cf. ibid. 293ff) The same is also true for the number of actors from European institutions whose share fluctuates between a mere 0.9 and 1.2 % of all actors mentioned. (cf. ibid. 296)

A more sophisticated quantitative indicator (together with further criteria that are discussed below) is used by Tobler, who argues that the same political issues must be taken up by media in differing countries at the same time. He thus analyzes the "issue-attention-cycle" for debates on tax policy in Swiss, German, and British media between 1996 and the end of 2000. The results provide us with information on the extent and the chronological distribution of the reporting on this particular topic in the three countries' media. (cf. Tobler 2002: 72f)

Purely quantitative approaches hardly can be found. Rather, different kinds of quantitative aspects are used as empirical indicators for the Europeanization of national public spheres in the various approaches that will be discussed in the following section. The disadvantage of purely quantitative approaches is that they do not provide us with insights on how "Europe" is communicated in the various media. An exclusively quantitative approach can thus, for example, not provide us with an answer to the question whether EU politics are depicted in the same way as broader international politics, or if they are constructed as being "internal" matters.

2.2.2. Qualitative Approaches

Most of the current research on the Europeanization of national public spheres use qualitative indicators. The distinction between quantitative and qualitative indicators, however, is a relative one, as in most "qualitative" studies, some kind of quantitative aspects are included as well. So far, one can basically distinguish three kinds of qualitative approaches:

"Same Criteria of Relevance"

In 2000, Klaus Eder and Cathleen Kantner introduced an important criterion to the realm of empirical research on the EPS that ever since has played an important role. Drawing on Habermas, they specify their normative concept of the EPS by arguing that what is decisive is that "in an anonymous mass-public *the same topics are communicated at the same time, using same criteria of relevance* [Relevanzgesichtspunkte]." (Eder / Kantner 2000: 315) While Eder and Kantner pointed out the absence of large-scale studies on the Europeanization of national media, Thomas Risse and his team have tried to fill this gap. In their study on the European media debates on the formation of the Austrian federal government, including the right-wing populist Jörg Haider and the ensuing diplomatic measures by the other EU Member States, they applied a theoretical definition of the EPS that is very similar to the one used by Eder and Kantner. According to Risse and van de Steeg, a EPS can be found,

> "1. if and when the same (European) themes are discussed at the same time at similar levels of attention across national public spheres and media;
> 2. if and when similar frames of reference, meaning structures, and patterns of interpretation are used across national public spheres and media;
> 3. if and when a transnational community of communication emerges in which speakers and listeners not only observe each other across national spaces, but also recognize that 'Europe' is an issue of common concern for them." (Risse / van de Steeg 2003: 2)

The third point of this definition implies two criteria (transnational observation and recognition of "Europe" as a common concern) that can be counted among the groups of indicators that will be discussed on the following pages ("transnational communicative exchange" and "domestication of Europe", respectively)[2], while the first two criteria clearly belong to the "same criteria of relevance" kind of approach. The operationalization of these indicators, however, is problematic for several reasons. The focus of the study is a "frame analysis" which is used to investigate the interpretational patterns that were used in the media debates on the Haider-affair. The results of this study are a number of frames, such as "Austria is xenophobic", "Europe is a moral community", "Europe is nazi" or "national sovereignty" (cf. Rauer et al. 2002: 32ff). Risse comes to conclude that "Broadly speaking, similar meaning structures emerge across all 15 newspapers from five EU member states and the US". (Risse / van de Steeg 2003: 6) Though these frames allow for certain insights into the characteristics of the international Haider-debate, they are no suitable tool for analyzing Risse's third criterion, i.e. the extent of transnational communicative exchange. Still, Risse also concludes that this kind of transnational communicative exchange could be found in the Haider-debate. (cf. Risse 2004: 140)

Furthermore, Risse argues that if same criteria of relevance can be found transnationally, one can speak of a "community of communication" that "creates a collective European identity in the process of arguing and debating the common European fate." (Risse 2003a: 8) Indeed, some of the frames that were discovered by Risse and his team, such as the "Europe is a moral community"-frame, imply the construction of a European identity. Others, however, such as the "Europe is nazi", "Europe is xenophobic" or "Austria is not nazi" cannot be interpreted as constructing a European identity, but rather contribute to depicting Europe as the "other". For analyzing whether a European identity was constructed in the Haider-debate, van de Steeg rightly analyzes how different frames are connected with each other by making a factor analysis. (cf. van de Steeg 2004) The results show four "dimensions" that are characteristic for the Haider-debate. Again, these dimensions partly do not allow for the conclusion that a European identity has been constructed in the course of the Haider debate, for example, when depicting the "sanctions" against the Austrian government as an interference with a democratically elected government. Van de Steeg thus more cautiously concludes that the Haider debate provided "Europeans an opportunity to discuss amongst themselves the EU's identity". (ibid: 19) General statements on the construction of a European identity in the Haider-debate, such as the above quoted statement from Risse, however, should be avoided. Generally, it seems to me that using "same criteria of relevance" as an indicator and frame analysis as a method, is not a very suitable strategy for analyzing the discursive construction of collective identities, especially when compared to the rich set of methods that was developed in the field of discourse analysis. Many of the linguistic subtleties with regard to the denomination of both, in- and out-groups, for example, can hardly be grasped with frame analytical methods. (cf. e.g. van Leeuwen 1996; Wodak et al. 1998; 1999; Wodak / Weiss 2004) For example, a study on the Haider-debate in Sweden (which, however, was not included in Risse's study), in which the latter methods were applied, comes to the conclusion that "the EU in this particular discourse emerged as Sweden's 'other' so that there was only little room for the discursive construction of a European identity." (Bärenreuter 2005: 207; cf. also Bärenreuter 2002, 2004)

Hans-Jörg Trenz' study on the Europeanization of national media discourses in 11 European media can also be counted among the group of studies that use the "same criteria of relevance" approach. For analyzing the Europeanization of the reporting on "European governance and policy making during the year 2000" (Trenz: 2004: 291), besides quantitative aspects, Trenz also measured the "degree of reciprocal resonance", which is, according to him, a "qualitative indicator which measures the degree of convergence and synchronicity of communication between the different media." (ibid.: 295) He explains that, according to this approach, "the specific meanings, expectations and world views which are channelled through/conveyed by these debates" are being addressed. While the quantitative criteria are the "necessary precondition" for the existence of a EPS, the "degree of reciprocal resonance" is the "qualifying condition". (cf. ibid.) Trenz operationalizes the latter, qualitative criterion 1.) by investigating the use of a "European rhetoric", that can be found in expressions such as "'unemployment as a European problem'" or "'a tragedy with European dimensions'". (ibid: 310) 2.) He distinguishes between different kinds of interpretations, i.e. interests, values and identity. This distinction, however, I would say does not do justice to the complexity of media texts.

The main reason for this is that the three categories Trenz tries to distinguish, cannot be neatly separated. On the contrary, values and interests of a certain collective are closely connected with the group's identity. Interests, on the other hand, can be thought of as being influenced by values, be they moral, economic, religious, and so forth. Analyzing the construction of interests, values, and identities in media discourses thus should not lead to a neat separation of these three categories, following an either-or-logic, but should rather aim at making transparent the intricate relations between these three concepts.

Transnational Communicative Exchange

While the aforementioned studies focused on the existence of similar interpretational patterns, Stefan Tobler argues that this criterion is necessary, but not a sufficient precondition for the existence of a EPS. (cf. Tobler 2002: 72) What is decisive, according to Tobler, is the development of a transnational communicative exchange between actors and/or media from different countries. Accordingly, Tobler measures how often actors from one country (e.g. the German government, Swiss banks, British media) are referred to in media from other countries. This criterion is thus a purely quantitative one which, however, is already more sophisticated than the mere focus on the extent of the reporting on European issues. (cf. above).

Andras Wimmel is another researcher focusing on the extent of transnational communicative exchange in European media discourses. It is, however, not clear whether Wimmel conceives of transnational communication as the *decisive* criterion for the existence of a EPS. According to him, a transnational discourse is given only if actors from different countries "first, formulate their own opinion on a certain topic and when doing so, second, directly refer to the opinion of another speaker, who can be assigned to another country." (Wimmel 2004: 11; translation C.B.)[3] It is thus not sufficient to merely quote or refer to an actor from another country. Rather, only an explicit argumentative reference to actors from other countries is the sufficient criterion for the existence of transnational discourses. Wimmel applies a "quantitative interactive structure analysis" to measure the extent of such a communicative exchange. With this method, he is able to show how often actors from one country refer to actors from other countries in their argumentation. This study is based on Habermas' version of the theory of deliberative democracy. Thus, Wimmel points out that in the next steps of this project, he will develop standards for distinguishing "good" from "bad" arguments, in order to make statements on the deliberative character of the discussions.

Ruud Koopmans and his team have chosen another approach for analyzing transnational communication. In order to investigate the "patterns of *communicative flow*" and the "*relative density of public communication* within and between different political spaces" (Koopmans / Erbe 2003: 7), Koopmans and his colleagues focus on the spatial distribution of "claims-making".

> "We defined an instance of claim making (shorthand: a claim) as a unit of strategic action in the public sphere. It consists of the expression of a political opinion or demand by way of physical or verbal action, regardless of the form this expression takes (statement, violence, repression, decision, demonstration, court ruling, etc. etc.) and regardless of the nature of the actor (governments, social movements, NGO's, individuals, anonymous actors, etc. etc.)" (Koopmans 2004: 13)

This definition of "claim" is thus a very broad one and can, compared to Wimmel's approach, grasp a wider variety of transnational communicative exchanges.

The Domestication of Europe

A third group of empirical indicators used for studying the Europeanization of national public spheres focuses on the way in which "Europe" is communicated in national public spheres. Eilders and Voltmer, for example, not only propose an agenda-setting study on the reporting on European issues, but also a "second-level agenda setting"-analysis that additionally investigates which aspects of a certain issue are being reported, how actors are being presented, or how different topics are connected with each other. (cf. Eilders / Voltmer 2003: 256) On the reporting of five German newspapers on European issues between 1994 and 1998, this second-level agenda setting study shows that European issues are usually debated with reference to national politics. Furthermore, they found a considerable level of support for European integration as such in the five newspapers. One of this study's strengths is that it points to the importance of investigating how discourses on European issues relate to discourses on national topics. References to national debates, national policies, actors or peculiarities do not necessarily contradict with the Europeanization of national public spheres. Rather, Europeanization depends on how the relation between the national and the European level is being constructed. The concrete methods used by Eilders and Voltmer, however, only allow for rather limited insights on the relation between these two levels. As they correctly point out, aspects such as the characterization of political actors or the connection of different topics are central to the study of how the relations between the national and the supranational level are discursively constructed. Yet, in their study they provided merely quantifiable data on, for example, which national policy fields are being referred to in comments on European issues. The important question, how exactly these connections between the national and the European level are being discursively constructed, remains unanswered.

2.2.3. What now?

Given the plurality of approaches to the empirical study of the EPS in the media, one is confronted with an increasingly complex field of research. In fact, in none of these studies exactly the same operationalization of the indicators (same criteria of relevance, transnational communication, domestication of Europe) can be found twice. Though the various studies provide us with a number of interesting and important insights into the characteristics of mass media communication in and on Europe, one wonders how to make sense of the diversity of approaches. Are some empirical indicators more important for the existence of a EPS than others? If so, which ones? How can we decide whether, for example, the existence of the same criteria of relevance is the decisive indicator for the

existence of a EPS or whether it is rather the extent of communicative exchanges between national public spheres? What if there is plenty of communicative exchange on European issues across borders, but differing national perspectives still prevail?

Any attempt to find answers to these questions must be based on a theoretical consideration of the EPS that must consist of at least two aspects: *First*, the concrete political functions that are ascribed to the EPS must be defined. In the context of this study this translates into the question: What exactly is the political role played by the media? *Second*, one has to take into account the multi-national and multilayered character of the European polity. As the EU apparently is no nation-state, but consists of currently 25 Member States, and since decisions are made on many levels, including supranational, national, as well as regional actors, any attempt to take the nation-state as a model implies a misconception of the conditions of possibility of the EPS. Considering these two aspects leads us to two overarching questions: *Which political functions should one ascribe to the public sphere in the multinational and multilayered polity of the EU? What characteristics must discourses take so that these functions are fulfilled?*

As most of the research on the EPS currently focuses on the Europeanization of *national* public spheres, it can be stated that the multinational character of a EPS is taken into consideration when developing models of a EPS. This, however, does not provide us with sufficient consideration regarding how to conceive of the public sphere in a *multilevel* polity. Neither solved is the question of how exactly to define the political functions of the (European) public sphere. In the existing literature on the EPS, one can find partly diverging accounts of the political role of the media. Koopmans and Erbe, for example, in their study list the following five functions: 1.) enabling responsiveness; 2.) ascribing or negating legitimacy; 3.) creating a collective identity; 4.) ensuring accountability of the political system and 5.) enabling participation of the citizens. (cf. Koopmans / Erbe 2004: 3) Concerning this definition, I would argue that the actual functions of the political public sphere can be further reduced. With regard to the “accountability”-function, the authors point to the importance of the mass media for providing people with information on political issues. They argue that the public depends on the mass media since most people do not have direct access to political information. (cf. ibid.: 3) Two remarks should be made regarding this definition: First, I would argue that it implies a misconception of the “accountability”-function and rather pertains to the role of the media as a source of information. This is not to say that the media are not relevant for keeping a political system accountable. However, I would argue that this function should be understood as being part of the responsiveness-function that will be discussed more in detail below. Second, the public sphere is not the only, probably not even the central means of assuring accountability. What is ultimately decisive is the possibility of electing representatives in and out of office. With regard to “participation”, Koopmans and Erbe argue that most people do not have direct access to “European policy-makers” and thus can “only indirectly influence policy-makers by way of visibility, resonance, and legitimacy they may mobilize in the mass media.” (ibid.: 3) Though this observation is surely adequate, this way of influencing day-to-day politics is part and parcel of the responsiveness-function as well. The following sections will thus be dedicated to a discussion of how to conceive of

the three functions that are considered central for the (European) public sphere: creating identity/identities, ascribing or negating legitimacy, as well as making responsiveness of the political system possible.

3. Identity and Legitimacy

One of the basic assumptions on which this paper is based is that a polity that proclaims to be democratic must be based on a citizenry that is united by some sense of belonging together. A prominent scholar standing for this way of reasoning is Jürgen Habermas. In a recent publication, he stresses that the normative requirements for the legitimization of the European Union are different from the ones necessary for supranational organizations, such as the United Nations. While, for the latter, legitimization is sufficiently based on the "moral indignation about evident infringements of the ban on violence and about massive human rights violations", (Habermas 2004: 80; transl. by C.B.) this kind of legitimization is not sufficient for the EU. As the EU has far-reaching competencies for shaping internal policies and, as Habermas optimistically states, learns "to speak with one voice" (ibid.), it needs a kind of "political ethos" or political identity that goes beyond the "negative duties of a universalistic moral of justice". (ibid.)[4] Schmitt and Thomassen similarly argue and point out that "perhaps the most fundamental requirement for a European polity that is more than the co-operation of sovereign states is a sense of collective European identity." (Thomassen / Schmitt 1999: 11) The necessity of a shared identity is explained by the assumption that it is likely that the decisions of a political system, whose subjects do not feel as belonging to it, will be perceived as being non-legitimate in any case where the decisions do not correspond to the subjects' wishes. In such a case, the polity's decisions are likely to be experienced as a "foreign" intervention, rather than an act of democratic self-rule. The polity's claim to power will only be approved by the population if some kind of "affective attachment" exists, linking the demos to its polity. This perspective, in which legitimacy and identity are closely linked, can be referred to as the recognition aspect of legitimacy.[5] (cf. Banchoff 1999; Banchoff / Smith 1999) It is particularly relevant for the case of the EU. As the EU increasingly takes over competencies that were hitherto the exclusive realm of national states, the EU's increased power has to be approved by European citizens. Otherwise, "Brussels" will be perceived as an "other" whose decisions are "imposed" on the Member States. Such a situation has both normative and functional implications. Considering the first, one would have to state that the European polity lacks legitimacy. Considering the latter, one would have to reckon with problems for the integration process, such as popular resistance, voiced in negative referenda on the planned EU constitutional treaty. Given this basic connection between the collective identity of a demos and the legitimacy of the respective polity, how can we conceive a European identity that includes more than 450 million people, living in currently twenty-five Member States? Is the development of such an identity at all feasible?

Some authors, such as Dietmar Grimm (1995) or Peter Kielmansegg (1995), are skeptical concerning the potential for the development of a European identity and point to the linguistic diversity and the "plurality of communities of communication, commemoration and experience". (ibid.: 237; translation by C.B.)[6] Their suspicion is based on a static

conception of collective identities that seems not to allow for the possibility of multiple identities. In recent years, however, it has become widely accepted within the social sciences that people do not merely have one single identity but that each individual has several identities reflecting its ties to differing groups, be it a nation, a religion, a gender, a profession, a certain social status or a hobby. These differing aspects of a person's identity can exist with and parallel to each other in a more or less harmonic way, and they can have differing degrees of influence on one another. (cf. Risse 2003b) For studying the possibilities of European identity, two important conclusions can be drawn from this insight: First, we can no longer assume that the process of European integration implies the replacement of national identities by a supranational, European identity, a notion that was especially popular in early research on European integration. (cf. Haas 1958) Secondly, one can conclude that the construction of a European identity largely depends on whether or not discourses on European identity are able to construct a non-conflictual relation to other kinds of collective identities, most importantly national, but also regional identities, including ideological variations of these identities. Based on the assumption that national identities currently are more firmly anchored than European affiliations, one can conclude that discourses on Europe, in order to create a European identity, must be able to show that European integration is not in contradiction to "national goals" or the national identity. This can basically be achieved by three differing strategies. Either discourses on Europe can be constructed in a way that argues that European integration can actually be a means of achieving national aims and interests. Alternatively, it can be argued that the "national" is actually not affected by further integration. Finally, discourses on Europe may imply a reconstruction of discourses on national identities and interests so that the "national" and the European dimension can be reconciled. If, however, "Europe" is presented as something foreign, external, and threatening, the discursive construction of a European identity is prohibited. (cf. Wæver 2002, 2003) For the study of the discursive construction of European identities, one should thus

> "ask how the nation / state identification is upheld by way of narratives on Europe, and conversely how Europe as a politically real concept is stabilised by its inner connections to other – maybe more powerful – we's." (Wæver 2002: 25)

From this tight connection between discourses on national identities and interests, on the one hand, and on European integration, on the other, what follows is the important conclusion that concepts of Europe and European identities will vary from country to country and are likely to vary even within countries, for example, following ideological cleavages. Instead of speaking of a single European identity, one should thus reckon with a plurality of European identit*ies* , which are influenced by their national (or regional) as well as political background.

For the question regarding which empirical indicators to use for studying the EPS, one can thus conclude that for investigating whether or not discourses on European issues contribute to the construction of European identities and to the ascription of legitimacy of certain policies (or European integration as such), it does not make much sense to use the "same criteria of relevance" or the extent of transnational communication as an empirical indicator. Rather, discourse analytical tools should be applied to investigate whether

"Europe" and the nation / state are constructed in a way that implies the discursive construction of a European identity or whether the EU is depicted as the respective "other". (cf. Wodak et al. 1998; 1999 for methods; cf. Wæver 2002; 2003 for a politico-theoretical discussion; Bärenreuter 2005 for a case study) The existence of shared criteria of relevance between discourses in national public spheres, as defined in the current literature, does not necessarily imply the discursive construction of a European identity. (cf. 2.2.2.)

4. Responsiveness

Another basic assumption that is relevant for the study of the EPS is that a polity that claims to be democratic cannot take decisions in complete independence from the preferences of its demos. This link between the demos and the political system is at the center of interest of all politico-theoretical reasoning on representation. Representation is a highly complex concept and comprises several aspects. The representative quality of a polity, to name just a few, is dependent on regular elections but also, as for example some feminist researchers argue, on the composition of representative bodies according to demographic characteristics, such as gender or ethnic background ("descriptive representation" in Pitkin's terms; cf.1967: ch. 4) . A further aspect of the representative quality of a polity is discussed under the label "responsiveness". Responsiveness refers to the extent to which representatives take the political preferences of the represented into consideration when making decisions. (cf. Herzog 1998: 298) A basic prerequisite for responsiveness is thus a permanent communicative exchange between the political system and its demos. Accordingly, Hanna Pitkin points to the necessity of a

> "machinery for the expression of the wishes of the represented, and that the government respond to these wishes unless there are good reasons to the contrary. There need not be a constant activity of responding, but there must be a constant condition of responsive*ness*, of potential readiness to respond. It is not that a government represents only when it is acting in response to an express popular wish; a representative government is one which is responsive to popular wishes when there are some. Hence there must be institutional arrangements for responsiveness to these wishes." (Pitkin 1967: 232f)

As Pitkin points out, one of the prerequisites for responsiveness is a "machinery" that communicates the "wishes of the represented" to the government. In mass democracies, this machinery can only be understood as a viable public sphere, in which many actors participate, including such entities as political parties, actors from civil society, trade unions, "ordinary" citizens, scientists, religious groups, artists and so on. Not least among them, the mass media play a crucial role in the public sphere as being both an arena in which other actors can communicate their concerns and opinions to a wider audience and an active actor themselves, reporting and commenting on political issues. While one could find for a long time, on the level of the nation state, a far reaching territorial congruence between the public sphere and the realm of the polity, this congruence is put into question by European integration. Thus, we must reassess the conditions of possibility for the responsiveness of a political system comprising currently twenty-five Member States and more than 450 million inhabitants.

In the above quotation, Pitkin also points to the necessity of "institutional arrangements" in order to secure that responsiveness is not restricted to mere "occasional response", that would be completely dependent on the powerholders' will. Most important in this regard is the possibility of choosing representatives in regular elections. When turning to the level of the EU, one finds that the actual possibilities of electing EU officials are rather limited. The only direct possibility is the European Parliament elections. The EP, however, does not have exclusive legislative power. Apart from this, EU citizens merely have the possibility to indirectly influence the composition of EU personnel by electing (or voting out, respectively) national representatives, who, through the Council of Ministers, have an important say in EU politics. Lord thus concludes:

> "In sum, the public cannot remove the supranational political leadership of the Union, and, because it can only remove the intergovernmental leadership piecemeal, its powers of dismissal may not produce significant or rapid changes in policy." (Lord 1998: 93)

Though it can be questioned, whether "significant or rapid changes in policy" on the national level can be achieved by electing one party or another, a certain influence *is* possible. At the European level, however, this kind of popular influence is further limited.

Given the special characteristics of the EU polity that provide different modi of decision making for differing policy fields, one could further specify the discussion of the possibility of responsive governance according to the varying decision making processes. The next question involves how responsiveness at the European level is possible in the intergovernmental modus of decision making on the one hand (the Union's second and third pillar), and in the supranational modus on the other (the Union's first pillar). The intergovernmental type is characterized by negotiations between representatives of various nation states in which they try to find solutions for the problems at hand. In such a situation, one could argue, responsiveness is possible, as national representatives have an institutional incentive to represent national interests (however they may be defined) in these negotiations as citizens have the possibility of voting representatives out of office.

When turning to the supranational modus of decision making, one could conclude that, due to the limited competencies of the only directly elected organ, the EP, and due to the way in which the European commissioners are put into office, there is neither a direct way of "throwing the rascals out", nor would this have much effect in the case where the election of representatives is possible, i.e. the European Parliament. From this distinction between intergovernmental and supranational modi of decision making, one could conclude that in the former responsiveness is possible, while in the latter it is not.

Multiple Addressees, Multiple Demoi

Such a conclusion, however, would be too hasty. When having a closer look at the structure of the decision making processes, it becomes apparent that no neat separation can be made between intergovernmental and supranational modi. Rather, the EU can be characterized as "a complicated hybrid of intergovernmental and supranational institutions" (Thomassen / Schmitt 1999: 6), with the European Council and the Council of Ministers being intergovernmental and the European Parliament, the Commission as

well as the European Court of Justice being supranational institutions. The way in which these actors interact with each other is dependent on the modus of decision making that is applied for the respective policy fields. According to the currently valid regulations, in the Union's first pillar, the focus is on the supranational institutions, while in the second and third pillars, the Member States have a stronger say. Pure supranational or intergovernmental forms of decision taking, however, cannot be found. The addressees of the communicative input by the public sphere are thus, in the case of the EU, always located both at the level of the Member States (i.e. national governments => Council of Ministers) and on the supranational EU-level (Commission, European Parliament). This *multiplicity of addressees* in its turn makes responsive governance much more difficult. The problem arises because national representatives in EU-institutions, i.e. mainly the members of the Council of Ministers, are responsible to their respective national demoi and can be voted out of office by them. Thus, national representatives have no incentive to behave in a responsive way to the communicative input from other Member States than their own. Political preferences and wishes, expressed in *one* Member State thus, in principle, do not confer an order to behave in a certain way onto representatives from *other* countries.

The restraints on responsive governance do not only derive from the fact that political preferences are always addressed towards multiple addressees. The other side of this phenomenon is the "*multiple-demoi character*" of the EU. Due to the multinational composition of the EU, in addition to cleavages along ideological (such as party) lines, one has to reckon with the articulation of differing national interests in various policy fields. As a consequence of this intermixture of interests and political preferences, the complexity of the communicative input into the political system potentially gets higher than in nation states. This is not to say, that interests *necessarily* must be more complex and manifold than in nation states as debates in the EPS may very well be structured transnationally along ideological lines. Still, the possibility of an increased level of complexity of the communicative input, due to diverging national interests, is a *possibility* that has to be taken into consideration when theorizing the conditions of possibility for responsive governance in the EPS. This complexity is a challenge for the political system and makes decision making more demanding. Christopher Lord argues in a similar way when he states:

> "One problem, however, is that there may be limits to the number of cleavages that can be accommodated in any political system, however ingenious its construction: if political actors are to be cohesive, they have to arrange themselves in relation to a limited number of social choices and conflicts." (Lord 1998: 49)

Though Lord made this statement with regard to the institutional setup of the EU, it also applies to the communicative exchange between the demos and the political system that is a basic prerequisite for responsive governance. In cases in which the communicative input into the political system exceeds a certain degree of heterogeneity, the implied complexity makes responsive governance difficult, as the "wishes of the represented" remain too unclear and heterogeneous for deducing an order to act in a certain way from it. In such a situation, the wishes of the represented can only randomly be taken into consideration by

decision makers. Decisions will exclusively be made by political elites who often negotiate "behind closed doors". Of course, also in representative systems at the national level, decisions are made by elites. In nation states, however, political disputes are usually worked out between political parties, whose relative strength can be decided upon in regular elections. Citizens thus have the possibility to sanction representatives with whose decisions they are not satisfied. On the European level, however, due to the limited effects of EP election results, this kind of sanction is hardly given.

When returning to the question of how to empirically investigate the EPS in the mass media, one can conclude from this that a *reduction of the complexity* of the communicated wishes and demands would be necessary to provide for the possibility of responsive governance. This reduction of complexity can be achieved if political debates on European issues in the respective national public spheres are structured along the same criteria of relevance. As a result of this reduced complexity of the communicative input, the EU polity can become responsive to the wishes of the European citizens.[7] In such a situation, decision makers are faced with a *limited* number of transnational popular demands, wishes and preferences. Which of these will be taken into consideration is then dependent on the political preferences of the majorities in the decisive EU institutions. However, as mentioned above, the EU currently is largely lacking institutional incentives for responsive governance. Even if a reduction of the complexity of the communicative input into the EU polity could be achieved, one may thus not necessarily reckon with that EU institutions will behave in a responsive way. This deficiency of the EU polity has to be taken into consideration when theorizing the political functions of the public sphere at the European level. If not making the analytical distinction between the democratic deficiencies of the political system of the EU and the EPS when considering the possibility of responsive governance, one actually risks to indirectly cover the former by focusing exclusively on the latter. The possibility of responsive governance is not only dependent on the development of a EPS, but to the same degree on the institutional setup of the EU polity. As Kantner stresses, institutional solutions have to be found that allow for linking the broader public with political decisions taken at the European level. Such an institutional setup would also *foster* the alignment of political preferences along transnational lines instead of national interests (cf. Kantner 2004: ch. 5) and thus contribute to the reduction of the complexity of the communicative input, necessary for making responsive governance possible.

5. Identity and Legitimacy versus Responsiveness?

So far it has been argued that the construction of European identities in the various European countries and, as a consequence thereof, also the ascription or denial of legitimacy of the EU, necessarily develop against the background of specific discourses on national identity, national interests, and history. It has also been argued that the reduction of the complexity of the communicative input by the EPS into the EU polity is a precondition for making responsive governance possible. Otherwise, the communicated wishes and preferences remain too heterogeneous, so that the EU polity can only randomly take these preferences into consideration when making decisions. When accepting these assumptions, one is confronted with a kind of dilemma, or – to put it

more cautiously – at least a tension between the above mentioned functions of the EPS. While the former two require that discourses on national identities and interests accommodate "Europe" in a way that takes the national peculiarities into consideration and constructs a non-conflictual relationship between the EU and the respective nation-state identities / interests, the latter requires a stronger homogenization of national discourses. At first sight, one is thus confronted with a situation in which the national "flavor" of discourses on "Europe" will make responsiveness impossible, as the latter would require the existence of the same criteria of relevance. Do we thus either have to choose between a plurality of European identities, for the prize of abstaining from responsive governance? Or: Is the prize for democratic influence by the European demos/oi a homogeneously defined European identity? I don't think so.

"Chains of Equivalence"

The tension that we are confronted with here seems to be between a pluralism of discourses on Europe, necessary for the construction of European identities and EU-legitimacy, and a stronger homogenization of discourses, necessary for making responsiveness possible. This tension, I would suggest, can be solved when applying and adapting certain aspects of the discourse theory of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. In their book "*Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*" (1985) Laclau and Mouffe presented their discourse-based model of politics in which they provide a theoretical account of the logic of discursive struggles of political agents for hegemony. One of the central concepts they developed is the notion of the "logic of equivalence". According to the authors, a hegemonic discourse is the successful attempt to unite differing political struggles by constructing a chain of equivalence between them. If the attempt to construct a chain of equivalence succeeds, "differences cancel one other [sic] out insofar as they are used to express something identical underlying them all." (ibid.: 127) This does not imply a complete homogenization, as the various political discourses "are only the same in one aspect while being different in others." (Torfing 1999: 97) The discourses consequently are both, embedded in "signifying chains that stress their differential value, and in signifying chains that emphasize their equivalence." (ibid.) The logic of equivalence should thus be understood as a "a logic of the simplification of political space, while the logic of difference" – the theoretical counterpart – " is a logic of its expansion and increasing complexity." (Laclau / Mouffe 1985: 130)

When applying the notion of chains of equivalence to the study of the EPS, one is capable of solving the theoretical tension described above. The successful construction of a chain of equivalence between discourses on European issues in the various national public spheres in Europe may accomplish both the necessary reduction of complexity that makes responsive governance possible (logic of equivalence), while at the same time leaving enough discursive scope to allow for the adaptation of the respective discourses to national circumstances (logic of difference). In concrete terms, one can imagine a transnational chain of equivalence between national public spheres in Europe as the (simultaneous) co-existence of similar political preferences and wishes concerning a specific issue of policy making. These preferences do not have to be based on the same

arguments, but can be included in differing discursive backgrounds that reflect national peculiarities and allow for the nationally (or regionally) specific discursive adaptation of "Europe".

There is, however, a difference between the original concept of chains of equivalence and its adaptation for the study of the EPS that is suggested here. According to Laclau and Mouffe, the establishment of a chain of equivalence is equated with the creation of a union of differing politically active groups who unite to counter a common political adversary, such as neoliberal intentions to (re-)construct society. By doing so, "the very identity of the forces engaging in that alliance" is being modified. (ibid.) This implies that political activists from the various groups are not only aware of their co-activists, but communicate with each other and intentionally reformulate their agenda in a way that guarantees that "the defence of the interests of the workers not to be made at the expense of the rights of women, immigrants or consumers". (ibid.: 184)

For enabling the functions of the EPS, on the contrary, this communication between national public spheres as well as the intentional, active co-ordination of political preferences is not a prerequisite. Political preferences that are communicated to the political system *may* well develop in the process of transnational communication between actors in the various national public spheres, but transnational communication and co-ordination is *not* indispensable. Indeed, it can even be assumed that preferences as formulated in mass media in most cases do not develop through transnational communication with actors, media (etc.) from other countries. To give a rather recent example, one can point to the debate on whether or not to include a reference to Christianity in the preface of the European constitutional treaty. This issue was fiercely debated in many countries and publicized opinion in some countries (e.g. France) tended to be against the inclusion of this reference while in other countries (e.g. Poland) the publicized opinion was predominantly in favor of including this reference. In this case, it is safe to assume that these positions were shaped by their respective national backgrounds and did not develop through the communicative exchange across borders, as normatively postulated by representatives of deliberative democracy. And indeed, this is not even necessary. All that is necessary is that various transnationally shared wishes and preferences are communicated to the political system. How exactly these preferences are justified, i.e. how exactly they are embedded in national discursive spaces and which discursive constructions of European identities come along with these justifications, is less important for making responsiveness possible. As long as a convergence of competing, but transnational political demands can be found, the necessary reduction of complexity of the communicative input is provided for. Nationally distinct constructions of European identities thus do not have to be amalgamated into a homogeneously defined pan-European identity.

For the empirical study of the extent to which the functions that are ascribed to the EPS can be fulfilled in media discourses, this implies a double analytical move. On the one hand the empirical analysis of the question to which degree discourses in national public spheres in Europe fulfil the prerequisites for making responsive governance possible, a comparative study of discourses on European issues in national media is necessary,

focusing on which political demands and preferences are being formulated in the respective public spheres. The central question in this analysis must be whether the communicative input into the political system follows national lines or whether similar interpretational patterns (chains of equivalence) can be found when comparing national public spheres. On the other hand, the analysis of the construction of European identities and the ascription / denial of legitimacy requires the in-depth analysis of the construction of "Europe" in national public spheres, not the least in media discourses. (cf. e.g. the analyzes in Stråth / Malmborg 2002 or in Hansen / Wæver 2002; for a close-reading of political speeches on Europe cf. Wodak / Weiss 2004; cf. also Oberhuber et al. 2005)

6. Concluding Remarks

What has been presented in this article is thus the sketch of a model of the EPS that does not apply demanding theories of deliberative democracy[8] as a benchmark for the study of the Europeanization of national public spheres. Central to this model is the argument that different functions of the EPS have to be treated separately, both when it comes to the politico-theoretical discussion of their conditions of possibility in the multinational and multi-layered EU-polity and the empirical indicators that are used to investigate the extent to which these functions can be fulfilled by actual discourses. It was argued that the creation of a European identity is a necessary prerequisite for the democratization of the EU. Instead of conceiving of a homogeneously defined pan-European identity, however, national peculiarities will have an impact on the construction of notions of "Europe". It is thus more appropriate to talk of European identit*ies*. For reaching a basic legitimacy of the EU it is necessary that discourses on Europe do not construct an opposition between the "national" and the "European". Identity and legitimacy are thus closely linked. When it comes to the possibility of responsive governance, it was argued that due to the multinational character of the EU, the communicative input into the EU polity potentially gets more complex than in a single nation state. Such a high level of complexity, however, would prohibit responsive behaviour of policy makers as the "wishes of the represented" remain unclear. Thus, a reduction of the complexity of the communicative input is necessary. Such a reduction of complexity would be achieved if public discussions are structured along "same criteria of relevance". In the final step, it was argued that a theoretical tension evolves from the discussion of the above functions. While the discursive construction of European identities and of legitimacy will necessarily reflect national differences (including *intra*-national differences following ideological lines), responsiveness requires a stronger approximation of discourses. This tension can be solved on a theoretical level when adapting the notion of "chains of equivalence", developed by E. Laclau and Ch. Mouffe, to the study of the EPS. A transnational chain of equivalence would denote national discourses on Europe that converge with regard to the expressed political preferences (necessary for responsive governance), but differ when it comes to the exact justification of these preferences, thus allowing for the adaptation of the respective discourses to national circumstances. The operationalization of chains of equivalence would thus imply a double analytical approach. On the one hand, the degree of convergence of political preferences as expressed in various national discourses has to be studied. On the other hand, the discursive construction of European identities in national public spheres has to be studied in depth, using discourse analytical methods.

I do not agree with Eriksen's statement that "Access to *one* common public – one single European public space – is necessary to enable citizens to address the same political issues and being exposed to the same information, arguments and contra-arguments." (Eriksen 2004: 24) The functions of a EPS, as described above, can also be fulfilled if discourses largely remain within national public spheres and if there is no pan-European public sphere, e.g. in the shape of pan-European media. Neither is transnational communication, understood as the communicative exchange of arguments and counter-arguments across borders, of central importance in this model. The aim of this paper was to sketch a model that does not take normative theories as a benchmark for the existence of a EPS, which, if applied to the study of national public spheres, would most likely show that they neither meet these standards. (cf. Gerhards 1997) Peters, for example, points to "some peculiar features" of public debates that "are very often apparent: Hyperbole, excitement, dramatization" as well as (over-) simplification. (Peters 1997: 40f)

Despite these characteristics, perceived as shortcomings from a deliberative point of view, national public spheres allow for the realization of, however basic, democratic standards. As Mokre and Puntscher Riekmann point out, the political relevance of the public sphere is rather endangered by the self-disempowerment of the political realm by succumbing to theneoliberal ideology of "factual constraints" ("Sachzwänge") as well as the uneven development of collective identities and the structures of political representation, as it can be studied not least in the European Union. (cf. Mokre / Puntscher Riekmann 2004) It is thus important to bear in mind that the question of a (European) public sphere goes far beyond the media system and that it is, amongst other factors, necessary to consider the political system as well.

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Notes:

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2. The necessity of transnational exchange for the existence of a EPS is even more explicit in the following quotation: „Europäische Öffentlichkeit entsteht im transnationalen Raum über die wechselseitigen Verbindungen und den Austausch zwischen nationalen Öffentlichkeiten.“ (Risse 2004: 140)

3. “Transnationale Diskurse könnten demnach nur dann von Akteuren geführt werden, wenn diese erstens zu einem bestimmten Thema selbst eine Meinung formulieren und dabei zweitens auf die Meinung eines Sprecher, der einem anderen Land zugeordnet werden kann, direkt Bezug nehmen.”

4. “ Für die Solidarität unter Weltbürgern reicht die übereinstimmende moralische Entrüstung über evidente Verletzungen des Gewaltverbots und über massive Menschenrechtsverstöße aus. […] Aber dieses Potential genügt nicht für den Integrationsbedarf einer europäischen Union, die, wie wir annehmen wollen, nach außen mit einer Stimme zu sprechen lernt und im Inneren Kompetenzen für eine gestaltende Politik an sich zieht. Die Solidarität unter Bürgern einer politischen Gemeinschaft, und sei sie noch so groß und heterogen zusammengesetzt, kann nicht *allein* über starke negative Pflichten einer universalistischen Gerechtigkeitsmoral […] hergestellt werden.”

5. This, of course, is not to say that the concept of legitimacy is exhausted by pointing to the importance of identity for the legitimation of a polity. Another aspect of legitimacy, that is of particular relevance for the study of the public sphere, is the importance of representative institutions. (cf. Banchoff / Smith 1999) For the representative quality of a polity not least the concept of “responsiveness”, which will be discussed in the next section, is of central relevance.

6. “Die Pluralität der Kommunikations-, Erinnerungs- und Erfahrungsgemeinschaften als ein europäisches Grunddatum – das hat Folgen nicht nur für die Möglichkeiten der Entwicklung einer kollektiven politischen Identität der Europäer als Europäer.”

7. The process of opinion formation should not be understood as taking place in a public sphere that is independent from the political system. On the contrary, political actors aiming at raising societal resonance for their political concerns, often communicate their political concerns to a broader public. This observation is especially important with regard to mass media, whose agenda is dominated by actors from the political system. (cf. Gerhards 1999)

8. A brief definition of deliberative democracy can be found in della Porta 2004: “we have deliberative democracy when under conditions of equality, inclusiveness and transparency, a communicative process based on reason (the strength of the good argument) is able to transform individual preferences and reach decisions oriented to the public good.” (3)

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