

Foreword

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3 Media and the European public sphere: Common misconceptions and shared conclusions on media representations of the EU and Europe

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Abstract. A European public sphere where citizens from all European countries join together in the debate of European issues – is this purely a utopian fantasy or has it already become reality? The chapter examines the past twenty years of research on the European public sphere as it becomes alive in mediated representations of the EU and Europe and discusses both common misconceptions and shared conclusions concerning this complex phenomenon.

Keywords: European public sphere, EU legitimacy, Europeanised national media, European identity, European entertainment

1. Looking for the European public sphere

Is there a public sphere bridging the gap between the EU's political institutions and its citizens? This question has been debated intensively over the past twenty years by three groups of people, each with a vastly different set of motives, definitions and approaches. On the one hand intellectuals and political philosophers, most prominently Habermas [1998], have been fulfilling their traditional role by critically reflecting on the consequences of the political process of European integration for the legitimacy of the political system in general and for the concerned citizens in particular.

The second group consists of EU officials realising that the comfortable period of ‘permissive consensus’ has ended and that they can no longer count on the European people’s friendly disinterest in European politics as a stable basis for pursuing the goals of political integration. Alerted by failed referenda and growing voter support for euro-sceptic parties, they grabbed at the idea of a European public sphere to improve relations between the EU and its citizens – hence a European Commissioner for Communication Strategy was installed in 2005², a White Paper on European Communication Policy [European Commission 2006] and the “Plan-D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate” [European Commission 2005] were published, and funding for several major empirical research projects on the European public sphere was approved.

A third group, scientific researchers faced the considerable task of systematically mapping the empirical realities of the European public sphere. Whether as part of multi-national research consortia backed by EU grants or as individual small-scale PhD-projects, many academics from different countries and disciplines united in the “Quest for the European public sphere” [Wessler et al. 2007: 94]. Their work is the focus of this chapter. It can only be understood, however, against the backdrop of the writings and actions of both political theorists and EU politicians [see chapter by Lodge].

The chapter begins by addressing three common misconceptions about a European public sphere (EPS), then discusses four commonly shared empirical conclusions of EPS research: that the European public sphere is an elite project, powered by political integration, is still a mostly episodic phenomenon and is not (yet?) sustained by a European identity. It concludes with some reflections on the future of the EPS and research on it.

2. Three common misconceptions

Whether in academic circles, among politicians and media professionals, or between citizens on the street, discussions of the European public sphere are

² The activities of Commissioner Wallström, whose responsibilities also included Institutional Relations, were controversial and the portfolio was abandoned at the end of the first Barroso Commission in 2009.

encumbered by a number of misconceptions. A perspicuous depiction of the current state of EPS research cannot succeed without first resolving the three most common of these: that a EPS looks favourably on European politics, that it depends on the existence of pan-European media, and that a EPS will replace national public spheres.

2.1. A EUROPEAN PUBLIC SPHERE LOOKS FAVOURABLY ON EUROPEAN POLITICS

The first common misconception probably most popular among politicians but not limited to those, is that a European public sphere would legitimize the political institutions of the European Union by providing *positive evaluations* of their political decisions and actions. Public sphere theory, understands ‘legitimation’ differently: according to Habermas, it is already the existence of a public forum in which European politics are *subject* to public scrutiny and discussion, which would provide it with political legitimacy, independent of the tenor of opinions voiced there [Habermas 1997].

Democratic theory provides different solutions to the problem of how the governance of a select few of ‘the people’ (i.e. the demos) can be legitimized. In some theory traditions regular elections suffice, in others, such as deliberative democratic theory, a more continuous link between government and the governed is required, e.g. the constant deliberation of matters of common concern in the public sphere [cf. among others Cohen 1997]. While different authors offer varying sets of stipulations for the public sphere to fulfil concerning the participants - the tone, argumentative style, or topics of the debate - none deny the possibility of negative evaluations of politics. On the contrary, the main purpose of a public sphere is considered to be to criticize the government and thus curb its power³. Any possible positive effects of the existence of a European public sphere for the European polity should thus not derive from an argumentative *support* of its policies, but from the simple fact

³ For a comparison of different democratic theories and the corresponding requirements on a public sphere see Ferree et al. (2002).

that its policies are publicly debated – thus increasing the democratic legitimacy ascribed to it which in turn should translate into a greater loyalty of and rational support by its constituents [Peters 2005]. Based on these considerations, empirical EPS research has focused less on evaluation and more on structural dimensions of the EPS, analysing one or several of the following key dimensions⁴:

1. vertical: Which polity levels are discussed in the public sphere, and is the EU level included?
2. synchronization: Are the same topics discussed at the same time with the same criteria of relevance?
3. horizontal: Which EU member states are part of the debate (as objects of discussions, speakers, claimants etc.)?
4. collective identification: Are opportunities of collective identification with the EU provided in the political debate?

2.2. A EUROPEAN PUBLIC SPHERE NEEDS PAN-EUROPEAN MEDIA

Even though Habermas based his ideal of the public sphere on coffeehouses and literary salons of the Enlightenment, the public sphere of today is generally considered to be a mass-mediated one. While public debates also occur on the level of personal encounters and public meetings, it is the mass media who can integrate all these separate public sphere moments in a (more or less) cohesive whole by disseminating information and arguments quickly and by functioning as a common reference point for individual debates. A public sphere thus depends on mass media serving as vehicles or arenas for the debate. As far as the European public sphere was concerned, the initial argument against its possible existence was the absence of pan-European mass media [other arguments include the lack of a common media regulation, language, culture, history and collective identity, cf. Grimm 1995; Kielmansegg 2003].

⁴ Most studies include also some indicators for evaluating the EU and/or its policies. The four dimensions are ranked according to their importance in EPS research, starting with the most prevalent. See Wessler et al. (2008). The distinction vertical/horizontal is based on Koopmans/Erbe (2003), synchronisation on Eder/Kantner (2002).

Empirically, this remains valid today. There are only few media outlets with a European-wide reach, and these are limited mainly to small and elite audiences. Several attempts to establish more mainstream pan-European media failed, indicating that national differences in language, culture, and media systems are too strong, relegating the development of a European public sphere sustained by pan-European outlets to the realms of utopian fantasy [Schlesinger 1999; Brüggemann/Schulz-Forberg 2009]. This does not disprove the possibility of the EPS as such: at the national level, public spheres comprise a multitude of different media outlets [Peters 2004; Kleinen-von Königslöw, 2007] and, in some cases, cross culture and language barriers. In the national public sphere, citizens take part in a public debate through a variety of media outlets, grouped together both by their interest in a common problem and their vague understanding of a shared collective identity. Taking into account the fragmented nature of the national public sphere, the existence of an EPS in which European citizens participate through the lenses of national media becomes a distinct possibility that can be verified by empirical analysis of the ‘Europeanisation of national public spheres’ [Gerhards 2001: 152; see also Kunelius/Sparks, 2001]. While theoretical dimensions and empirical indicators vary, looking for the EPS as it manifests itself in the representations of the EU and Europe in national media has become the core of EPS research, and allowed it to overcome its initial paralysis and blossom⁵.

2.3. A EUROPEAN PUBLIC SPHERE REPLACES NATIONAL PUBLIC SPHERES

The third common misconception concerns the relationship between national public spheres and the EPS. As EU institutions take over more and more national governments’ responsibilities, the corresponding EPS would, in the

⁵ See Machill et al., 2006; de Vreese, 2007; Brüggemann et al., 2009. The focus on Europeanization of national public spheres has, however, also led to a serious neglect of the possible contribution of the few existing pan-European media- for a rather solitary exception see Brüggemann/Schulz-Forberg, 2009. Considering the fact that the European Commission has chosen one of them, the *Financial Times Europe*, as its preferred mouthpiece [cf. Lecheler, 2008], in particular the interplay between national and pan-European media outlets and its impact on the level and shape of Europeanization of national public spheres should also yield interesting insights into the workings of the European public sphere.

long term, replace national public spheres: the two are direct competitors. This misconception is encouraged by the empirical indicators used in many EPS-studies. The share of EU institutions in the debate is mapped against the shares of national institutions, the share of EU speakers against that of national speakers – a growth in the salience of EU issues would thus only be possible against a loss in importance and visibility for national topics. But despite the limited news-processing capacity of media (and their audiences) it would still be wrong to consider national and European public sphere as direct rivals involved in a zero-sum-game. In many ways the two are interconnected. When nationally elected politicians debate European policy, the two layers of public spheres meet and intermingle. At the moment, it seems unlikely and undesirable that EU level politics should crowd out national (or regional) politicians and politics completely: the EU will remain dependent on national politics serving as a transmission belt to translate and adapt their politics to local conditions. At the same time this also implies that to exist, the European public sphere does not have to outdo or be stronger than its national counterparts. Based on an argument by the late Bernhard Peters, Hepp et al. encourage us instead to understand “the European public sphere as a certain thickening [in political communication] that ‘layers’ in a lesser intensity across these national public spheres” [2009: 47]. This allows for the national ‘thickenings’ in political communication, i.e. the national public spheres, to remain in place while the intensity of EU and European political communication may vary and adapt to the changes in the political system.

3. Four commonly shared conclusions of EPS research

What are the four main shared conclusions of EPS research? This summary of the research field mainly draws on the findings of larger comparative projects, but refers also to single-country studies wherever they add particularly valuable insights to the workings of the EPS⁶.

⁶ Due to space constraints this chapter focuses on the main body of EPS research which examines the EPS and its manifestation in media content, although recent years have seen a growing number of studies on either media professionals as producers of EPS content

3.1. THE EUROPEAN PUBLIC SPHERE IS AN ELITIST PROJECT

The EU has often been accused of being an elitist project, disconnected from the interests of the majority of its citizens, pushed by political and economic elites. Much EPS research makes similar claims for their research object (and even for some of the EPS researchers themselves). The EPS is an elite project, dominated by elite participants, elite countries and limited to elite audiences.

Habermas' main criticism of today's mass-mediated public sphere concerns the fact that it is dominated by voices of the 'centre', leaving little room for the 'periphery', i.e. civil society or average citizens [Habermas 1997]. Empirical analyses mostly confirmed this for national public spheres: Ferree et al.'s [2002] comparison of the German and the US public sphere on the abortion debate may have shown a more 'open' debate in the US, but overall the political elite that has the greatest voice in national mass-mediated debates. In the EPS, this dominance becomes even stronger. Contrary to early enthusiastic predictions, the shift of political power to the European level has not empowered civil society. Wessler [2007] shows that the share of civil society voices drops sharply when the debate moves from national to European topics. The EUROPUB-project came to a similar conclusion comparing national and Europeanised political claims [Koopmans 2010]. Only research on the online EPS is somewhat more encouraging: here the chances of encountering citizens' opinions are slightly higher, particularly in comment sections [Koopmans/Zimmermann 2010; Michailidou/Trenz 2010].

Even in the case of the debate on the European Constitutional Treaty, which had been hoped to stimulate bottom-up participation from citizens, Vettters et al. [2006] find an overall dominance of political actors from both Germany and France; civil society actors account for under a fifth of political claims. According to Liebert and her group [2007], this elitist bias was even stronger in the new member states. Thus, despite the fact that the EU Commission launched a series of measures to enhance public interest in and debate of the

[Heikkilä/Kunelius, 2006; AIM Research Consortium, 2007; Hepp et al., 2009] or on effects of EPS content on citizens' knowledge and attitudes [de Vreese/Boomgaarden 2006; Maier/Rittberger 2008; Vliegthart, 2008; Scharrow/Vogelgesang 2010].

Constitutional Treaty, citizens' participation in the public sphere was limited.⁷ As Lingenberg's study of audience appropriation of the debate on the Constitutional Treaty in Germany, France and Italy illustrates, the failure of the constitutional referenda in France and the Netherlands was probably the greatest stimulus for citizens' engagement with the issue, evoking "a moment of the European public sphere" [Lingenberg 2010: 66].

The EPS' elite bias also concerns the states involved either as active participants or as objects of observation in the debate: the EPS is clearly dominated by strong and powerful member states such as France, Germany and Great Britain [Erbe 2005; Wessler et al. 2008]. Europe appears mostly as a project of the strongest members, with others only rarely entering the spotlight, for example in moments of failure, before they sink into oblivion again (even though Greece may prove to be more persistently remembered as the first grand EU failure). Brüggemann/Kleinen-von Königslöw [2009] point out that this is a one-sided love affair. Elite states show significantly lower interest in their EU neighbours' affairs than do smaller countries like Austria and Denmark.

The EPS elite bias persists at the level of audiences: not only are the audiences of the few truly pan-European media outlets limited to political and economic elites [Brüggemann/Schulz-Forberg 2009], even the Europeanisation of national public spheres appears to occur mainly in the quality press which is also read by a somewhat larger, but still elite audience. EPS research mirrors the elite bias of its research object by focusing mainly on quality papers – either because the researchers consider Europeanisation more likely to occur or because their general conception of a public sphere in terms of deliberativeness is beyond the possibilities of tabloid papers or television newscasts⁸. The regional press is generally ignored even though the circulation exceeds that of the quality press in most states.

⁷ Concerning the general inefficiency of the European Commissions efforts to stimulate a European public sphere see the overview in Brüggemann (2010).

⁸ An exception is the EUROPUB-project (Pfetsch et al., 2008; Koopmans et al., 2010) and some single country studies (Vetters, 2007).

The little research on the tabloid press and television news consistently reports low levels of interest in both the EU and Europe as a community of nations, particularly during routine periods [Norris 2000; Grootjens 2004]: “the Europeanisation of television news coverage is more an illusion than reality” [Peter and de Vreese 2004: 3]. Special events attract somewhat more attention, for example the introduction of the EURO [de Vreese 2001], or European Parliamentary elections for which de Vreese et al. [2006] could even attest to an increase in visibility between 1999 and 2004 for ten of the 15 old member states. Here public broadcasters surpass commercial television news and even newspapers. For tabloid papers, the picture looks rather bleak, as even these important events remain mostly below the radar. This is confirmed by Kleinen-von Königslöw [2010] who finds a trend of increasing interest in EU institutions in the tabloid papers of six EU states over the past 26 years – however, they never reach the degree of Europeanisation found in the quality press. Furthermore, it remains a more superfluous European public sphere, lacking both the in-depth interest in EU politics and the references to a European identity which can be found in the quality press. The depiction of the EPS in recent years by EPS researchers remains mostly restricted to the elite audiences of quality newspapers and – during European Parliament elections – public television newscasts.

3.2 THE EUROPEAN PUBLIC SPHERE IS POWERED BY POLITICAL INTEGRATION

The political integration of the EU has driven the debate on the EPS and its deficiencies: as political power shifted from nation states to Brussels, intellectuals, politicians and ordinary citizens increasingly worried about a possible democratic deficit. But has political integration really had an impact on the EPS itself? The few longitudinal research projects appear to confirm this. The EUROPUB project concluded that Brussels had become more important in political claims-making between 1990 and 2002 [Koopmans et al., 2010]. Wessler et al. [2008] show a rise in monitoring of EU institutions and discussion of EU politics that seems to mirror their political relevance between

1982 and 2003 in five EU states – even though Kleinen-von Königslöw [2010] cautions that this trend has levelled off by the world financial crisis in 2008, thus reflecting somewhat the general unease as to whether the EU would be able to solve the related problems. This general development is confirmed for additional states and based on a continuous dataset [Boomgaarden et al. 2010]. Similarly, the length of membership and depth of political integration of each states seems to have an important impact. The national public spheres of the EU's founding members tend to be more Europeanised than those of late-comers [Brüggemann/Kleinen-von Königslöw, 2009], even though Poland is trying to catch up as quickly as possible [Kleinen-von Königslöw/Möller 2009]. At the same time, Great Britain (which opted-out of some integrative steps such as the Euro and the Schengen Treaty), retains by far the lowest levels of Europeanisation.

EUROPUB showed that changes in political opportunity structures are mirrored in the national public spheres [Koopmans et al. 2010: 93]: “Actors from the European polity level were highly visible participants in issue fields where the European Union has gained strong supranational competencies: monetary politics, agriculture and European integration”. On the one hand this implies that journalists are simply ‘doing their job’: they report on and critically discuss political decisions, and as more and more political decisions are taken in Brussels, they follow this development. On the other hand, Trezz [2004: 313] correctly points out that “the media are not the mirror of the political system. Newspapers design their own maps of the political landscape and use different scales from political actors. [...] EU agricultural policy, for instance, has practically no chance of reaching the threshold of media attention”. However, this phenomenon is not unique to the EPS. National politicians have continuously complained that the media set their own agenda, and only because the EU is very much involved in this policy field, why should national media bother about it? Even the most ardent supporters of the European project concede that an increase in coverage of agricultural policy is unlikely to stimulate the average citizen's interest in and support for the EU.

3.3. THE EUROPEAN PUBLIC SPHERE IS MOSTLY EPISODIC

Much EPS research focuses on single episodes, i.e. analyses either discussions of particular issues or exceptional time periods such as European Parliamentary elections. There are both normative and empirical reasons for this. Normatively, such an approach can be grounded in the rather minimalistic definition of the EPS proposed by Eder and Kantner [2000] in which [following Habermas 1997] a common public sphere exists when the same topics are discussed at the same time with the same criteria of relevance in the different national public spheres: the synchronisation of national debates. As the original premise of the research field was the non-existence of a European public sphere, it was plausible to analyse most-likely cases such as these episodes, where a shared or at least parallel discussion of European affairs was empirically most likely to occur and normatively most desirable. Most episodic studies come to a positive conclusion. In the so-called ‘Haider’-debate concerning EU sanctions against Austria for forming a coalition with right-wing populist Jörg Haider, similar frames emerged in all analysed European states [van de Steeg 2006]. Studies of the discussion of constitutional issues or EU enlargement⁹ describe an EPS where national discourses may be dominated by a particular frame or argument, but general conflict lines are similar enough also to permit transnational European debates.

Underlying any optimistic interpretation of these research results is the assumption that such episodic ‘moments’ of a European public sphere will contribute in the long term to its general integration. With each European-wide debate on single issues the overall level of Europeanness, of awareness of Brussels and EU neighbours should increase, in turn facilitating the occurrence of European debates in a self-reinforcing process. Promising for the EPS as this hypothesis sounds, only longitudinal studies can assess its validity. Here issue-specific studies report a clear trend of Europeanisation of national debates for

⁹ cf. the analyses of the ‘Future of Europe’-debate of 2000 (Trenz, 2007), of European integration as a topic between 2000 and 2002 (Pfetsch et al., 2008), the Brussels summit on the Constitutional Treaty in 2003 (Oberhuber et al., 2005), the ratification process of the Constitutional Treaty 2004-2005 (Vetters et al., 2006; Liebert, 2007), as well as Adam (2008) on both Constitution and Enlargement.

the debate of Green biotechnology [Schneider 2008], but for the issue of humanitarian/military interventions the results are mixed. While Kantner et al. [2008] claim a synchronization of issue cycles for European newspapers between 1990 and 2005, Wessler et al. [2008] can find no sign of convergence in cleavage structures between the first and second US intervention in Kuwait/Iraq. In other words, military interventions are increasingly discussed at the same time in the different nations, but not necessarily using the same frames and arguments. The main problem, however, is that these studies have difficulty separating a possible general trend of Europeanisation from the impact of the context of each debated conflict (Iraq or in Europe? Own troops deployed? Etc [Kantner et al. 2008]). So the results of the few cross-issue longitudinal studies seem somewhat more reliable in tracing the general structural transformation of the national public sphere. While these do find indications of an increase in the awareness of and focus on EU institutions or European parliamentary elections over time, none clearly pinpoints whether the general trend has been fuelled by previous episodes of parallel debate. Furthermore, there appears to be no growing interest in the affairs and opinions of European neighbours – which contradicts any ‘integration through conflict’-thesis.

3.4. THE EUROPEAN PUBLIC SPHERE IS NOT SUSTAINED BY A EUROPEAN IDENTITY

This relates to results that advocates of the European project should find the most alarming: so far EPS research has discovered very little evidence of a developing European identity. No matter how intensively EU politics are monitored and discussed nowadays in national media outlets, Europe as a community of nations and an object of identification only rarely makes an appearance. If the EPS is supposed to feed the loyalty and support of its citizens, and ‘belief’ in the political system, it must go beyond simple ‘vertical Europeanisation’, i.e. a growth in the monitoring of EU politics in national public spheres. The public sphere would then have to facilitate solidarity among its constituents and provide an object of collective identification. Thus EPS research has identified ‘horizontal Europeanisation’ and ‘collective identity’ as

additional important dimensions in the Europeanisation of national public spheres.

Horizontal Europeanisation refers to the mutual observation of European member states, to an exchange of arguments and opinions, of political claims across national borders. As Habermas argues, when citizens are provided with the opportunity to learn about their neighbours they will be able to develop something like pan-European solidarity, “solidarity among strangers” [2006: 76]. Here, however, there appears to be little progress over time. Most research projects report an overall level of horizontal Europeanisation that differs strongly between countries. Some political cultures, particularly those of small countries, appear to be very open towards influences from abroad. Others, such as the notoriously parochial Great Britain, remain rather shuttered off [Brüggemann/Kleinen-von Königslöw 2009; Kleinen-von Königslöw 2010; Koopmans et al. 2010]. Still, despite the fact that the political interdependence of EU member states grows continuously and more importantly is also increasingly visible – if we take the Constitutional referenda or the Greek and Irish “bailouts” in the course of the global financial crisis as the most obvious examples – the level of mutual observation and discursive exchange remains stable in most states, with the notable exception of growing mutual interest following the fall of the Berlin Wall. The EPS thus remains nationally “segmented” [Wessler et al. 2008: 40].

The findings for collective identification are also discouraging: the first glimpses of a growing European ‘We’-identity found in the quality press in the form of references to ‘We Europeans’, disappeared again by 2008 [Kleinen-von Königslöw 2010]. An analysis of the national debates of eight crisis events between 1956 and 2006 [Krzyzanowski et al.] concluded that “*Europe never comes to the foreground* of the analysed media discourses and it is debated only ‘as a whole’ in the reporting of the Mohammed cartoons in the European media in early 2006” [2009: 261].

If explicit references to the European identity as such are rare, EPS research, nevertheless, offers some glimpses of common European values and cultural signifiers that may sustain such an identity. Most issue-specific studies note

great similarity in normative positions debated in the different states¹⁰ - for crisis events the similarity of historical references appears to rise over time [Lucht 2010]. In particular when compared to the US, there appears to be a common stock of values, normative positions and cultural references which unite most European states.

5. The future of European public sphere research

An examination of over twenty years of research on the EPS shows that the European public sphere does indeed exist, at least in a similar way to a global public sphere (though the latter has quite a few blank spots). There is enough awareness and observation of the EU and among the EU27 for national public spheres to pick up on relevant issues and opinions, and intensify the debate where they deem it necessary. Whether the EPS in its current state succeeds in sustaining a resilient European political community remains open. So far the world financial crisis and the ensuing chaos has neither led to heart-warming displays of European solidarity in the media of the EU states, nor to a Greek chorus calling for the immediate abandonment of the European project. The future of EPS research therefore should be informed by the following two considerations:

4.1 BRINGING THE EUROPEAN PEOPLE IN

The most serious problem encumbering the EPS' working was its elitist bias. Optimistic success-stories told by many EPS studies arise largely because of their focus on the most-likely case for Europeanised national public spheres:

¹⁰ There are, however, also some exceptions such as the debate on the common currency [Risse, 2003], the Kosovo intervention [Grundmann et al., 2000] or the Cresson scandal [Meyer, 2000]. The main problem with this type of qualitative studies is, however, that the final evaluation of results is often very open to interpretation, see for example Risse [2010] for a (positive) reinterpretation of the results presented by the team of Ruth Wodak [Oberhuber et al., 2005] for the Brussels summit on the Constitutional Treaty in 2003.

the quality press. Limited information about what is happening outside this sheltered niche suggests major challenges both for EPS research and the EPS itself. Not only are the levels of debating the EU and the European community of nations in other media segments significantly lower, most importantly the contributions have a completely different character. They refer to different issues, different actors and use a different tone and voice.

EPS research thus faces a choice. The first is that it could continue to cling to its elitist notions of a political public sphere, looking for formal deliberation and argumentation, and hence accept that a large part of the population will almost never participate in it, even as part of a passive audience. This would require adjustments on the level of the underlying democratic theories, as the public sphere then would no longer be a link between *all* citizens and their political institutions, but only between those with a sufficient level of education, power of articulation and interest in political affairs. Or, the second is that EPS research could be more open in its understanding of the public sphere: looking for it in unlikely places such as tabloids and television broadcasts or on YouTube, but most importantly by talking to the people themselves, and by getting them to describe how they experience the EU and the EPS. By observing the ‘public connection’ [Couldry et al. 2007] of the people with their national and maybe transnational political community through media more closely, EPS research might be able to develop a definition and operationalization of the public sphere that overcomes the originally embedded class-bias. In deliberative democratic theory quite a few authors have already attempted to readjust the focus of the model to include more real-life practices, the everyday talk of the public sphere, a public sphere that also includes informal and non-rational forms of expression, emotions, expressives, storytelling, rhetoric and humour [Basu, 1999; Dryzek 2000; Young 2000; Gardiner 2004]. If EPS research were to incorporate these ideas, it might discover a richer and, most importantly, a further-reaching EPS.

4.2 ENTERTAINING THE EUROPEAN CITIZENS

The main challenge of a public sphere for Europe lies in fostering a sense of community and solidarity among its members. Providing information for

citizens and politicians, and encouraging a public discussion of relevant problems are further challenges that national public spheres face. The latter can usually draw on a well-established sense of political community, which is not yet as strong at the European level. For this challenge, informal and non-rational forms of expression seem to be particularly important. What better means to create an emotional connection between European citizens than the use of emotions themselves?

EPS research needs to take a closer look at what entertainment formats and content might contribute to the EPS. While political content and news media are the backbone of a public sphere, entertainment may provide the much-needed flesh and blood that lets the EPS and the EU itself become alive for European citizens. Entertainment formats offer citizens many opportunities to learn about other European countries or the EU, to develop an emotional connection. Even watching, discussing and later remembering non-European content can be part of a shared, pan-European experience and thus contribute to “feelings of belonging to this continent and not others” [Gripsrud 2007: 491]. Furthermore, the Europeanisation of these formats has probably already progressed much further than for political news: there is a lively exchange of cultural goods, television programs, movies etc. among European states and, while the entertainment sector is strongly influenced by North American production, some distinctly European programmes and preferences have developed as well. Expanding into entertainment formats might help EPS research get to know how the EPS and Europe are experienced by the not insignificant part of the public that avoids information media altogether. Neither EPS research nor the EU can afford to neglect these voters and their mediated view of Europe any longer.

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