Mediatisation and democratization in the EU

Hans-Jörg Trenz

Abstract

The debate about the legitimacy of the EU and the possibilities of its democratisation has so far only rarely addressed the question of the role of the media. An instrumental approach pre-vails towards the media acknowledging that the so-called gap between the EU and its citizens is grounded in a communication deficit and that the EU should therefore strive towards a higher legitimacy in terms of public accountability, openness and participation, in other words of democracy. The paper discusses these technical aspects of public-sphere building from above in relation to the systematic constraints on mediatisation that result from the inertia of the existing (national) media spheres. On the basis of this, an alternative understanding of mediatisation and its ambivalent effects on the legitimacy of the EU will be developed. The proposal is that European public sphere research should focus on the more active role of the media as an independent variable that affects institutional choices and processes. Empirical results from comparative content analyses are discussed, which illustrate to what extent media have become an enabling and/or constraining factor of European integration..

1. Media: the unknown player in European integration

The media are the unknown player in European politics. Their presence goes often unnoticed but they might still be decisive in many respects. For a long time in the history of European integration the role of the media was principally restricted to linking back the activities of national governments (e.g. in the Council) to the national electorates. In absence of genuine European media outlets like a European television channel or a European newspaper, the existing apparatus of EU-correspondents has served mainly the national media of the Member States. The effects of the rather limited EU-coverage in the national media on EU-governance were seen as marginal. Media attention was sometimes desired by European actors and institutions, but more often it was avoided. Only EU-top politicians, if at all, felt the need to deal with the media. European integration theory has consequently not paid attention to the performance of the media as an intervening variable that interferes in the course of administrative and intergovernmental action.

It would be clearly misleading however to restrict the role of the media to that of a passive and submissive transmitter of meaning that is fabricated and pre-established by European political actors and institutions. Media do not only select among the outputs of the EU-political system to diffuse the relevant information to the general public. They also provide inputs and feedbacks that are used by the EU-administrative apparatus to initiate decision-making processes or to regulate public relations: Media play a role as an agenda setter for particular policy initiatives, they lay as a shadow upon the negotiations, they affect the cooperative or conflictive behaviour of the participating actors, they mediate between diverging interests and expectations and they finally evaluate the outcomes of decision-making processes. At certain points, media might also step out of the shadow and take a more active part in European integration. Media become actively involved in promoting particular visions of European integration, thus strengthening critical or affirmative, pro- or anti-European attitudes. The EU-constitutional moment was one of such points in history where media became a decisive element and active player in European politics (Fossum and Trenz 2006).

The aim of this paper is to test out how far and to what extent mediatisation has become a constraining effect on European integration. Mediatisation, first of all, refers to the simple fact that EU-politics are almost exclusively transmitted through the mass media. The enhancement of public communication through the EU is relying on external organisational capacities and mechanisms of intermediation. Media make political information available and form the knowledge that is used by the "people" to evaluate the performance of the EU. Media coverage also provides the raw material from which voters form their preferences and become engaged in public opinion formation. Since only few citizens have the chance to talk directly to EU political actors or make use of their opportunity to visit a European Parliament plenary or make any other direct effort to be informed about the EU, their knowledge is restricted to what the media with irregular frequency report from Brussels.

The effects of mediatisation imply further that the legitimacy of EU-policy-makers is increasingly conveyed through their media performance and through the media framing of their activities. The formal legitimacy derived from compliance with legal procedures and normative criteria is not a sufficient guarantee for social acceptance, which is generated through non-legal attributes such as personal traits of political actors, their mobilising capacities, their persuasive power, etc. Mediatisation thus refers to a two way process of adaptation in which politics are increasingly made for the mass media and the mass media increasingly shape the image of politics. From this perspective, Meyer (2005) has argued that the mediatisation of European integration has slowly undermined the consensus culture of the EU and increased the likelihood of politicisation and open-ended conflicts that cannot be settled easily through bargaining or arguing in small elite circles. The concern with the mediatisation of the EU is thus that the kind of main-stream media coverage to be found in the Member States has affected the erosion of the EU's legitimacy rather than extended its legitimatory basis.

2. Mediatisation and the erosion of the EU-legitimacy

The debate about the legitimacy of the EU and the possibilities of its democratisation has so far only rarely addressed the question of the role of the media. An instrumental ap-

proach prevails towards the media, acknowledging that the so-called gap between the EU and its citizens is grounded in a communication deficit and that the EU should therefore strive towards a higher legitimacy in terms of public accountability, openness and participation, in other words of democracy (Commission 2006). The remedies promoted by the EU spin doctors are based on the conviction that a) mass media communication should be increased to promote EU-legitimacy, b) that mass media are an impartial transmitter of knowledge, rational arguments and information that enable collective action and participation by European citizens, and c) that mass media are a fair player that can be committed for the main objectives of European integration and that will support the EU on its way to deeper integration. In short, mass media are seen as a central component of the management of what has been called the EU *auditive democracy* (Brunkhorst 2006). In the auditive democracy, the principal aim of public communication management is to maximise transparency and multiply communicative inputs that allow citizens to listen and to attend to what is going on in the political arena.[1]

Previous efforts of public communication management in the EU (e.g. in the course of Eastern enlargement, the common currency or the process of constitution-making) repeatedly fell short of their aims to broaden public engagement and support (Trenz 2002c; Brüggemann 2005). Such predictable failures of public communication (Fossum and Trenz 2006) were only inadequately dealt with and exposed the rather limited capacities of institutional adaptation. Even after the implosion of the EU-legitimacy through popular referenda in France and in the Netherlands the Commission still kept up the illusion of communication management.[2]

If institutional logics of public communication management are persistent and hard to change it is all the more important to expose the difficulties of adaptation to media logics and its contingent effects on the project of democratic self-determination. Communication with the public through the media becomes much more demanding and also more risky. It is not enough to sell the good arguments and the major achievements of political decision making. Instead, strategies are required to improve media performance, political marketing, staging and symbolisation.

The problem to be addressed after the experience of the popular referenda in France and the Netherlands is rather how to democratise and constitutionalise the EU with or against the media (de Vreese 2006). This opens a new perspective on the media

not simply as a social technology to democratise the EU but as a cultural and political power that constrains the democratisation of the EU (Slaatta 2006).

Within institutional and normative theory alike, these contingent effects of mediatisation and their systematic restrictions on the possibilities of transferring the legitimacy to the EU have only rarely been taken into consideration. A deeper understanding of the autonomy of the media and its particular mode of operation is required to test out the scope of legitimacy of political institutions and decision-making processes. Such a perspective is emphasised by system theory, which analyses the media as a self-regulating and autonomous operational system. Media representations of politics are different and at least partially independent from the institutional order of politics (Luhmann 1996). Bringing in the media as an intervening variable is helpful to expose the inconsistencies of transforming political communication and public communication. Such inconsistencies result from the encounter of specific modes of communication of the political system with the selective and amplificatory logics of the media system. In particular, a focus on the autonomy of media selection and representation challenges the assumption of a uniform opinion and will formation process that makes political actors and institutions directly accountable to their various constituencies. Instead of the linearity of *mediation,* democratic institutional designs and procedures are faced with the ruptures of *mediatisation.*

Mediatisation refers to constraints of adaptation and accommodation of the internal system rules and functional logics of governing institutions to the mechanisms of producing and diffusing public attention through the media (Schulz 2004: 89; Marcinkowski 2005: 341). It is manifested in a confrontation of the EU-governing system with the outside environment, which is *not* controlled by the internal system logics. Mediatisation thus results in the interpenetration of the political system and the media system which increases contingency on both sides. Of particular relevance for the EU is not simply the question to what extent and in what forms such adaptive processes are initiated through willful design and strategic efforts by institutional actors. The question is rather what conditions such efforts of public communication management in the first place, why European institutions have so far only been able to mobilise very limited capacities of adaptation to media logics and how we can take account of the systematic failures of their communicative efforts.

The contingent effects of mediatisation on the legitimacy of the European Union can be confined by confronting the communicative logics of the EU political system with the selective and amplificatory logics of the media. EU-governance research has identified "bargaining" and "arguing" as the main modes of internal communication within the EU-governance system (Kohler-Koch 2000).[3] Both communicative modes are only partially converted into publicly visible communication. Media coverage of European integration is built, on the one hand, on insufficient information e.g. from closed bargaining rounds in the Council. On the other hand, media increasingly have to come to grips with information overflows, e.g. from open committees within the Commission or the European Parliament. In selectively amplifying political issues and giving prominence to particular actors and stories media rely mainly on generally applicable news values, such as conflict, celebrity, scandals, etc. (see figure 1).[4]

Table 1: The selective amplification of political communication in the media

bargaining logics	deliberative logics	selective media amplification
compromise	consensus	conflict
interest	truth	emotion/drama
discretion	openness	indiscretion
declaration	dialogue	monologue
statement	argument	image
majoritarian	collective	personalised
delegation/representation	equality of speakers	prominence of speakers
aggregated voice	plurality of opinion	populist voice

The expectation is that the selective amplification of European news in the media generates particular kinds of irritation within the political system. The amplificatory logics of the media affect the communicative behaviour of political actors and institutions whenever they step out of the arenas of bargaining and deliberation to communicate with the external publics. Processes of adaptation between political communication and media amplification, which are triggered off by the increased uncertainty within decision-making bodies, can go into two directions: control/manipulation and penetration/colonisation. At the zero pole of mediatisation the media system is entirely controlled/manipulated by influential political actors. Constraints are put on the media in terms of power (censorship) or normative expectations (e.g. quality standards) to apply the system logics of political communication. At the extreme pole of mediatisation the political system has defencelessly surrendered their bargaining and arguing logics to the

rules of media attention. The power play is mainly reduced to populist campaigning and symbolic politics.

From these constraints on the amplification of political communication, the intrinsic difficulties of imposing a democratic design to the EU-institutional setup become apparent. It can be expected that mediatisation will have a decisive impact on the shape of the emerging EU-polity and its possible road to democracy. The question of EU-democracy is not simply a question of formalising procedures of democratic decision-making. It is not simply a question of re-designing institutions according to democratic requirements. The current proposals of re-modelling the EU according to participative, representative or deliberative blueprints rather have to be faced with the possibility that the EU-democracy – in one way or in the other – will also have to be perceived as *media democracy*. Media develop a preference for a certain type of communicative input that the EU-political system has difficulties to provide, hence the notorious deficits of communication with the general public. Media do further produce a communicative output format that increasingly irritates the political system logics of the EU, hence the insufficient supply of public support and legitimacy through the media that constrains the scope of Communitarian action.

EU-Institutions and institutional perspectives on EU-governance alike tend to disregard these distorting effects of mediatisation. At the best, the effects of mediatisation on the political system of the EU are perceived as irritations, as an unwanted and unplanned way of outside intrusion and disturbance, which EU-institutions through their internal rules and procedures of decision-making have difficulties to cope with. The misconception is that legitimacy is a product that can be advertised and sold by placing particular media messages or images. Media are seen either as an approval mechanism to increase the social acceptance of the EU or as an educational mechanism to enable critical scrutiny and informed debate (Mc Nair 2000). In particular the media inexperienced EU-actors and institutions fail to see the systematic misrepresentation of the logics of political decision-making in the media and tend to attribute instead the responsibilities for their failures of communication strategies to the unfair treatment by the particular journalists involved.

The disregard of media impact in institutional theories of governance and in normative political theory stands out against the alertness within media and communication studies and their fatalistic anticipation of the erosion of democratic legitimacy (Rössler

and Krotz 2005). The paper will therefore proceed with a review of normative accounts of the role and function of media in democracy. This will be instructive for re-conceptualising the role of the media in the project of the democratisation of the EU.

3. Media and democracy

Media have an ambivalent relationship to democracy. Media call for democracy and de-mocratisation but media also increasingly restrain democratic procedures and practice. The concern with the "colonization of politics through the media" (Meyer 2001) is mainly a concern with the "colonization of democracy through the media", a transfor-mation of parliamentarian-representative democracy into *media democracy*. The media democracy is conceived critically the extreme point of this relentless development of modern politics in which power is linked almost exclusively to the media competence and performance of political actors. In its preface to Nimmo and Combs (1992), the leading American communication scholar Robert E. Denton argues that "it is now nearly impossible to distinguish between political talk and political action" (p. xvi). Top-politicians do not take decisions, they are talking about the taking of decisions in the media. They do not read reports but media outlets. They do not solve problems but stage a talk about problem-solving.

The strong mediatisation thesis is thus not simply that the media play somehow *a* role to be taken into consideration as one of the many factors that shape and constrain political decision-making processes. Media play *the* central role in the staging of democ-racy, they pervade the democratic procedures and set the rules and standards for the dis-tribution of legitimacy (Kamps 2002: 103).[5] If the European Union is exceptional, this is in the sense that it excludes top politicians from the media play. The competent players of the "playful democracy" (ibid.) have not yet emerged. The "normal" working day of the EU top politician is still determined by participation in negotiations and deliberations and not by strategic interactions with the media. For those national politicians used to constant media appearances, going to Brussels is therefore often an alienating experience, many may find themselves in need of a media detoxication.

The interrelation between media and democracy can be approached either from the perspective of the role of the media as the infrastructure of democracy or from the perspective of the role of the media as a player in democracy. From the first perspective,

media are treated as a dependent variable that provides the social technology for building a legitimate political order of the EU. From the second perspective, media are treated as an independent social and cultural power that influences European integration itself (Slaatta 2006). From both angles, media contribute either to the enhancement or to the dumbing down of democracy. The different readings of the relationship between media and democracy are summarised in table 2:

Table 2: The ambivalent interrelation between media and democracy

Media	Democracy enhancing		Dumbing down
	function	*(desired) outcome*	*(undesired) outcome*
Passive	–mirror of the political system –amplifier of rational discourse	–transparency justification, reasoning	–inherent nationalism –entertainment
Active	– Third estate –popular voice	–critique, control – –popularisation	–voice of the powerful –cynicism

3.1 Media as contributing to the enhancement of democracy in the EU

Media a as the mirror of the political system. Mass media are seen here in its passive role as the provider of unbalanced information about politics and not of opinion. The picture that is mirrored in the media should be as real as possible. Media's principal task is to make politics transparent. They should "reveal what citizens need to know about the workings of their government, the parties that aggregate and represent their interests, and the office-holders they have elected to make policy on their behalf" (Ferree et al. 2002). In a liberal-representative democracy, the public sphere's main function is linked to safeguarding the transparency and general visibility of the political process. The classical reference here is Lippmann, according to whom "the main value of debate is not that it reveals the truth about the controversy to the audience but that it may identify the partisans" (Lippmann 1927: 139). The public sphere will lead advocates of particular interests to expose one another. "Open debate may lead to no conclusion and throw no light whatever on the problem or its answer, but it will tend to betray the partisan and the advocate. And if it has identified them for the true public, debate will have served its main purpose" (ibid.: 114).

Transparency does notably also include the function of pre-selecting news for the citizens, drawing their attention to particular issues and suggesting what could be of relevance for them. Media administer the citizens' restricted budget of what to pay attention to in public life and guide them on their way through the jungle of politics. The EU ranges low in this hierarchy of relevance, and rightly so, because there are only few occasions that would justify to bother the average reader of a newspaper with EU–politics.

Media as an amplifier of rational discourse. Media are seen here as the promoter of public discourse that bridges the differentiated rationalities of the political system. Their active role in the political process is limited to that of a fair player who is devoted to the promotion of good arguments and reasoning. Political journalists should provide the good reasons for citizens to enable them to make their political choices. As such they become the "primary medium for the development of public knowledge, values, interpretations and self-understandings for change and innovation, as well as reproduction or transmission over time in the inventory of ideas and arguments that are available in a given public sphere" (Peters 2005: 88). As part of the intelligentsia, journalists have a social responsibility to ponder different opinions and standpoints in such a way that media discourse is not made by them but carried by the whole of society. Theodor Geiger formulated the mission of the journalist as follows:

Die Intelligenz wird um eine neue Figur bereichert: den Journalisten oder Popularisator politischen Wissens. Seine Aufgabe ist es, die streitenden politischen Meinungen und Argumente zu verbreiten und zu erörtern und so der öffentlichen Meinung den Weg zu weisen (Geiger 2001[1949]: 447)

A particular emphasis is laid here on the quality of media coverage through which citizens should be able to learn and to gain knowledge about political facts and reasons. Especially quality newspapers create the cultivated citizen ("Bildungsbürger"). The emergence of independent and truth-oriented journalism is also the starting point for Habermas' analysis of the bourgeois public sphere some fifteen years after Theodor Geiger's study on the role of the intelligentsia. The development of the free press at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenths century correlates with the development of a reasoning public in the functioning of political control (Habermas 1990[1962]: 125ff.).

Media can in this sense be seen as the missing link between institutionalised debates and the general public debate. They channel the good arguments from the strong

publics to the general publics and they sluice diffuse problem perceptions, opinions and claims expressed within civil society into decision-making processes (Habermas 1992: 435ff.). Media thus support the constitution of a democratic sovereign by generally increasing the level of information, reducing the problem of bounded rationality of segmented institutional arenas and forcing all participants to justify their claims and the quality of their choices and preferences (Eriksen 2005: 356). Applied to the EU, this opens a perspective of Europeanisation through deliberation, which takes place in transnational networks and issue communities involving people at different places to participate in collective opinion and will formation.

Media as the fourth estate. The classical, active role that is attributed to the media within the model of a pluralist-participatory democracy perceives political journalism as a powerful watchdog, revealing abuses of state authority and defending the democratic rights of citizens (Mc Nair 2000). As the guardian of democracy media are devoted to a plurality of views and should encourage citizens to participate actively in politics. This service is best provided by channeling plural and necessarily also conflictive views on politics. It is only through writing and printing that such views become real and powerful. This is meant with the notion of the media as the fourth estate, a term that is attributed to the Scottish historian Thomas Carlyle who wrote in 1841:

"Printing, which comes necessarily out of Writing, I say often, is equivalent to democracy: invent Writing, Democracy is inevitable. (...) Whoever can speak, speaking now to the whole nation, becomes a power, a branch of government, with inalienable weight in law-making, in all acts of authority." (...) The nation is governed by all that has tongue in the nation. Democracy is virtually there." (Carlyle 2003 (1841): 191).

In the EU, the media has stepped forward as the fourth estate on several occasions, e.g. in the corruption scandal of 1999 (Trenz 2000). Research on the EU *corps de presse* has also revealed a change of self-understanding of EU-correspondents from primarily representatives of national interests to critical watchdogs of the EU (Meyer 2002). This new autonomy of EU correspondents has helped to break up the small Brussels world and to overcome the confidential relationship between journalists and EU-representatives that all too often has obstructed effective controls in the past years. The problem is that this new critical self-understanding of EU-correspondents has so far rather undermined the legitimacy of the EU, accusing the malfunctions of the EU-governance system, its over-bureaucratisation and the deficits in decision-making.

Media as expressing people's sentiments. Mass media are seen here as the organ of popular voice and sentiments which is detached from the political system. Through their direct and privileged relation to the people, the media assume the most active role as a political advocate who expresses the popular interest against the system rationality. Such a vision of the media in defense of the people goes back to Karl Marx who attributes a social responsibility to the journalists to stand for the people's voice, which also means to adopt the people's voice as different from the language of public administration. The "free press" is thus seen in its double role to express the "intellect" of the people, but also the people's sentiments:

"Die Presse verhält sich als Intelligenz zu den Volkszuständen, aber sie verhält sich eben so sehr zu ihnen als Gemüth; ihre Sprache ist daher nicht nur die kluge Sprache der Beurtheilung, die über den Verhältnissen schwebt, sondern zugleich die affektvolle Sprache der Verhältnisse selbst, eine Sprache, die in amtlichen Berichten weder gefordert werden kann, noch darf" (Marx 2000[1843]: 77).

Hence, media introduce a language that is different from the technocratic-rationalistic language applied by administrative actors. One could read Marx's vision of the free press as a support for tabloids as the real democratic media which express the needs and sentiments of the ordinary people against the system logics of the political-administrative apparatus. Applied to the EU, this opens a perspective of Europeanisation through tabloidisation, where popular news formats support and amplify strong feelings for or against Europe. In doing so, tabloids would assume the function to make European elites alert of the concerns of "ordinary" citizens and at the same time commit them to more popular ways of relating to the general public.

3.2 Media as contributing to the dumbing down of democracy in the EU

Media as enhancing public cynicism. Numerous studies have pointed to the systematic bias of news media in selecting negative news (for an overview see Cappella and Jamieson 1997: 32). Political journalism is frequently not devoted to fair judgment and substantive critique, but is rather polemical, excessive and overall negative. By and large, media coverage delivers a distorted image of politics as the world of scandals, intrigue, dishonesty and lie. By inflaming public mistrust, anger and frustration journalism contributes to the erosion of the legitimacy of politics. Content analyses of routine European news coverage

revealed the dominance of strategic news framings stressing the power game aspects of politics – winning and loosing, self interest, manoeuvres and tactics, performance and artifice (Cappella/Jamieson 1997: 110; Trenz 2000; Kevin 2003). Experimental designs in audience research indicate that such repeated exposure to strategic news coverage about the EU produces political cynicism and a declined readiness to support the EU (de Vreese 2004).

In the "spiral of cynicism" the preference of journalism for negative news is seen as corresponding to the preferences of the public and its demand for sensational news (Cappella and Jamieson 1997). In a situation of media market competition this can trigger off a journalistic race for political intrigue and scandals. Cynical publics require ever more negative news. On the other hand, media sensationalism and inaccuracy is also a mechanism of reducing social complexity. From this perspective, the dominant negative news coverage in EU politics is a result of media's own incapacity to deal with complex issues such as the EU. The problem is that political journalists often risk themselves to be drawn in the information overflow. Their capacities for selecting relevant information for the fabrication of news are naturally limited and they work under increasing time constraints. Negative news are "cheap" news, whereas facts, fairness and evaluation require more expensive journalistic investigations. As a result, political news coverage in fields of imbalanced attention and uncertain public preferences becomes less reliable and tends to create easily applicable strategic frames, incoherent stories and political mayflies.

Negative public attitudes and cynicism about politics are seen as causally related to the effects of negative news coverage. Contemporary journalistic culture and their focus on strategy, conflict and motives invite cynicism (Cappella and Jamieson 1997: 31). In the EU, the dominant media negativism leads to systematic misrepresentations of the performance of the EU-governance system. EU-politicians are portrayed as macchiavellianists unconcerned with the public good. When the head of governments come out of a Council meeting late at night there are national reporters waiting for them who do not want to know whether anything was resolved for the betterment of the EU. They want to know who tricked whom, who was beaten and who got most. In similar terms, strategy coverage produces systematically unfavourable news about the European Commission which is punished by the journalists for its rationalistic, consensual style of policy-making (Meyer 2002). Journalists are not interested in consensus and transparency, they are interested in confusion, controversy and conflict. At the end, the public expects to

get only negative news from Brussels and automatically associates the EU with malfunctioning and corruption.

Media and entertainment. Since Lippmann (1927) there has been dispute in democratic theory to what extent the uninformed citizen can be involved in rational public opinion making. Numerous studies have stressed that media's concern with rational debate is rather limited and that the prime function of most media organs today is to provide the public with entertainment (Wolf 1999; McNair 2000: 42ff.; Street 2001: 60ff.). Political journalism proceeds through symbolic discourse, drama and infotainment with the main purpose to draw the attention of a broad public (Sarcinelli 1998). Following the critique of Neil Postman (1985) this transformation of rational discourse into pure entertainment puts at risks one of the main achievements of enlightenment: the capacity of public reasoning. Media debates are more expressive than substantial, more fiction that facts, and they pay more attention to performance and the power play than to the substance of the debate. Journalism does not support the rational problem-solving orientation of the political process. It is no longer an instrument of public reasoning but has become an "alienating, cynicism inducing, narcotising force in our political culture, turning people off citizenship rather than equipping them to fulfil their democratic potential" (Mc Nair 2000: 8).

Many insiders of the EU would probably agree that the rationality of political discourse is continuously undermined by the media. The Commissioner Wallström even maintains a web-page to correct the most unashamed media lies about the EU, which make many people come away with a picture of the EU as a bunch of 'mad eurocrats'.[6] Seen from this light, journalism puts serious constraints on European institutions to enter a dialogue with European citizens. Media corrode the exchange of arguments towards a better understanding, they dismantle agreements and they amplify and exaggerate the significance of conflict. Instead of discursive constellations, media communication is determined by monologic situations in which some powerful actors (in the EU usually the national governments) prevail. On the other hand, the entertainment value of the EU is rather low. The kind of un-personalised news about technocratic decision-making that are produced by the political system of the EU do not sell. Also the notorious democratic deficit of the EU and its permanent crisis become rather a common place than exciting news. The general expectations of the public to be surprised and mobilised by

news from Brussels are low. This restricts the scope for political news coverage and favours a satirical and polemical view on European politics.

From a postmodernist view a different twist is given to the dumbing down thesis interpreting the preference for entertainment, the apathy and the disinterest for facts of the silent majorities as a form of resistance, "that withdrawing into the private could well be a *direct defiance of the political*, a form of actively resisting political manipulation" (Baudrillard 1983: 39, emphasis in the original). Against all efforts of education and enlightenment, "the masses scandalously resist this imperative of rational communication." They are given meaning and facts, they want spectacle and entertainment. "No effort has been able to convert them to the seriousness of the content, nor even to the seriousness of the code. Messages are given to them, they only want some sign, they idolise the play of signs and stereotypes, they idolise any content so long as it resolves itself into a spectacular sequence." (ibid.: 10).

Media as the voice of the powerful. In critical media studies, the preference of entertainment in media news formats is seen as a new form of manipulation. In particular Bourdieu (1996) has reintroduced the manipulation thesis underlining the hegemonic position of the media, which are accused to express the economic interest of their owners of the handful of spins that keep the gate of journalistic access to political information. A journalistic field which is penetrated by the market logics, has effects on the autonomy of the political sphere and on the sphere of cultural production. A journalistic product must, first of all, sell. In the rapid market dynamics, products, which do not sell, will disappear very quickly. "Journalistic spontaneousness" and "demagogical submission under popular taste" determines the daily news selection (ibid: 68). The market logic further supports a mechanism of homogeneisation and uniformisation. The products of the successful competitor are imitated, instead of trying to offer alternative products.

In such a mediatised environment, the "media competence" of political actors becomes the main principle of legitimation. A person, who is in charge of a public office, is measured in its capacity of staging things and not in its capacity of doing things. This media logics of personalising political responsibilities increasingly applies to the EU, e.g. in recent efforts to give a human face to Europe.[7] The effects of mediatisation strengthen those actors within the EU-political field who stand closest to the media, i.e. the governments of the Member States, a handful of prominent EU-Parliamentarians but not the

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EU-Commission whose former President Prodi was heavily criticized for his bad media performance, a critique that was ironically brought forward by the media itself (Trenz 2002b). The failure of "EU spin-doctoring" strengthens the national spins and their quasi-monopoly to feed the journalists with information.

The observation that the public is systematically misled in its policy preferences threatens of course the main trust in the argument about the rationality of public opinion (Page and Shapiro 1992: 355). There is apparently not much of resistance on the side of the public to be entertained rather than informed. However, as Page and Shapiro (ibid: 381-82) have argued for the United States, the public mind is not simply a blank slate that can be easily written upon. In the long run the public is found to be "surprisingly resistant to being fooled – so long as competing elites provide at least some alternative voices."

Media's abuse of power. Finally, the legitimacy of the media themselves is put into question. Media are less seen as manipulated by power than expanding and abusing their own power. Political journalism becomes the fifth estate in media democracy that increasingly determines the rules of the political game and the viability of political reform (Nimmo and Combs 1992). Journalists are omnipresent in guiding the citizen through political debates: they appear as discussion leaders of public and academic debates, they are invited guests at round tables, contribute their insights in edited volumes, etc. Journalists select information, suggest particular interpretations and opinions, give instructions about what is relevant and what is not, who is important and influential and who is not. This power to make public opinion is restricted to a very small and distinctive group. It is hard to measure the political influence of this group of licensed truth-tellers but we can be relatively safe to assume that leading opinion makers are widely read (and commented again) among political representatives.

The media power in framing European politics for larger audiences is generally made responsible for the spread of hostile attitudes towards the EU (see Grey 2003 for the UK). In more recent studies, the opposite findings are reported with regard to the affirmative EU-coverage of quality newspapers, which often assume a missionary attitude as an active campaigner for the EU's democratization and constitutionalisation (Trenz et al. 2006, Pfetsch 2006). In light of recent referenda it must be doubted, however, that affirmative EU-coverage of elite newspapers has any impact on shaping positive attitudes

of the citizens (De Vreese and Boomgaarden 2005). Given the still rather skeptical or openly hostile attitude of large parts of the national public, such an exposure of media power in promoting the European project might easily backfire. The cultural power of journalists in truth-telling can be felt as annoying by the public, especially when the same kind of messages are unisono referred by the media. When media start to represent narrow interests on unpopular issues this can have a negative impact on public opinion (Page and Shapiro 1987: 39).

In contemporary Europe long term trends point to the decreasing power of quality newspaper journalism (Schlesinger 2006, McNair 2000, Norris 2000). News stories on European issues tend to loose public favour. In many EU-countries, the media suffer themselves from a legitimacy deficit and their over-zealous EU-commitment rather increases the gap between elite newspapers and the people. Specific counter-movements of the public might emerge against the cultural power of journalists.[8]

Media's inherent nationalism. From a historical perspective, media perform as a conserver of national culture, they are the school of the nation that forms the unitary national public. Schlesinger (2003) and Slaatta (2006) have pointed at the particular institutional connection between news media and politics as manifested in the conventions and connections that generate the daily representation of national symbolic complexes. Following the main lines of historical sociology[9] it is argued that "both linguistic and cultural boundaries, formatted through historic structuring of social communication, over time has formed functional communicative spaces along the lines of national borders that work towards social cohesion and strengthening of collective identities" (Slaatta 2006: 16).

The media economy is a kind of natural constraint to trans-nationalisation (Hafez 2005). It is further argued that the journalistic field is deeply rooted in culturally specific patterns with the result that media practice and discourses change from one national context to the other (Weischenberg 2000; Hummel 2006). Comparative studies have delivered numerous examples for the national self-reference of news coverage within one particular country (for an overview see Page and Shapiro 1992; Hafez 2005).

Media's inherent nationalism is made responsible for the re-interpretation of issues of global or transnational concern within contextualised systems of meaning and particular cultures. Through the effects of mediatisation more encompassing debates are re-

fragmented into national debates. Political journalism develops within a particular politi-
cal culture and reproduces its dominant values and interpretations. This nationalistic and
ethnocentric bias comes to bear above all in foreign news coverage, where journalists
tend to defend national interests over normative ideals of a just world order (Hafez
2005). The nationalistic bias is manifested, first of all in agenda-setting (heavy attention
to those foreign events that are most closely tied to domestic politics and interests) and
second in framing (e.g. in categorising foreign actors as friends and enemies of the na-
tion) (Page and Shapiro 1992: 376). Mediatisation of the EU might thus result in the
defence of visions of popular sovereignty in the nation state framework and collide with
cosmopolitan visions of rights and justice defended by European elites. Especially the
tabloids adopt a populist style of news coverage serving mainly national audiences.

4. Enhancing democracy in the EU: the role of the media

The empirical question to be addressed in the following is how mediatisation interferes
with the democratisation of the EU enhancing and/or constraining the prospects of a
legitimate political order. In a process of explicit constitutionalisation, which the EU
underwent in the last five years, a specific social responsibility is attributed to the media
in facilitating constitutional reasoning, aggregating people's preferences and controlling
power. Within European public sphere research the bulk of existing studies have evalu-
ated media performance against these criteria (van de Steeg and Risse 2003; Wimmel
2004; Peters et al. 2005; Brüggemann et al. 2006). The concern was with the democratic
quality of the media measured in the degree of objective knowledge, the degree of fair-
ness and the degree of support of the integration process. This has nurtured a feeling of
perplexity when European institutions and their scientific observers had to realise that
their expectations could not be met. From the dumbing down perspective, media cannot
be expected to enhance democracy of a constitutionalised EU but rather to put systemic
constraints on the widening and deepening of integration beyond the national.

The question how deliberative, how rational and how truth-oriented the media
are, misses the main point of research on the media as an independent and self-referential
organisational system that is not replicating the system logics of the EU but strives in-

stead for autonomy in terms of selecting, re-interpreting and evaluating political news. Taking the media autonomy seriously and recognising its power of knowledge formation and public opinion-making on the EU, I will focus in the following on the active role of political journalism in constructing European news. Political journalism is conceived as fulfilling the dual function of selecting and interpreting the kind of information that forms the basis of citizens and voters knowledge of the EU.[10] Media, in this sense, act as selective amplifiers of political information from external sources and thus shape the information flows on European integration. Furthermore, media interpret European news and thus contribute to the process of public opinion formation by commenting European affairs. Observing the media's impact on EU-democracy means to re-construct the interwoveness of media's representation and media's own interpretation of the world of European politics.

The empirical focus will be on the performance of political news journalism which takes the leading part in this normative construction of the EU reality. The relevant findings will be recollected from different, so far rather unrelated research projects, which analysed primarily the performance of quality newspapers in covering European news.[11] In reconstructing newspapers' representation and newspapers' own interpretation of European politics I will be able to describe how the mediatisation and the democratisation of the EU are intertwined but not causally linked to each other.

Under this premise the performance of the media can be confronted with the normative expectations how media should perform in the democratic process. From my previous discussion of the democracy enhancing function of the media I can distinguish between (1) a minimum normative requirement of transparency as promoted by liberal theories, (2) the normatively more demanding requirement of inter-discursivity as promoted by deliberative theories of democracy, (3) the performative function of the media as the people's voice, (4) the most active and political control function as promoted by representative models of democracy.

According to the first and second criteria, the selection of European news must be *quantitatively* sufficient to provide the minimum of information that is needed for the citizen to exercise democratic control. We can measure these criteria in the density and interconnectedness of newspaper discourse on the EU (Trenz 2004). According to the third and forth criteria, European news selection must be *qualitatively* sufficient to involve the citizen in transnational debates and to participate in a practice of collective

opinion and will formation. We can measure these criteria in the pro-or anti-European attitudes carried by media discourse and in the degree political journalism becomes actively involved in European campaigns. In the first section, which deals with the selective bias of newspaper journalism, quantitative findings on the structure and interconnectedness of newspaper discourse on the EU will be collected to test out the liberal and the discursive paradigm of democracy. In the following section, qualitative findings on the interpretative bias EU-journalism will be collected to scrutinize the critical and the performative function of newspaper discourse.

4.1 The selective bias of European journalism

The European Union has become a principal reference point for news production, which for the most part still runs through the filter of national media organisations. Its growing importance can be measured in the number of accredited EU-correspondents in Brussels, which according to figures provided by Christoph Meyer (2002) has almost doubled between 1990 and 2002 from barely 500 to over 900 journalists. Yet, increasing media attention to EU-affairs is not necessarily translated into a convergence of journalistic cultures and routines of news selection. Rather to the contrary, it is generally believed that national editorial cultures still determine a differentiated practice of news production with regard to the EU. A recently issued comparative report speaks of the "stubborn resilience of 'banal nationalism' as even EU-issues are still largely viewed via 'national prisms' (Preston and Horgan 2006: 37).[12] This perpetuates the national bias of news production selecting different issues, becoming engaged in different debates and applying diverging problem perceptions and interpretations.

Such comparative research on journalistic routines of news-making is deeply entrenched in a culturalist perspective of national media spheres as relatively closed systems of meaning. The implicit assumption made is that media represent segmented national public spheres and that the selective logics of media nationalism are superseding other possible selective logics (like ideological cleavages or generalised news values). Turning instead from such a culturalist explanation to an organisational perspective of the media as an operational system, the standardisation of European news coverage in the specific segment of quality newspapers becomes highly expectable.

In the process of European news production, standardisation takes place at two crucial points. One is the standardisation of *inputs* of relevant information through the centralised public communication management of the EU and its institutions. The other is the standardisation of the *throughputs* in the practice of journalistic news production, which is self-organised but also self-controlled by the media (Luhmann 1996). News values, qualitative criteria and norms of conduct for journalistic work are internationally codified. The type of independent, impartial and trans-regional quality newspaper analysed here has developed a quasi-monopoly of information for the educated middle classes.[13] What's more, political information flows are increasingly steered by international news agencies (*Agence Europe* for the EU) and through the internet, which arrange and pre-structure a similar spectrum of news, which is taken up by the newspaper editorial offices in different countries (Kriesi 2001; Humphreys 1996).

First field studies of journalistic practice in dealing with international news further point to the impact of trans-media agenda-setting as an effect of transnational diffusion and news imitation. In the practice of European news production, the leading role of some few newspapers like Financial Times, FAZ or Le Monde has been emphasized which are frequently used as information sources by journalists of smaller newspapers. Whereas national newspapers compete for agendas and try to cover dissimilar topics, foreign newspapers are not direct competitors on the national media market. This can lead to circular news production and diffusion among journalists from different European countries, who instead of becoming engaged in expensive and time consuming investigations simply copy the stories from each other.[14]

The crucial question is now whether this increasingly standardised operation of European news journalism is also sufficient to overcome the traditional segmentation of national media spheres as relatively closed systems of meaning. From my categorisation of the democracy enhancing functions of the media provided above, the density of newspaper coverage of the EU can be taken as an indicator of the transparency function of the media. The interconnectedness of newspaper coverage on the EU indicates instead to what extent media comply with the discursive paradigm of democracy.

The principal positive finding from most existing media surveys is that there is substantial news coverage of the EU. Exploring the degree of Europeanisation of national quality newspapers for the year 2000 I was able to demonstrate that one out of three political articles makes reference to Europe or the EU and one out of five reports directly

of at least one European political issue.[15] The EU constitutes a shared universe of meaning that is reflected in simultaneous debates about issues of common relevance. This shared European discursive space is also clearly demarcated from the outside: American quality newspapers like the New York Times make three times fewer references to European political issues than the European newspapers do on the average (Trenz 2004: 297).[16] In similar terms, Brüggemann et al. (2006) concede that quality newspapers fulfil a monitoring function of EU-governance. According to their comparative panel survey of quality newspapers, the general visibility of the EU, its main policy fields and its actors and institutions is found to be high and rising over time, in 2003 reaching a level of approximately one third compared to national news coverage.

Koopmans and Statham (2002) have analysed the conditions for a European public sphere not in the density of coverage on EU-issues but in the density of claims-making that is either directed at the EU or that unfolds horizontally across the European space. In conformity with the before mentioned studies, the results clearly demonstrate that the main problem regarding the Europeanisation of political communication is not a quantitative one: "In those policy fields where Europe matters, European actors and actors from other member states are frequently covered in national media, and national actors, including the media themselves, often refer to European dimensions of issues" (Koopmans 2006: 16). Problems might still persist however in the composition of actors that get voice in the media. Several studies have identified an elite bias in European political communication that is monopolised by the governments of the Member States and by the Commission and that excludes particular types of actors such as civil society (Trenz 2005a; Koopmans 2006).

It has been argued that these overall positive findings are partially an artefact of the respective research design (Neidhardt 2006: 47ff.). With regard to my own survey, I will concede that my measurement of European and Europeanised news articles "conflates" in a way the share of European news articles. The counting is based on the political section of the newspaper, where news from Brussels become highly expectable. This neglects the large space that national newspapers devote to non-political issues in which the EU plays only a minor role. In addition, I have identified a particular group of news articles under the category of "banal Europeanism" including rhetoric references, the mere mentioning of EU-issue fields and actors or loose references to European law (Trenz 2006).

Brüggemann et al. (2006) are more cautious in the interpretation of their findings. For them, the question of the Europeanisation of political communication is not only a question of the scope of communication and of mutual observation between national public spheres. The democratic quality of such a public sphere is rather searched in what they call "discursive transnationalisation", i.e. the way debates in different member states are interconnected. Media should thus become engaged not simply in *parallel* debates but also in *common* debates and in collective identifications about topics of shared relevance (similarly Risse 2004).

If media are expected not merely to enhance the transparency of European governance but also to bring the Europeans together, the yardstick for measuring their democratic performance is considerably higher. It is to be agreed that even with substantial and rising news coverage about the EU there might still be a qualitative deficit in the selective and interpretative bias of European political communication by the media. Brüggemann et al. (2006) speak in this sense of segmented Europeanisation: "national public spheres are Europeanized in that they look at Brussels more attentively but there is no increasing discursive exchange between them" (ibid.: 16).

A less demanding proposal consists in measuring interdiscursivity in terms of reciprocal resonance of public communication between national media spheres (Trenz 2005a: 176ff.). Instead of focusing on interactive dialogic situations (which are rather unlikely to appear in media communication) research should describe the effects of the diffusion of common topics, patterns of interpretations and frames of references. Media communication is then structured in a way that contributions at one place become not only principally observable but are also likely to be taken up and connected with ongoing communication at other places.

From existing research we know that the structuring of reciprocal resonance does not necessarily point to common understanding but rather to conflictual constellations of the public sphere. The problem here is that EU politics are typically not contested in the media but through other channels of mediation or direct influence taking. Even in the case of fundamental decisions of EU-politics such as enlargement or EU-constitution-making, the media prefer a consensual style of newsmaking (Trenz 2007). The coverage of conflicts about regular EU-decision-making instead is rather episodic, unsystematic and does not end up in long-term debates (Trenz 2005a, Berkel 2006). Reciprocal reso-

nance of media communication about the EU therefore remains exceptional and linked to short periods of politicisation.

4.2 The evaluative bias of European journalism

Quality newspapers apply a distinction between news articles and commentaries. A news article provides unbiased information and abstains from authors' judgements and evaluations. A commentary is the place for expressing the media's opinion on a particular issue (Eilders et al. 2004). Commentaries are clearly distinguished in style and format, they are usually signed by full name in order to make it possible for the reader to recognise the opinion expressed by the author and they can be found in a special section of the newspaper.

In the following I will scrutinize the critical and the performative-representative function of newspaper opinion articles in making sense of European integration. Commentaries can either be the *initiator* or the *indicator* of public opinion processes. The *critical function of the commentary* is to control and advice political decision-makers. Journalists as the fourth estate distribute approval or critique and launch public debates on issues that are considered of public relevance. The commentary pages can be further used as a forum for deliberation in which elite journalists meet with other public intellectuals and politicians to exchange views and arguments (Page and Shapiro 1987, 1992). The high density of comments on EU-constitutional issues would thus indicate the shared relevance of the topic that is chosen for simultaneous discussion in different media spheres facilitating an exchange of arguments and opinion formation processes between different national newspapers.

The commentary of European news corresponds to the increased demand on the side of the public for orientation. Rational citizens tend to accept information and analysis from their preferred and trusted newspaper sources (Page and Shapiro 1987). The commentary is the counter-spin against the monopoly of interpretation provided by the PR-specialists and spin-doctors of political institutions, which are seen as representing special interests and partial opinion. "Nevertheless, in a world of spin and intensified news management, political commentary is the best counter-spin we have. When politics is increasingly a series of performances, we need reviewers. In a world of constantly ac-

celerating information flow, commentary is the 'gatekeeper and wellhead' the essential sense-maker in the virtual Tower of Babel" (Mc Nair 2000: 83).

From a slightly different perspective Diéz Medrano (2003) analyses editorials as an *indicator* of public opinion formation processes on European integration reflecting the changing attitudes and preferences of a country over time. The *representative function* of the commentary is to focus the public voice on a particular issue or debate. The underlying assumptions are that commentaries "represent long-term expectations of the impact of European integration on the national collectivity" and further that these particular national images of European integration and European institutions originate in the reflections of elite journalists as members of the most educated groups of society (Diéz Medrano 2003: 107).

Commentaries in quality newspapers are written by the elite among the journalists (Eilders et al. 2003). In making and representing public opinion, a central role is attributed to EU-correspondents as the avant-garde of political journalism in Europe. EU-correspondents are said to become the pundits of the political Europe, they have a high self-esteem and build on expanding their influence on EU-politics. With print journalism we explore only a small part of the EU-punditry as "a knowledge industry that has grown into a political force demanding recognition, understanding and reckoning" (Nimmo and Combs 1992: 20) and which, in addition, includes TV-commentators, public intellectuals and frequently also ourselves as scientists who claim to be the pundits of the pundits.

The strong thesis related to the impact of newspaper commentaries is that the EU-punditry has monopolised public debate about European integration. The EU-pundits are among the main promoters of European integration who endorse the deepening and widening of the EU as a kind of moral imperative in defence of the collective good of the Europeans and against the self-interest of single governments.

This emphasis on the campaigning role of elite journalism supports the critical view of European integration as a project of elites who have set in motion a self-referential process of EU-constitution-making. From this perspective, EU-constitutionalisation was mainly self-organised and carried forward as part of the institutional dynamics of integration and not triggered off by outside mobilization or any other kind of significant external pressure (Mair 2005). The strive for democratization and the building of a legitimate legal and political order of the EU was generated from within

the political system of the EU and its supporting environment (including elite journalism).

The democratisation of the EU can be seen then as the private struggle of the EU-punditocracy which is entrapped in the self-referential logics of constitutionalisation. EU-pundits are the "gladiators" of an EU-democracy who generate and constantly reproduce their own normative arguments, whereas citizens are becoming reduced to the roles of "spectators, cheerleaders and 'couch potatoes' of the political process" (Denton in Nimmo and Combs 1992: xvii). Bartolini (2005) sees in this self-referential search for democracy an almost ironical element: "there are few historical examples of politicians, bureaucrats and scholars searching so frenetically for 'democracy' and 'legitimacy' that no citizen has demanded".

A number of empirical studies confirm the strong role of elite journalism in promoting the democratisation and constitutionalisation of the EU. Pfetsch (2006) reports that claims-making in editorials is highly supportive. The average of negative claims in several EU-countries analysed is below 5% (Germany, Switzerland, Spain, Italy, France and the Netherlands). Italy and France are found as the most supportive countries. Only in the UK, negative opinion about the EU prevails among the journalists. There is also a significant difference between different types of newspapers: the proportion of negative claims in the regional and tabloid press is four times higher than in quality papers (Pfetsch 2006).

In my own survey of the early constitutional debate of the year 2000 in quality newspapers in Germany, France, Spain, Italy, Austria and the UK, I was able to describe an attitude of *progressive Europeanism* among news commentators who were overall supporting the project of the democratisation and constitutionalisation of the EU and in many case even openly campaigning for it (Trenz 2005a; Trenz 2007). Similar to the study of Pfetsch (2006) a cleavage line was found between UK journalists, who tended to dislike European integration and continental journalists who strongly supported it.

Accordingly, one could see quality newspapers journalism critically as a homogeneous field of cultural production which corresponds to the higher educated, bourgeois public and provides a distinction for both journalists and readers within the wider field of mass media consumption (Hummel 2006). One could even hypothesize that the division between different national audiences served by quality newspapers is less pronounced than the division between elite and lay audiences within the national public sphere

(Slaatta 2006). In an increasingly differentiated media market, the consumption of different news formats becomes an indicator for class distinction. Anti-Europeanism spread by the tabloids could be seen as one common strategy of creating collective identifications of non-bourgeois lay publics against the cultural monopoly of quality papers journalism.

In a more recent survey on referenda debates, however, the impact of this alleged EU-punditocracy in the crucial moment of ratification of the EU-constitutional treaty has been found to be rather low (Trenz et al. 2006). If commentaries stand for the critical and representative function of newspaper journalism as a watchdog but also as a promoter of European democracy, it was concluded that quality newspapers were not at the forefront of popular contention for or against the project of EU-constitution-making. In fact, the experience of the French and Dutch referenda may be read as indicative of the media's crisis of legitimacy when it comes to their function of *expressing* the public voice. Rather than controlling public opinion, quality newspapers in countries like France became the negative template of public opinion. Their commitment to rational discourse was embedded in a strategy of distinction that allied progressive Europeans with the elite readerships of the newspapers and that dissociated them from the anti-European popular mass publics. The media's defence of reason and objectivity alienated substantial parts of the public who felt that their concerns were marginalised. The recognition of the people's deep rooted Euroscepticism entails the need for more popular news formats, which will inevitably mean a trade-off with deliberative reasoning.

5. Conclusion: Towards a media democracy in a transnational environment?

The different evidences for the mediatisation of the EU and their ambivalent effects on the enhancement of legitimacy of European integration collected in this paper point to the possible emergence of an *EU media democracy*. Such a media democracy deviates from the conventional description of the EU as a system that derives its principal legitimacy either from intergovernmental bargaining or from deliberative surpanationalism. The EU is not on its way to become entirely subdued to media dynamics, rather it is becoming a media democracy, as it is at the same time also a "bargaining democracy" and a "deliberative democracy". Institutional and governance designs have to be adapted to this new

situation of mediatisation in a transnational environment and normative theory has to take into account its contingent effects.

However, the research overview has also highlighted that the assumption of a linear mediatisation of the EU must be specified. Meyer (2005) speaks in this regard of asynchronous and asymmetrical mediatisation. Research has demonstrated indeed that only particular types of media pay attention; that issues are still mainly nationally framed and that periods of high media attention are short and usually linked to negative news such as corruption, mismanagement, conflict but not to regular decision-making processes in the EU. Even the constitutional moment has triggered off only short media debates restricted to the very peculiar condition of national referenda and the alarmism in light of the possible "no" of the electorate.

It has been emphasised that there are different barriers to the mediatisation of the EU. One is the prevailing system of news values that disadvantages European issues to be picked up by the mass media. The second is the increasing depoliticisation of the media, a trend to infotainment which does not support critical debate and deliberation. Commercial pressures on journalism marginalize the EU even further. A common trend to be observed in all EU-Member States is that the privatisation of public broadcasting has restricted dramatically the space of a unified public sphere that speaks to the so-called national public. Audience research points to an increasing diversification of the public. Target specific audiences or specific media user communities are located within world society and are mostly detached from the nation state.[17]

The diversification and individualisation of media use does not necessarily improve the conditions for the emergence of a European public sphere. The disappearance of the unity of the national public sphere restricts also the possibilities for the transmission of European news and, ultimately challenges the very idea of the political public sphere as an intermediating and integrating system. A further constraint is that media markets are already saturated, with only small niches left than can be occupied by European political communication. The national public that could become Europeanised in a more or less linear and unitarian way does simply not exist. Processes of Europeansiation of public communication loose grounds and become increasingly diversified. Ultimately we are faced with what Hannerz (2004: 23) has pointed out as one of the main challenges of cosmopolitanism: the fact that in an era of intense globalization and increased global connectedness, foreign news coverage in many media channels has recently been

shrinking and existing communicative spaces become increasingly diversified. In light of the lowering news quality and the demolition of the unified national public sphere, the emergence of a European or Europeanised media sphere should thus be perceived as being even more exceptional.

In empirically observing the unfolding of a European media sphere neither the hopes in a democracy enhancing function of the media nor the many complaints about the dumbing down of the quality of news can therefore be exactly corroborated. In substantial terms, particular segments of the mass media (most prominently among them the quality newspapers in the Member States) meet the transparency function of democracy. They are further promoting a shared space of meaning – a media reality constructed in a particular way – in which common debates evolve. On the other hand, media do only occasionally step forward as a control organ of European governance and their commitment to the project of European integration is limited to a few elite journalists who distinguish themselves through an attitude of "progressive Europeanism" from mainstream media nationalism.

Notes:

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[1] For an evaluation and critique of this technocratic approach of communication management see Trenz 2002a, Trenz and Vetters 2006; Kurpas et al. 2006. See also the EU-funded project "Adequate Information management in Europe (http://www.aim-project.net/).

[2] Compare, for instance, the recently issued White Paper on a EU communication policy with previous strategic papers of the Commission (e.g. Commission 2001).

[3] The reconstruction and evaluation of the competing logics of political communication that accompany decision-making processes has come to the centre of attention in the course of the Habermasianisation of political theory (Elster 1991; Eriksen and Weigård 2003). The "bargaining" or "arguing" capacities of decision-making bodies have since then been tested out also in the fields of international relations (Müller 2004; Risse 2000) and EU-politics (Neyer 2003). From my reading, there are only few and unsystematic references in the existing body of literature of how both communicative approaches are constrained by communication with the outside media and society environment (see Eder and Trenz 2006 for a more systematic critique).

[4] Media research shows that news values are consistently applied across a range of news organizations and across different socio-cultural contexts (Eilders 2006, see also the classical study of Galtung et.al 1965).

[5] Media and communication studies critically scrutinize this assumption with rather contradictory findings. In their 2003 annual conference in Germany they spoke about the "Mythos Mediatisierung" (Rössler and Krotz 2005).

[6] http://europa.eu.int/comm/dgs/communication/facts/index_en.htm

[7] In the White Paper on Communication the programmatic topic of "giving Europe a human face" is spelled out as follows: "The European Union is often perceived as 'faceless': it has no clear public identity. Citizens need help to connect with Europe, and political information has greater impact when put in a 'human interest' frame that allows citizens to understand why it is relevant to them personally. EU institutions and all levels of government can do more to 'give a human face' to the information they provide."

[8] Several indicators are discussed in the literature that point at the credibility crisis of political journalism, e.g. the general decline of circulation experienced by newspapers, the cynical attitudes of the audiences, the frequency of media scandals, etc. See Schlesinger 2006.

[9] See Benedict Anderson's (1991) reconstruction of print capitalism. Different schools of nation-building agree on this central role of unified mass media communication (Deutsch 1953; Gellner 1983).

[10] For the distinction of these two functions, in general, see Hall et al. (1978: 63.); Gerhards et al. 1998. Applied to the context of EU-news coverage see Koopmans and Statham 2002 and Statham (2006: 3-4).

[11] According to Eurobarometer (2002) quality newspapers are after television the second most important information source of European citizens. Media studies further confirm the leading role of quality newspaper journalism as the prime cross-media agenda-setter and opinion-maker in national public spheres (for Germany see Kepplinger 1985: 19).

[12] The report is based on the accumulative findings of case studies on newsmaking cultures in nine European countries

[13] A monopoly that is shared with public broadcasting and television. The differences in media consumption of the Europeans are monitored by Eurobarometer. The results point to a Northern European newspaper information culture and a Southern European television information culture. The practice of news production is determined by close cooperation that facilitates trans-media-agenda setting between newspaper journalists and television journalists, especially in the close world of Brussels (Kevin 2003; Norris 2000; Meyer 2002).

[14] See my own case study on the transnational diffusion of rumours (Trenz 2002b).

[15] The survey includes 12 European quality newspapers in six Member States (France, Germany, Italy, Spain, UK, Austria). For further details see Trenz (2004, 2005a).

[16] Similar findings are reported by van de Steeg and Risse (2003) who analyse the scope of the Haider debate that is highly politicised in European but not in American newspapers.

[17] For the case of cinema see Trenz 2005b. For the case of ethnic audiences in diaspora see Appardurai 1998; Pries 1998.

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