



Eurocrisis and the Media ***Preserving or Undermining Democracy?***

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Abstract

The conflicts at the core of the Eurocrisis increasingly reflect competing world views and ideologies that are difficult to reconcile. Crucially, the gulf between what is economically required and what is socially and democratically acceptable is widening. Central to the crisis, both in terms of offering core mediating capacities and of providing the public stage for the crisis conflicts, are the EU media spheres- new and old media, offline and online, news and social. We approach the complex relationship between the crisis in the EU, media and democracy from three interrelated perspectives: 1) media as the legal and institutional guarantee of free speech and information, 2) media as the primary arena of public opinion, and 3) media as the facilitator of civic engagement. Drawing on normative and empirical research, we first collect evidence for the direct effects of crisis on media institutions and their functioning in democracy. We subsequently analyze the politics of public discourse in Europe and its mediating effects on crisis perceptions, responses and democratic legitimacy. Lastly, we assess available evidence for how the media can empower EU citizens affected by the Eurocrisis and help them to develop capacities of resilience. These latter are often linked to new media and social media practices with a potential to open new transnational spaces of political contestation and legitimation.

Keywords

Crisis - Democracy - EU - Media - Public Sphere

Introduction

The current economic and political crisis has become an experience that immediately affects the life chances of many citizens. For many Europeans the necessity to cope with the negative consequences of crisis requires immediate responses and the development of resilience. This new *immediateness* of how Europe is experienced through crisis contrasts sharply with the many hurdles of *mediation* between the EU political system and the life worlds of the citizens. Due to the technocratic character of the EU rescue measures which are taken to secure economic and monetary stability, EU decision-makers have become less responsive to the demands for public legitimation. Thus, while directly affecting millions of citizens, the crisis has at the same time widened the EU's public communication and legitimation deficit. EU institutions and national governments are under constraints to consolidate new regulatory competences, but, at the same time increasingly deprived of the possibilities to legitimize these increased powers in a democratic fashion (Habermas 2013). They lack, in short, the mediating capacities to include the wider populations in informed opinion making and to respond to the concerns and fears of the people affected from crisis. And it is not only the communication aspect of crisis management that is lacking: The gulf between what is economically required and what is socially and democratically acceptable is widening. The conflicts at the core of the crisis increasingly reflect competing world views and ideologies that are difficult to mediate. Instead of reconciling such fundamental conflicts, the media then appear as a further amplifier of conflict and cleavages: elites (national and EU) versus citizens; the crisis-ridden South versus the still-affluent North; the economic players and banks versus social welfare NGOs and protest movements that challenge financial capitalism.

Central to the crisis, both in terms of offering core mediating capacities and of providing the public stage for the crisis conflicts, are the available media spheres and infrastructures in Europe - new and old media, offline and online, news and social. Delving into the media perspective of the crisis is paramount for understanding how the Eurocrisis has turned into a major threat to democracy but also for formulating democratic solutions to the EU crisis and defining new ways of democratic empowerment. Mediating capacities are needed to arbitrate between the economic and the political rationale of crisis governance and to sustain vital information and communication flows between and across the four space dimensions of the crisis, namely the local, the national, the European and the global.

Three factors complicate the mediation of crisis related events and affect, on the one hand, the capacities of government to provide adequate information and communicate effectively to relevant stakeholders, and, on the other hand,

the possibilities of audience formation and their potential to hold political representatives accountable. Firstly, in times of crisis, it may be seemingly impossible to reconcile effective crisis management, which relies on quick executive decisions, with the democratic control mechanisms – including the media – designed to preserve and enforce autonomy and accountability. The Eurocrisis has given new momentum to the politicization of European integration, turning it into a mobilization force for intellectuals, political actors and citizens' movements (Statham and Trenz 2014). In response to the EU “constitutional crisis” and democratic deficits, the “permissive consensus” characterizing public opinion before the 1990s has slowly been replaced by a “constraining dissensus” through a process of public and media contestation (Hooghe and Marks 2009; Statham and Trenz 2012; Statham and Trenz 2013). Societies respond with an intensification of insurgent politics (ad-hoc citizens' protests, asymmetric communications), on the one hand, and with further depreciation of representative politics, on the other (Kriesi 2012). As such, the Eurocrisis is constitutive of a particular kind of public sphere that contests the legitimacy of governance, national and European.

Secondly, this emerging conflict of interests between crisis management and democratic governance is amplified exponentially when both governance and crisis unfold in an internationalized context. Existing media infrastructures are however not supportive of transnational communicative exchanges and opinion formation processes. This makes it unlikely that the focus and possibly even the locus of democracy is shifted from the national to the transnational and European level. While crisis contestation is increasingly transnational, publics continue to be exposed mainly to national opinions and, by following these patterns of nationalized media communications, often remain hostile to any proposed solution that asks for European solidarity or delegates national sovereignty.

Thirdly, the current online media-driven structural transformation of the public sphere increasingly affects crisis mediation. Although online media have amplified participation and openness of EU politics, they make for a “less stable platform for political decision-making” and legitimacy-seeking, precisely because intense differentiation of publicly-expressed opinions makes it more difficult for political institutions “to identify normative foundations for legitimate decisions” (Rasmussen 2013: 97). In the case of the EU, even though online media have been found to constitute a virtually shared forum for political communication that political actors and users increasingly occupy developing homogenous patterns of evaluating European integration, national political and media cultures continue to determine the normative framework within which EU politics is publicly discussed (de Wilde et al. 2013; Michailidou and Trenz 2010). Thus, EU citizens have

[o]nly national, segmented and topical zones of what may be elements of a more robust European public sphere in the future. [...] despite growing and widespread concern about the current crisis (and hence increasing debate about common concerns), these zones form fragile and unstable European publics, only indirectly and unintentionally oriented towards an integrated will formation in Europe.

(Rasmussen 2013: 103)

In the following, we approach the complex relationship between the crisis in Europe, media and democracy from three interrelated perspectives: 1) media as the legal and institutional guarantee of free speech and information; 2) media as the primary arena of public opinion; 3) media as the facilitator of civic engagement. The first immanent question is how the economic crisis has directly affected media institutions and media performance. In relation to this, several independent observers are concerned with the notable dumbing-down effect of the Eurocrisis on media performance, particularly recent restrictions in the autonomy of news media. Especially in the countries most affected by the sovereign debt crisis, we get alarming signals of a decline of media autonomy and freedom of expression. Secondly, the mediating effects of political news in shaping crisis perceptions and responses come into question. Media representations shape public attitudes and views of the causes and solutions of the crisis. News media are a carrier of ideas and images of Europe and of the nation state and the framing of media content is crucial for the attribution of responsibilities. Thirdly, the media are essential as an amplifier of the voice of the powerless. Especially new media and social media develop a potential to serve the needs of citizens and translate them into political demands. The media environments within which people move increasingly set the parameters for social inclusion, rights and empowerment and define the scope of civic engagement and the enactment of citizenship.

Our paper draws on each of these points to reconstruct the complex relationship between European crisis, media and democracy. In this context, we first collect evidence for the direct effects of crisis on media institutions and their functioning in democracy. Secondly, we analyze the politics of public discourse in Europe and its mediating effects on crisis perceptions, responses and democratic legitimacy. In the last section, we collect evidences for how media can also empower people affected from crisis and help them to develop capacities of resilience. These latter are often linked to new media and social media practices with a potential to open new transnational spaces of political contestation and legitimation.

The Eurocrisis, media autonomy and press freedom

The economic crisis in the EU has undoubtedly exacerbated the near-chronic problems plaguing news media, and particularly the press, across several European media environments. Newspaper sales, for example, and advertising revenue across the media spectrum have plummeted in the half decade of the Eurocrisis in many EU member states (WAN-IFRA 2013). This crisis has also coincided with a decline in journalism freedom in several of the worst-hit member states and globally; again, a trend that has been developing for some time (Carlsson 2013), but which has nevertheless been intensified due to the political tensions typical in crisis situations. Five EU countries, in particular, fare poorly in both the 2013 World Press Freedom Index and the Freedom of the Press 2013 Report, namely Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Italy and Greece).¹ Developments in the media spheres of these countries are not all directly attributable to the crisis, but certainly do not indicate democratically healthy media environments. This gives the public spheres in these EU member states a serious disadvantage in turbulent times, like the current one, as they enter the crisis with their media performing already with serious defaults. Several other EU countries, although still maintaining their “free press” status, also show worrying signs of media ownership concentration, restrictions in freedom of expression and rapid economic decline. Europe-wide and beyond, scholars point to the mainstream media being directly responsible for systematic misinformation, abusing power, restricting the diversity of political views and manipulating public opinion in the case of the Eurocrisis (Tracy 2012; Tzogopoulos 2013).

It is in Greece’s case, however, where we see in no uncertain terms the profound impact of the Eurocrisis on the democratic functions of the media sphere. Greece’s decline in media economic performance and journalism standards during the Eurocrisis has been such, that both media monitoring reports mentioned above highlight it as one of the most disturbing developments in the media sphere globally. Greek journalists are reported to “operate in disastrous social and professional atmosphere” (Reporters Without Borders 2013), where the wider sense is that the media cannot (or even do not wish to) fulfil their vital role in holding authority to account. This is hardly surprising, in a country that epitomizes the “polarized pluralist” media system model (Hallin and Mancini 2004) of close media links with the political system; extensive state intervention and/or control; and the domination of

¹ All of these countries have a World Press Freedom Index rank lower than 50, with Greece and Bulgaria ranking worst at 84th and 87th place respectively out of 179 countries assessed (Reporters Without Borders 2013).

media ownership by industrialists.² Examples abound of the toxic relationship between formal politics, industry interests and media organizations in Greece, but two Eurocrisis-related cases in particular have gained international notoriety for their blatant (and unprecedented in Greece's post-junta history) anti-democratic nature.

The first concerns Kostas Vaxevanis, investigative journalist arrested for exposing a political scandal. In 2010, the French government (in which current IMF managing director Christine Lagarde was Finance Minister at that time, hence the name "Lagarde list") forwarded to its Greek counterpart a computer disk containing the names of 2,000 Greeks with accounts totalling about 6 billion Euros at an HSBC branch in Geneva, for investigation of possible tax evasion. The disk remained in ministerial drawers for some time, until the Greek press got hold of the case last year. The list was eventually leaked to Vaxevanis, who published it in its entirety in his magazine *Hot Doc*. For this act, he was promptly arrested, charged with "interfering with sensitive personal data." His arrest was instantly classified as "political persecution" not only by Vaxevanis himself but also by opposition political parties, intellectuals, journalists and social media-savvy citizens, generating the intense interest and also support of international news media, as well as freedom of speech NGOs.³ Vaxevanis' trial began on 1 November and ended the same day with an acquittal.⁴

The second case in point is the closure of the public broadcaster ERT, which was shut down in scandalous fashion in June 2013. The Memorandum dictates that 15,000 public sector employees be dismissed by the end of 2014, of whom 4,000 must be fired by the end of 2013. Of those latter ones, 2,000 had to be dismissed by the end of June 2013 in order for Greece to receive the next disbursements from the Second Economic Adjustment Programme. By mid-June 2013, the government had proceeded with exactly zero dismissals and there was no specific plan in place on how to reach that target on an objective, needs-and-performance basis. Thus ERT became an obvious, seemingly easy solution. By shutting it down overnight, and firing all of its 2,656 reporters,

² In the Greek case, these are shipping, travel, construction, telecommunications and oil industry tycoons (Papathanassopoulos, 2001; Kontochristou and Terzis 2007).

³ See, for example, Vaxevanis 2013; Mourenza 2012; Spiegel.de 2012.

⁴ A year after his acquittal, on 8 November 2013, Vaxevanis was brought to court again, after the public prosecutor demanded a retrial on the grounds that the journalist's initial acquittal was flawed. Greek and international reporting reveals the bemusement at the continued persecution of the journalist and stresses that throughout this time, the deposits of those named on the Lagarde list has not been properly investigated (see, indicatively, Tagaris and Hepinstall 2013). Meanwhile, Vaxevanis received the Guardian/Index on censorship journalism award in March 2013.

journalists, TV and radio technicians and support staff, it could then show the Troika, whose inspection visit was looming, that the government had the will and ability to meet agreed targets. The public outcry within Greece and from abroad at shutting down the public broadcaster had not been factored in, nor had the political friction that was caused among the members of the tri-partite government (Christides 2013). Eventually, Democratic Left (DIMAR), the smallest party in the coalition, decided to withdraw from the government over the ERT affair, bringing the government's power in parliament down to just above the required majority threshold. The decision of the government to shut the ERT down through the use of an Act of Legislative Content was challenged in Greece's supreme administrative court, the State Council (StE). StE stipulated that there can be no termination of one public broadcaster without its simultaneous replacement by a new one and therefore the government ought to take action in order to establish an interim public broadcaster until the new, reformed one is ready in September 2013 (State Council 2013). The government has subsequently had to announce a total of approximately 2,000(!) positions in order to staff the interim public broadcaster, so that it can go on air. In an equally unprecedented move, for the Greek media sphere anyway, ERT's personnel continued broadcasting illegally until Wednesday, 7 November 2013, through the radio and web TV frequencies of other Greek media platforms, displaying not only defiant attitude but also exemplary "independent", collective news-making (as opposed to the typically hierarchical and heavily government-biased news structure ERT broadcasts had before). In the early hours of 7 November, the government decided to put an end to these defiant transmissions by deploying eight riot police platoons to terminate the occupation of the public broadcaster's headquarters in Athens. The manner and method used to finalize the ERT's closure invoked bitter memories of darker times in Greece's history, sparked protests by opposition parties, public intellectuals and journalist associations within the country and abroad; and generated numerous news headlines in international media, most of which pointed to Greece's being the only EU country to have ever shut down its public broadcaster (e.g. Smith 2013).

Certainly all is not lost for EU media: 16 EU member states feature in the Top 30 countries for news providers, while another seven are ranked among the Top 50 in spite of inconsistencies and worrying developments noted in some of them (Reporters Without Borders 2013: 13). Many journalists are fighting back by challenging the editorial lines of the crisis reporting. At the same time, the online public sphere offers a reporting "escape route" to journalists in crisis-struck EU countries, who lost their jobs in established news media outlets either because of the financial crisis, or because they diverged too much from the editorial/ownership line or both. In the "most disturbing" case

of Greece, for example, the news media landscape has been dramatically transformed with the rise of news blogs and online news media platforms, several of which are owned and run by prominent journalists without any links (visibly at least) to powerful media conglomerates or other business interests.⁵ Such news sources now match established newspapers and even TV political talk shows in popularity and offer an alternative to the mainstream line of reporting (the quality of this alternative reporting is not necessarily better than what established TV channels broadcast, but what is crucial here is the very existence of riposte to the “crisis propaganda”). In the following section we examine in more detail the mechanism through which the state of the European media spheres is linked to perceptions of the Eurocrisis and the process of public legitimation of counter-crisis measures.

Mediated political legitimacy

Our starting point here is the public sphere as the communicative infrastructure, through which the legitimacy of the EU as a political project is negotiated between EU representatives and the citizens (Eriksen 2005; Fossum and Schlesinger 2007; Trenz 2005; Trenz and Eder 2004). It is through the discursive and mediating practices of polity contestation that political elites and the citizens are interrelated and political legitimacy is given expression. Political legitimacy is thus the outcome of a publicly unfolding process, in which practices of re-legitimation of political elites meet with the practices of de-legitimation of their opponents and of affected parties (Trenz and Eder 2004). In this public legitimation struggle, news media and political journalism are not just simply acting as intermediary institutions. Media players often directly affect the institutional and governmental capacities to gain public legitimacy, because they directly shape the narrative (frames) within which political legitimacy is publicly debated. In Western societies, and especially in the US, established mass media were often found to uncritically back a neo-liberal ideology of the free market and its political underpinning in established representative democracies, but in more recent years critical journalism is making a noticeable comeback – and in this online media have a crucial role – calling for the dismantling of the financial system and challenging global capitalism (Artz and Kamalipour 2003; Fuchs 2010; Wong 2013). This latter type of discourse often requires an investment in new forms of collaborative investigative journalism across national borders.

In times of crisis – the Eurocrisis being no exception – such ideological struggles around the legitimacy of established democratic systems and the

⁵ One such example is ThePressProject.gr news platform, already in its fourth year running.

sustainability of market economies based on growth are intensified. Crises, as threatening situations that belie expectations of normality and have widespread negative repercussions, inevitably create high levels of uncertainty, focus the attention of the media and increase the public's demand for information and proactive challenging of the decisions taken by political leaders (Seeger et al. 2003). The media play a fundamental role in this process, not only in shaping the perceptions and development of the crisis itself but also in driving political and social (re)actions to the crisis and any measures taken at elite level to counter it (Boin et al. 2005; Coombs and Holladay 2010). They function as agenda-setters (e.g. highlighting particular aspects of crisis, actors who are to deal with crisis or responses); as crisis actors themselves (e.g. by exacerbating a critical situation or creating financial "panics"); and, perhaps above all, as the general "interpreter of public voice", of perceptions and identities (e.g. by "blaming" or ascribing political responsibilities or "flaming", i.e. encouraging hostile reactions to the "other") (Raboy and Dagenais 1992).

Clearly, the quality (meaning here both the content provided by decision-making elites and the way this content is relayed to the public, including the types of media channels and the media frames used) and timing of public information about the crisis are essential factors for the public legitimacy and subsequently the success of attempted counter-crisis measures and reforms. Yet, while research has mainly focused on the institutional arrangements of "crisis governance" (Peters et al. 2011; Scharpf 2011; Willke and Willke 2012; Crum and Fossum 2013), there is still limited understanding of how the Eurocrisis is linked to the struggle of political elites for public legitimacy. Below we present some first evidence on how the public legitimation process of the EU polity is shaped by the way media spheres are reacting to the Eurocrisis. How do economic and political instability, uncertainty, perceptions of threat and the need for system change link to media discourse? Is there any evidence to the constitution of critical publics and if so, in what way are these critical?

Technocratic hegemony of media discourse

A technocratic regime of governance does usually pay only little attention to the problem of how the collective choices imposed by it can be also publically advanced. Technocrats do usually not argue but impose their choices as "facts" or "functional imperatives". Journalism is expected to communicate about public policy choices as the "only available alternative". The question of public consent becomes secondary, as expert choices cannot be negotiated or compromised. Public communication is in this sense used for the spread of a hegemonic worldview that needs to be translated into a common language to be understood by those who are in a less privileged position and lack the

knowledge and insights of the experts. Political mediation requires some exercise of translation, which includes the use of political rhetoric, trust generating symbols and mass mediated messages but which disregards the possibility of entering into an argumentative exchange with the lay public. In the current situation of crisis, such a technocratic regime of governance by default has been set up by the enhanced cooperation between the International Monetary Fund, the European Commission and the European Central Bank known as the Troika. Politicians, and in particular the governments of the member states, act as the principal mediators of the Troika. Their use of the mass media is mainly restricted to transmitting the “no-choice” rescue packages but not to contesting it or pointing out possible alternatives. This declamatory style of communication of the governments reverses previous trends of politicization and the hesitant steps taken to open EU governance to electoral authorization and control. Yiannis Mylonas, in his critical analysis of the German tabloid “Bildzeitung”, speaks of a “hegemonic discursive construction of the EU’s current (2012) economic crisis, as it is articulated by political and economic elites and by mass media” (Mylonas 2012). From a political economy perspective, journalists are seen as trapped in a “free market economic ideology” (ibid.), which determines the hegemony of news production and interpretation. Crisis publicity is interpreted here by critical media scholars as an instrument of social control. Through the “culturalization” of crisis and the creation of country scape goats (such as Greece), the hegemonic center of Europe is accused of fighting political struggles of capitalist restructuring of the EU, diverting from the roots of global crisis and reiterating neoliberal worldviews as the only available alternatives (Brunkhorst 2012). In our own study of Eurocrisis (see Annex for the details) reporting in online news media, we have also found that technocratic and political elite actors (i.e. political actors in decision-making positions) dominate media coverage of the Eurocrisis in professional news platforms and their public statements virtually never contain any critique or hint of doubt of their own actions (see Table 1 in the Annex). This combined with the seemingly “neutral” crisis framing that news reporters adopt – namely, most frequently simply presenting the actions of various decision-makers as facts rather than provide commentary or analysis of those – leaves the technocratic hegemony discourse virtually unchallenged (see Annex for detailed results).

The technocratic governance of crisis combined with the depoliticizing strategies of governments has thus resulted in a communication vacuum. The transparency of EU crisis governance is low while at the same time the demands for publicity by attentive public are rising. Governments have considerably reduced their public communication efforts to reach out to the citizens at a moment they are confronted with the enhanced attention and

concerns of the European publics. The question is how governments can be held accountable under these conditions and how responsibilities are attributed in public and media discourse.

Attribution of responsibility

The new secrecy of government can be seen as the hour of critical journalism. Journalists from several countries can help forge a common European public discourse on the crisis' causes and solutions, which is different from the official discourse promoted by the Troika that is in charge of crisis governance. This is where the role of online news media is key, as they provide an alternative but not marginal sphere for crisis discourse that does not necessarily follow the narrative and frames found in mainstream offline media reporting. The online media sphere gives voice to investigative and critical journalists who may no longer be welcome in established media organizations because they do not follow the preferred crisis narrative or whom media organizations may no longer be able to afford due to the crisis-related recession. In addition, the online media sphere is also turned into a participatory arena, where readers' views appear alongside those of professional journalists but do not necessarily coincide in their perspective of the crisis. Under these conditions, the Troika faces constraints of publically justifying their choices and policies in response to investigative journalism and the critical attention of the publics. It is then unlikely that the concerted action by the Troika to create publicity by forced consent can impose a hegemonic discourse on the media. The public controversy around the highly unpopular measures taken to rescue the Euro rather opens the possibility that also ideas of "alternative Europe" or of "European resistance" become salient in public discourses across the European press. In addition, the press in different European countries can present perspectives from other member states to foster a cross-national understanding on the crisis.

Conflict frames

This picture of a "re-politicization" trend uniting critical journalists and protest actors would be incomplete, however, without paying attention also to the polarizations and structural divides of European elites and audiences. As regards the emerging cleavages, a structuring element of politicization in the Eurozone debt crisis is related to the new transnational elite divisions between executives from creditor and indebted countries. The inter-Eurozone conflict field is structured around a powerful European core of "strong" countries (especially Germany and France) on one side, and a European periphery of "weak" relatively indebted countries (Greece, Portugal, Spain, Ireland and Italy), which have harsh austerity measures imposed upon them, on the other.

Overall, there is a very high potential for deep and long term divisions between the blocs over the terms of membership within the EU. Populist backlashes are likely in the media frenzy to attribute blame to other countries and to recur to “identity politics” that opposes pro-integrationist elites with nationalist and/or xenophobic publics. In all Eurozone countries, the bailout measures are contested by populist parties, which evoke publicly-held stereotypes and whose positions are often given prime exposure in mainstream media discourse. Nationalist populism is in this sense not only represented by the general rise in populist nationalist parties, but, sometimes even more prominently, by the spread of media populism as manifested in tabloids or new social media formats (Mazzoleni 2003).

The specific collective identities that tabloid media mobilize, for example, “sovereign national people versus EU-level financial technocrats” or “Greeks versus Germans”, are constructions that tell us about the groups and relationships forming in the conflict. They publicly communicate the emergent conflicts between groups over the new structural inequalities that are generated by neo-liberal financial capitalism (manifest in monetary union) in the region. Mediatized public contestation is in this sense a crucial element for the attribution of responsibilities, the salience of new cleavages (North-South, Nordics vs. the rest of the EU) and the demarcation of new national or transnational spaces of democracy, belonging and solidarity. Cultural, social and political norms are brought under public scrutiny through media debates. Their meanings are contested, dismissed, reconfigured or strengthened (e.g. the norm of solidarity among EU countries; or the repercussions of the Stability Pact for the weaker Eurozone countries). Crisis contestation in the media sphere can further facilitate transcultural encounters and exchange of meanings (e.g. organization of protests across countries, confrontation of diverse cultures, debates across linguistic divides).

In searching for the public arenas of crisis contestation, European public sphere research has emphasized the (restricted) scope of mass media communication through traditional media formats (such as quality newspapers and television) (De Vreese 2007; Wessler et al. 2008). Recent transformations in the media use of European citizens’ point however to the increasing importance of New Media forums as a place of citizens’ encounters and communications where the legitimacy of the EU as a political project is contested (de Wilde et al. 2013). In our own survey of mediated crisis communication we have therefore applied a new research focus on the expressions of citizens’ voice, protest and mobilization through New Media. We find social and online media to reconfigure the dynamics of crisis communication by strengthening the informational and participatory independence of the public. At the same time, online independent media can

play an important role in escalating reactions to a crisis (Song 2007). There is thus the expectation that New Media can be turned into a tool of resilience of those vulnerable groups of society who are most affected from crisis. These relations between new media and the constitution of citizens-voice publics or resilience shall be analyzed in the next section.

Media and political engagement in times of crisis

To approach the resilience capacities of citizens through the use of new media, the emphasis is put on the participatory promise of New Media to engage its users in political practices and direct exchanges with their political representatives. This has led many researchers to postulate a new civic culture that emerges from online citizens' encounters and interactions. The one-to-many communications of the traditional public sphere of mass attention would thus be substituted by the many-to-many-communications of the online public sphere of civic engagement (Dahlgren 2005; 2006). In contesting the legitimacy of the EU in response to crisis, public sphere dynamics are however not only measured in the potential of online media to overcome the antagonism between citizens and elites but in the correlation between elite and counter elite formation and their competition for audience attention. With regard to our case, it would be, for instance, misleading to assume that all vulnerable citizens affected from crisis can be turned into "strong voice" citizens. The question whether digital media can be turned into a tool of resilience of vulnerable citizens is not solely dependent on the "voicing" of concerns but even more so on the "channeling" of these concerns and their wider resonance. What counts then is the constitution of publics where such concerns find articulation in a way to *include* and *represent* the wider community of affected citizens.⁶ Social network sites are in this sense occupied by political elites and entrepreneurs (some of them emerging from the audience of vulnerable people) who give "voice" to constitute a public and to compete with other counter-elites and counter-publics. A public is constituted when those "voice representatives" searching for "likers" and "followers" meet with those to citizens-users searching for expressions of "voice" that represent their discontent and anger. We thus propose a model of public contestation in response to crisis where digital and social media sites are primarily analyzed as a forum of elite and counter-elite formation which is linked to consenting audiences.

In the current context of crisis, especially social media are used for the public expression of anger, rejection and disappointment with the political

⁶ This is precisely the "problem of the public" famously formulated by John Dewey 1927.

establishment outside organized forms of civic action (political parties, trade unions). This can have far-reaching effects on the representation of the “united in diversity” system of social and political values underpinning the EU project. At the collective level of reception of such counter-messages, crisis contestation in the social media influences the way the EU polity and the nation state are viewed as well as what it means to “be European” or “be national.” It can thus lead to the formation of audiences that are foremost distinguished by the expression of dissent. At the same time, the old and new media are an indispensable communication mechanism for the political establishment in its quest to create consensus and compliance with counter-crisis policies and measures. In contrast to the old media, the social media are however less likely to offer privileged access points for political and economic elites to defend the permissive audience consensus. Through the social media it is likely that also the consenting audiences are turned into voice publics, whose representatives need to enter the arena of public contestation.

From this vantage point, the crisis presents current theories with challenges for the representation of citizens and the press in democracy. Especially as young adults reject older forms of information, political communication can renew itself by deepening existing theory and shifting from old “effects rationality” to a new “media affect” sensibility. Social media are perceived to have such changing power and in the context of current crisis are treated accordingly by political actors, news media and civil society alike. Hence, we can observe an increasing number of EU and national political actors who not only maintain Twitter and Facebook accounts but take to the social media arena to make “breaking-news” statements or address political opponents—even in countries where Twitter and Facebook use among the general population is very low, such as in Greece. It is not uncommon for these social media exchanges to subsequently become the focus of mainstream news reporting and/or of part of the official discussion agenda in national parliaments. Moreover, social media enable individuals to not only come together in informal networks of resilience and mobilization during periods of instability, but also to shape the public perceptions of crisis, thus affecting the image and development of the crisis itself. In this latter function, social media constitute a “social awareness environment” that functions as an efficient, mobilizing “electronic word of mouth” (e.g. Jansen et al. 2009: 2169). Lastly, and crucially, social media are often the communication medium of choice for young people – often those who are most affected from crisis and suffering from unemployment. Youths in Western democracies often turn away from traditional politics, but can be found to become activated online in a number of alternative ways. Social media environments as everyday realities (Dahlgren 2011) can support young adults to search for new opportunities and develop their capacities of “resilience” against crisis.

New media sites as a tool of citizens' resilience need however an institutional anchorage from where practices can develop and political claims can be articulated and channeled. In the European framework, such anchorage for evolving citizens' practices and claims is provided by the legal and constitutional framework of rights and citizenship. Of particular interest in this context is the question how social media can facilitate a new citizenship practice that builds on existing legal entitlements (EU Citizenship) to support the mobility and the mobilization of European citizens within the European space. By facilitating transnational exchanges, social media can give new impulses to the enactment of EU citizenship (Saward 2013). They confine a virtual social and political space that in contrast to the no less virtual mass mediated spaces, nevertheless belongs to the citizens and can be filled by them with meaningful interactions. At the same time, this virtual-interactive sphere is not detached from the possibilities of mass communications and its potential impact, as broader audiences can be reached through campaigning, public demands can be articulated in a focused way and channeled to relevant decision-makers.

Conclusion

The focus of this paper has been on the question of how media (old and new) meet the needs for recognition, political expression and economic well-being of European citizens affected by crisis. From a media sociology perspective, the question is not how such needs are individually grounded but how they are socially embedded and given collective expression. The analytical focus is thus not only on the role of media to define individual consciousness and identities, but how these evolving media practices and cultures are related to the economic, social-identitarian and political needs of vulnerable citizens (Couldry 2012).

The media, first of all need to be analyzed in their capacity to satisfy and articulate the economic needs of vulnerable citizens. Economic needs refer to the need to secure the well-being and material base of living. Media can be used to turn such economic needs into demands for inclusion in the labor market and *demands for redistribution*. Being involved in communication and information networks is an important element of inclusion in the labor market and helps to identify economic opportunities. Migrants or mobile people, for instance, generate particular needs for the use of media formats, like mobile phones or twitter and Facebook groups. Secondly, the media in the context of current crisis are used to articulate, confirm or contest cultural values, belonging and identity. The same group of migrants and mobile people can use, for instance, social media to satisfy ethnic needs to affirm social and

cultural ties within the community. These needs for social identification are typically translated into *demands for recognition*. Through social media use, online diaspora communities proliferate within the EU of like-minded but dispersed people who nevertheless maintain intense cultural interchanges. Thirdly, the media become central for the articulation of political needs which are linked to the resistances of vulnerable populations against established authority. In confronting political authority, persons affected from the consequences of collective decision need to express support or opposition to government. The possibilities for the expression of political needs are central for allegiance to law and the political community. As such, political needs of citizens affected from collective decisions are typically translated into democratic *demands for participation and representation*.

From this perspective it can be further investigated how old and new media practices support not only political mobilization but also mobility within a *transnational social space* of free movement as defined by EU citizenship. The differential use of civic, political and social rights of EU citizenship in correspondence to the needs of vulnerable citizens is reflected in different but overlapping media practices by specific audiences or online user communities. The media can follow and ethnic divide providing tools of integration of the new diaspora communities who are on the move in Europe. Along these divides, the media can be also used in various ways to claim recognition, be it through the organization of cultural events or in political struggles where national stereotypes are played off. Secondly, the media can also follow a new social divide by providing opportunities for integration in the labor market. Claims for redistribution and solidarity transcend the ethnic divide and are typically raised by professional groups, anti-capitalist coalitions, generations or other sectoral representatives. As such they constitute a European space and bring together particular categories of people (e.g. young adults) from different national backgrounds. Thirdly, the media can follow new political divides, facilitating transnational mobilization, the no-global movement or anti-EU sentiments. The current crisis in this sense turned into an experimental field for how new and old media can be used by citizens in a European context for giving meaning and activating existing rights or asking for their expansion. Media use is an integral part of everyday practices of European citizens and, as such, can help to constitute a transnational political and social space as part of the lifeworld experiences of average citizens. The framework of EU citizenship is useful in this regard as it helps vulnerable citizens to translate their needs into political demands and to raise these demands in a *transnational political space* of rights and entitlements.

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Annex: Eurocrisis in the media study outline

Our study, part of the ARENA EuroDiv project, included the two most popular online news media in the following countries: France, Germany, Greece, Norway, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and the UK. We focused on news coverage of three specific Eurocrisis events, namely the agreement on Greece's first loan ('bail-out') and establishment of the EFSF in May 2010; the 2011 announcement by then-Prime Minister of Greece, George Papandreou, of a referendum on whether Greece would accept a second loan agreement (the actual question of the referendum was never clarified, but when announced, the other EU leaders made it clear that any referendum would ultimately affect Greece's Eurozone membership regardless of how the question would be formulated); and the ratification by the German parliament of the second loan agreement for Greece in December 2012. We analyzed all relevant articles (N=1,156) concerning these events (news items sampled up to three days prior to and after the events took place) using software-assisted (DiscoverText) quantitative and qualitative text analytics. The overall inter-coder reliability achieved (seven coders, 16 datasets, 80 codes) was Fleiss' kappa = 0.66 and for the actor codes (31 codes) Fleiss' kappa = 0.61. Given the high number of codes, coders and articles involved, we consider these kappa values show substantial agreement among coders (Landis and Koch 1,977).

Of the 3,405 actors found in the analyzed news items, 87 per cent (2,962) were decision or policy-makers in political or technocratic roles. Nearly a quarter of all actors found in the selected news items (24 per cent or 809 actors) were Troika institutions or their representatives (European Central Bank, the IMF and the Commission) Table 1 below presents a break-down of this figure.

40 per cent of the articles we analyzed (462 articles) presented the crisis and/or the specific crisis event in a neutral manner, i.e. without providing an evaluation of the reported actions or attributing responsibility to any actors. Furthermore, only 374 of the analyzed articles contained some type of analysis or commentary.

Table 1: Eurocrisis-related actors and frequency of their presence in online news media coverage

Actors present in news items covering Eurocrisis events	N	%	Notes
Activist	6	0	
Bank/Financial institution	902	27	Of which the IMF: 258; Central European Bank: 138
Citizen	38	1	
EU Institution	526	15	Of which the EU Parliament/MEPs: 89
Intellectual	95	3	
Journalist/News media	307	9	
NGO	1	0	
Political	1,530	45	Of which national governments/MPs/political parties: 556; National Prime Minister: 342
Total	3,405	100	

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