



# Democracy in Europe: Politicizing Champions for the European Public Sphere

Matteo Garavoglia

## Abstract

The democratic deficit in the relationship between European institutions and citizens stems from the lack of a pan-European public sphere where supranational policy-making and national politics can be reconciled. One of the key reasons for the absence of a pan-European public sphere is the extremely limited politicization of European policy-making in the eyes of European citizens in a context whereby Europe is perceived as an entity of “policy without politics”. The aim of this paper is to highlight how a politicization of the European policy-making process through a dialectical engagement of progressive and liberal forces with conservative and nationalistic ones can contribute to the development of a pan-European public sphere.

**Keywords:** *European Union / EU institutions / Decision-making / European Parliament (EP) / EU democratic legitimacy and accountability*

## Democracy in Europe: Politicizing Champions for the European Public Sphere

by Matteo Garavoglia\*

### 1. Introduction

The limited development of a European public sphere is a major reason for the limited extent to which European citizens can influence the legislative process and hold accountable European institutions for their policy-making. The aim of this paper is to highlight some of the reasons accounting for the persistent weakness of a pan-European public sphere<sup>1</sup> and to explore how processes of politicization of European policy-making might contribute to address such weakness. This essay will explore such issues through a number of steps. Firstly, Europe's "original sin" of policy without politics will be introduced. Secondly, the paper will explore the potential for contested politics in Europe. Thirdly, the essay will present Europe's "Progressive and Regressive Champions" potentially contributing to the politicization of the Union's political discourse. Fourthly, an overview of the literature on the subject of a European public sphere will be provided. Having done that, the essay will highlight what the essential characteristics of a thriving pan-European public sphere would have to be. Finally, the paper will suggest which key mechanisms might best contribute to the politicization and therefore strengthening of a European public sphere. Through the steps mentioned above, this essay will highlight how the emergence of nationalist and regressive political discourses successfully promoted by certain political forces might provide exceptional opportunities for the development of a stronger pan-European public sphere.

### 2. Europe's original sin: policy without politics

There is a gap between where the European legislative process increasingly takes place (the supranational dimension) and where citizens look for its existence (still at the national level). This is a problem because democratic legitimacy and accountability are not ensured: the political process lacks a clear "European dimension" through which citizens can influence policy-making. Why does Europe experience weak democratic legitimacy among the European citizenry? Because Europe is about policy without

---

Paper prepared for the Istituto affari internazionali (IAI), June 2011.

\* Matteo Garavoglia is PhD candidate at the Berlin Graduate School for Transnational Studies (BTS) and Research fellow at the Research College on the Transformative Power of Europe (KFG), Otto-Suhr-Institute for Political Science (OSI), Free University Berlin (FUB).

<sup>1</sup> Throughout this paper, the term European Public Sphere (EPS) is used as an all-encompassing concept for an arena where European socio-political actors interact in order to develop political discourse later to be translated into policy-making. This does not, however, imply the fact that the EPS is to be seen as a unitary entity. Rather, it is most appropriate to think of European Public Spheres (EPSs) in the plural so as to highlight the multifaceted dimension of the subject of analysis.

politics.<sup>2</sup> The very nature of EU decision-making makes it difficult to “politicize” the European legislative process and key provisions of the Lisbon Treaty could actually be strengthening even further this trend of “Eurodepoliticization”. As of 2014 and for what concerns the overwhelming majority of EU legislation, a Qualified Majority Voting (QMV) mechanism involving 55% of all member states representing 65% of EU citizens is to be needed for legislation to be adopted by the Council of Ministers. At the same time, the extension of the ordinary legislative procedure (the old co-decision procedure) to a raft of new policy areas greatly enhances the political weight of the European Parliament (EP) within the institutional triangle made up by the Commission, the Council of Ministers and the Parliament itself. Although the European Commission has the sole right of initiative in drafting legislation, the fact that two intrinsically different bodies such as the Council of Ministers and the EP have to approve its proposals for legislation to be adopted, ensures that a soporific consensual *modus operandi* emerges as the standard approach when seeking to adopt new policies. Both centre-left and centre-right governments in the Council of Ministers as well as the two largest political families within the Parliament (the European People’s Party and the Party of Socialists and Democrats), must seek political compromises at the centre of the ideological spectrum in order for legislation to be adopted. A consensual political *modus operandi* that discourages the politicization of contested European policies on a European dimension therefore is established as a means to achieving the objective of legislative adoption.

### 3. Europe today: the potential for contested politics

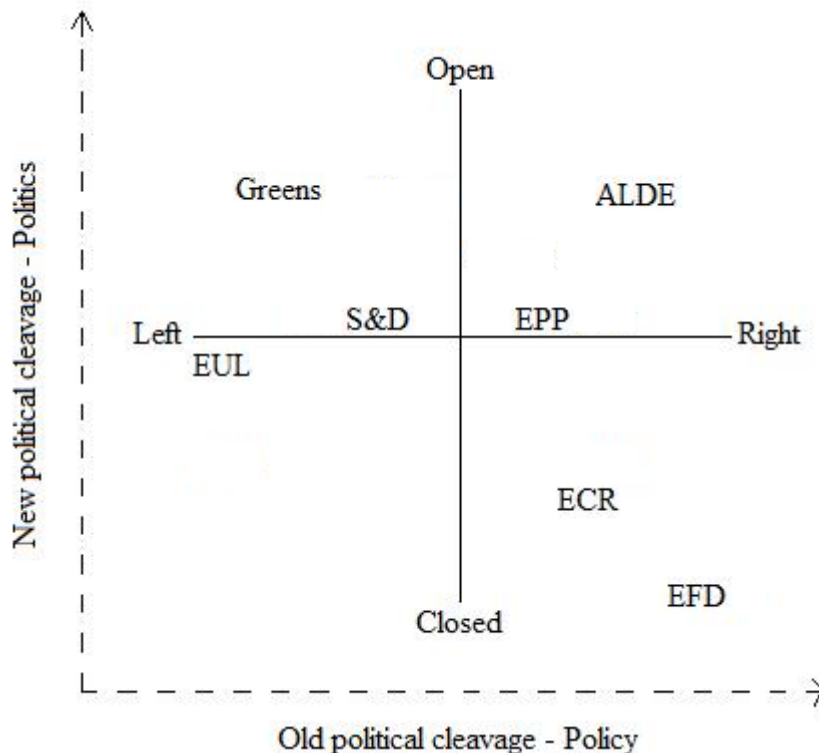
If both national governments within the Council of Ministers and the two largest political families within the EP are encouraged to foster a climate of soporific consensual politics of “policy without politics”, who, then, has the potential to provide “policy with politics” at the European level? The only socio-political actor that has so far successfully managed at times to inject “politics into policy” in Europe is the loose group made up by right-wing, xenophobic, nationalistic forces well to the right of the traditionally centrist and moderate European People’s Party (EPP). These forces are made up primarily by the British Conservatives, the Polish Law and Justice Party (PIS) and the Czech Civic Democratic Party (ODS) that have grouped into the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) and, even further to the right, the United Kingdom Independence Party and the Italian Northern League that have coalesced into the Europe of Freedom and Democracy Party (EFD). These forces have successfully managed to inject “politics into policy” into the European legislative process, recognizing that the traditional left vs. right and employee vs. employer economic dichotomy upon which European politics has been built upon for centuries has progressively given way to a new cleavage: one opposing open, liberal, progressive and cosmopolitan forces against nationalistic, xenophobic, conservative and parochial forces.<sup>3</sup> Having understood this historical transformation faster than other political

<sup>2</sup> Vivien A. Schmidt, *Democracy in Europe. The EU and National Politics*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006.

<sup>3</sup> See Hanspeter Kriesi *et al.*, “Globalization and the Transformation of the National Political Space: Six European Countries Compared”, in *European Journal of Political Research*, Vol. 45, No. 6 (October 2006), p. 921-956; Stein Rokkan, *Staat, Nation und Demokratie in Europa. Die Theorie Stein Rokkans aus Seinen Gesammelten Werken*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 2000 (Transl. *State Formation, Nation-building, and*

forces, these groups are increasingly the only actors that at times successfully manage to inject “politics into policies” by developing a political discourse that both gives voice and strengthens the socio-political constituencies that they represent. While traditional and well established mass parties are finding it increasingly difficult to define their political identities on the outdated x-axis of the traditional left vs. right political divide while at the same time also having to live in a Europe of policies without politics, the above-mentioned groups are successfully re-positioning themselves at one extreme of a newly emerging y-axis characterized by a value-based rather than an economic-based political conflict between progressive and reactionary forces. While economic conflict is certainly also value driven, changes in the economic structures of European post-industrial societies have made it likely for European citizenry to identify itself and shape its values along economic classes less common than in the past. Within this newly emerging open vs. closed political cleavage, these forces are bringing politics into policies by occupying one extreme of the y-axis through the articulation of their political discourse and vision while traditional mass parties keep promoting centrist policies along the increasingly outdated x-axis of economic cleavages without being able to bring politics into their policies into the by now much more dynamic y-axis of value-based politics.

**Figure 1.** Positioning of the EP's political parties along old and new cleavages



**Legend:** ALDE: Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe. ECR: European Conservatives and Reformists. EFD: Europe of Freedom and Democracy. EPP: European People's Party. EUL: European United Left. S&D: Socialist and Democrats.

*Mass Politics in Europe. The Theory of Stein Rokkan based on his collected works*, Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 1999).

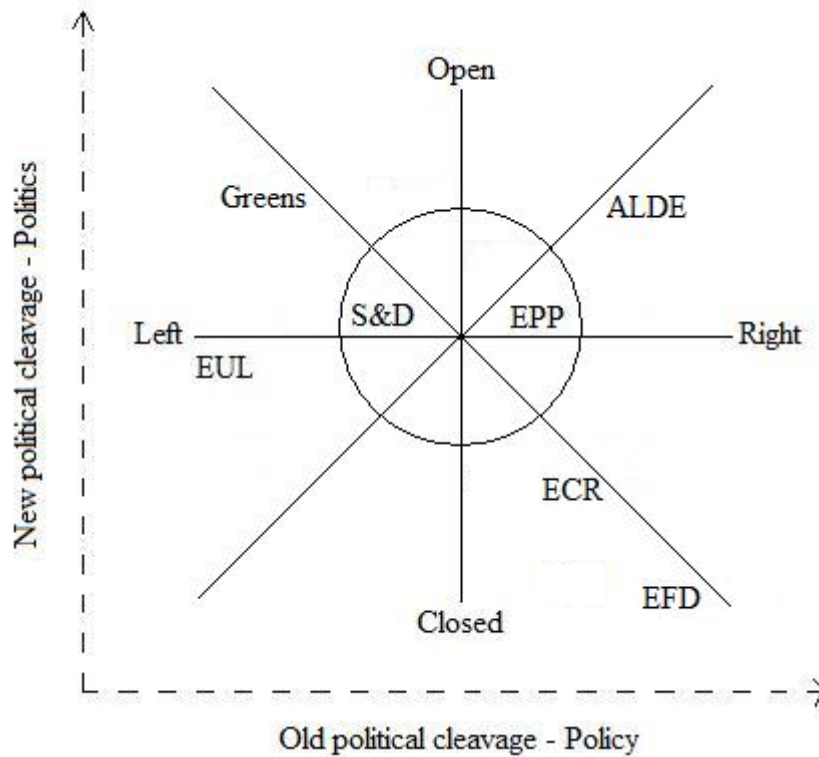
Politics is (also) about conflict and contestation. Political parties have traditionally played a key role in arguing for and against the drafting of specific policies and, by doing so they have inserted the “political” into the policy-making process. The insertion of “politics” into policy has given citizens the possibility to make up their mind and to take up a value based position as to whether or not to support a determined policy proposal. Political parties have therefore traditionally played the role of “champions of ideas”: two or more parties positioned at the two extremes of the x-axis had traditionally championed a certain position on a policy proposal and entered into conflict with each other by contesting the other party’s position. Today, within a European dimension characterized by a newly-emerging y-axis of open vs. closed politics along the GAL/TAN divide identified by Hooghe and Marks,<sup>4</sup> only one “champion of ideas” is to be found: the champion made up by the cluster of nationalistic, xenophobic and right-wing forces represented within the ECR and the EFD. It is these forces that currently have the almost-monopoly of the politicization of policy-making along the newly emerging y-axis of open vs. closed politics. While the ECR and the EFD proactively and effectively already tap in and amplify xenophobic and extreme right-wing values, liberal and progressive views are not yet adequately framed into coherent political narratives by those political forces that tend to represent them at the national level in a number of European member-states.

#### 4. Politicizing Europe: the “Champions” of European politics

For the contestation and politicization of policy on a European dimension to take place, an opposing champion that will effectively confront the political discourses promoted by the “Regressive Champions” (RCs) of the “closed” end of the y-axis of the new political spectrum has to emerge: enter the “Progressive Champions” (PCs) of European politics. The Progressive Champions of European politics are cosmopolitan, liberal and, of course, progressive. Because they have recognized the tectonic shifts that the European political landscape has witnessed over the last decade, the Progressive Champions of European politics tend to move more on the open vs. closed cleavage typical of the emerging y-axis of European politics rather than on the old-fashioned left vs. right one. Because they tend to move along the emerging y-axis of European political discourse rather than the old x-axis, the PCs can “take on” the RCs on their own y-axis of value-based politics rather than keep struggling like the EPP and the S&D on the old-fashioned economic cleavage-based x-axis. Through the confrontation with their political *alter ago* on the y-axis, the Progressive Champions can therefore, both against and together with the Regressive Champions, inject politics into policy within the European legislative process. Within this context and as the graph below clearly highlights, in today’s European political constellation, the Greens and the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) are the two political parties that are most likely to take up the role of Progressive Champions tasked with opposing the Regressive Champions.

---

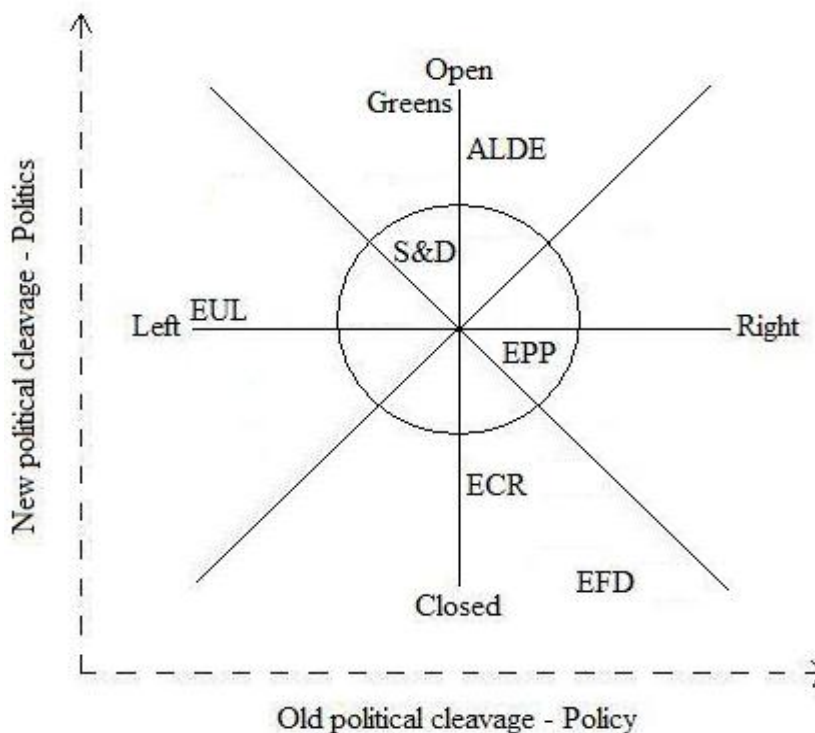
<sup>4</sup> Liesbet Hooghe, Gary Marks and Carole J. Wilson, “Does Left/Right Structure Party Positions on European Integration?”, in *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 8 (October 2002), p. 965-989, <http://www.unc.edu/~gwm/unc.edu/assets/doc/hooghe,%20marks,%20wilson%20-%20does%20leftright%20structure%20party%20positions%20on%20European%20integration.pdf>.

**Figure 2.** Policy without politics (inner circle) and policy with politics (y-axis)

While “Progressive Champions” are not yet succeeding in developing progressive pan-European discourses, “Regressive Champions” (RCs) concentrating within political families such as the ECR and the EFD are firmly establishing their control over the “closed” extreme of the newly emerging y-axis of value-based European politics and are already injecting a significant dose of political discourse within European policy-making. What is currently missing is a strong interlocutor that would provide a counter-discourse injecting conflicting politics into European policy-making from the “open” extreme of the y-axis. Because of their relative size within the EP, their non-mass nature as political parties and their ideological nature, ALDE and the Greens are the two parties that could most easily converge towards the open end of the emerging value-based y-axis of European politics, to assume the role of “Progressive Champions” and to become the *ideological alter-egos* of the European “Regressive Champions”. Indeed, were the Greens and the ALDE both to decide to move towards the centre of the x-axis so as to gain moderate votes, the Greens would probably feel compelled to move further up the y-axis in order to avoid being swallowed up by ALDE’s ideological shadow. Within this emerging context, the European United Left-Nordic Green Left (EUL/NGL) could possibly move up along the y-axis but it would find itself bound to stick to the extreme left of the x-axis in order not to give up its “proletarian and workers roots”. Finally, the heavyweight EPP and S&D could re-adjust their positioning by shifting themselves from the x-axis towards the y-axis only to a moderate extent by becoming “mediators” between Progressive and Regressive Champions, so as to better take advantage of the emerging value-based cleavage of the y-axis, while at the same time remaining appealing for an overwhelmingly moderate

electorate. The Progressive Champions (PCs) of European politics might therefore well develop strong political discourses in open opposition to the Regressive Champions (RCs) and thus inject some politics into the European policy-making process, but this will not necessarily translate into the *perceived politicization* of the European policy-making process itself. For citizens to be able to *perceive* European politics, the nature of the political discourse promoted by the PCs in opposition to the RCs has to fulfil conditions most likely to contribute to the development of a European public sphere: a *space of communication* for continued politicization.

**Figure 3.** EP political parties' re-alignment along the value-based y-axis



## 5. The European public sphere

The development of a pan-European public sphere could go a long way in contributing to address problems of limited democratic accountability by narrowing the gap between where the legislative process takes place (at the supranational level) and where citizens look for it (at the national level). Thanks to the existence of a pan-European public sphere, the quality of the legislative process could improve in that socio-political elites would be able to reap political gains on a European dimension and would not always have to seek to influence the legislative agenda in order to reap political gains at the national level. Additionally, democratic legitimacy and accountability would be strengthened by providing a “European dimension” to the political process: it would become easier for European citizens to influence the main orientations of the legislative process and to hold accountable the European socio-political elite for its policy-making. In this vein, the potentially “healing properties” of a European public sphere have

already been highlighted by Habermas: “the deficit in democracy can only be eliminated if a European public sphere comes into existence in which the democratic process is incorporated [...] the pan-European political public sphere is the solution to the problem of insufficient social integration in the processes of Europeanization”.<sup>5</sup> De Vreese highlighted this point in a number of occasions when he observed that “the legitimacy of a political system hinges on the consent of the governed”, that “a Europeanized public sphere is a precondition for democratic decision making in the EU”, that “a viable public sphere not only contributes to the legitimacy of a system but also to the accountability by showing political actors in action and providing a forum for evaluating their performance” and that “the argument for the importance of a viable European public sphere is augmented by the end of the ‘permissive consensus’”.<sup>6</sup>

Many definitions of what a public sphere might be have mushroomed over the years and Habermas’ original definition of the public sphere as “an arena for the perception, identification and treatment of problems affecting the whole society”<sup>7</sup> has in time been joined by a number of possible other understandings. Neidhardt conceptualizes “a system of communication where issues and opinions are being gathered (input), processed (throughput) and passed on (output)”.<sup>8</sup> Jankowski and Van Os talk of “an arena of communicative discourse to which citizens have access and may freely contribute to rational discussion of issues collectively deemed of societal importance”.<sup>9</sup> Eriksen defines the public sphere as “the place where civil society is linked to the power structure of the state”.<sup>10</sup> Brantner sees it as a “space for communication between political actors and citizen for discussions of matters of common interest”.<sup>11</sup> Regardless the nuances of each formulation, the underlying understanding shared by all these definitions envisages the public sphere as a space where socio-political actors interact in order to address issues relevant for the political community.

Three overarching macro-understandings of the public sphere have developed over the years: a “utopian European public sphere”, typical of a post-national dimension based

<sup>5</sup> Jürgen Habermas, “Warum Braucht Europa Eine Verfassung?“, in *Die Zeit*, 28 Juni 2001, p. 7, [http://www.zeit.de/2001/27/Warum\\_braucht\\_Europa\\_eine\\_Verfassung\\_](http://www.zeit.de/2001/27/Warum_braucht_Europa_eine_Verfassung_) (Transl. “Why Europe Needs a Constitution?”, in *New Left Review*, No. 11 (September-October 2001), p. 5-26, <http://www.newleftreview.org/A2343>).

<sup>6</sup> Claes H. de Vreese, “The EU as a Public Sphere”, in *Living Review of European Governance*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (2007), <http://livingreviews.org/lreg-2007-3>.

<sup>7</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchungen zu Einer Kategorie der Bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*, Neuwied, Hermann Luchterhand Verlag, 1962 (Transl. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere. An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1989).

<sup>8</sup> Friedhelm Neidhardt, “Öffentlichkeit, öffentliche Meinung, soziale Bewegungen”, in *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, Sonderheft 34 (1994), p. 7-41.

<sup>9</sup> Nicholas W. Jankowski and Renée Van Os, “The 2004 European Parliament Election and the Internet: Contribution to a European Public Sphere?”, paper presented at the *International Conference on Internet Communication in Intelligent Societies*, Hong Kong, 8-10 July 2004.

<sup>10</sup> Erik Oddvar Eriksen, “An Emerging European Public Sphere”, in *European Journal of Social Theory*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (August 2005), p. 341-363.

<sup>11</sup> Cornelia Brantner, Astrid Dietrich and Florian Saurwein, “Europeanization of National Public Spheres: Empirical Evidence from Austria”, paper prepared for presentation at the First European Communication Conference on *50 Years of Communication Research, Past and Future*, Amsterdam, 24-26 November 2005, [http://www.univie.ac.at/Publizistik/Europaprojekt/datei/pub/ECC\\_Brantner-Saurwein\\_Vienna.pdf](http://www.univie.ac.at/Publizistik/Europaprojekt/datei/pub/ECC_Brantner-Saurwein_Vienna.pdf).



on patriotic constitutionalism and a shared identity as envisaged by Habermas<sup>12</sup> and Grimm;<sup>13</sup> a discouragingly narrow “elitist public sphere”, identified by Klaus Eder<sup>14</sup> and a “fragmented and multifaceted public sphere”, based on the Europeanization of national public spheres as proposed by Gerhards.<sup>15</sup> In a European Union still firmly rooted in national identities and discourses, it is only the latter type of public sphere that can be seen as a historically viable option, which adequately takes into account the national socio-cultural contexts within which European citizens are bound to experience their political lives still for a long time to come. A number of observations can be made in this respect. Firstly, the Europeanization of national public spheres takes place when one can observe the evaluation of public events and discourses from a perspective that goes beyond national perspectives and interests as well as through a higher degree of coverage and reporting of European actors and themes on behalf of national mass media as highlighted by Gherards.<sup>16</sup> Secondly, an increase in such kind of reporting is often “engineered” through the use of “conflict frames” at the level of the national media and there is no apparent reason why such a technique would not give similar results when applied onto more “Europeanized” themes and actors. A point, this one, perfectly highlighted by Peter and de Vreese when they point out that mass media are still the most effective tool through which one can operationalize an analysis of the Europeanization of public discourses<sup>17</sup>. Thirdly, as work by Eder and Kantner<sup>18</sup> as well as by Trenz and Eder has demonstrated,<sup>19</sup> there is indeed an increasingly significant body of evidence highlighting the Europeanization of national broadsheets as proxies for the Europeanization of national discourses but, at the same time, very little evidence of an Europeanization of TV channels can be observed.<sup>20</sup> Fourthly, three different types of “European news” can be identified: national news on domestic events characterized by a “European rhetoric”, “Europeanized news” highlighting the impact of certain events on domestic issues and news that were “European” both in their nature

---

<sup>12</sup> Jürgen Habermas, “Warum Braucht Europa Eine Verfassung?“, *cit.*

<sup>13</sup> Dieter Grimm, “Treaty or Constitution? The Legal Basis of the European Union After Maastricht”, in Erik Oddvar Eriksen, John Erik Fossum and Agustín José Menéndez (eds), *Developing a Constitution for Europe*, London and New York, Routledge, 2004, p. 69-87.

<sup>14</sup> Klaus Eder, “Zur Transformation nationalstaatlicher Öffentlichkeit in Europa. Von der Sprachgemeinschaft zur issuespezifischen Kommunikationsgemeinschaft”, in *Berliner Journal für Soziologie*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (Juni 2002), p. 167-184.

<sup>15</sup> Jürgen Gerhards, “Westeuropäische Integration und die Schwierigkeiten der Entstehung einer europäischen Öffentlichkeit”, in *Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (April 1993), p. 96-110, <http://www.zfs-online.org/index.php/zfs/article/viewFile/2823/2360>.

<sup>16</sup> Jürgen Gerhards, “Europäisierung von Ökonomie und Politik und die Trägheit der Entstehung einer europäischen Öffentlichkeit”, in *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, Sonderheft 40 (2000) [Special issue on *Die Europäisierung nationaler Gesellschaften*, ed. by Maurizio Bach], p. 277-305.

<sup>17</sup> Jochen Peter and Claes H. de Vreese, “In Search of Europe. A Cross-National Comparative Study of the European Union in National Television News”, in *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (Fall 2004), p. 3-24, [http://www.claesdevreese.com/documents/Peter\\_&\\_de\\_Vreese\\_HJPP\\_2004.pdf](http://www.claesdevreese.com/documents/Peter_&_de_Vreese_HJPP_2004.pdf).

<sup>18</sup> Klaus Eder and Cathleen Kantner, “Interdiskursivität in der europäischen Öffentlichkeit”, in *Berliner Debatte Initial*, Vol. 13, No. 5 (2002), p. 79-88, <http://www.linksnet.de/de/artikel/18326>.

<sup>19</sup> Hans-Jörg Trenz and Klaus Eder, “The Democratizing Dynamics of a European Public Sphere Towards a Theory of Democratic Functionalism”, in *European Journal of Social Theory*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (February 2004), p. 5-25, <http://club.fom.ru/books/trenz.pdf>.

<sup>20</sup> Jochen Peter and Claes H. de Vreese, “In Search of Europe”, *cit.*

and in the discursive meaning through which they were dealt with.<sup>21</sup> Finally, a dichotomy between vertical Europeanization involving supranational actors addressing national ones or, vice-versa, horizontal Europeanization involving supranational actors addressing other supranational actors or national actors addressing other national actors in another member state can be observed.<sup>22</sup>

## 6. The characteristics of a pan-European public sphere

A mature and well-established pan-European public sphere would display a number of key characteristics, namely the existence of European institutional structures, of European socio-political actors and of European narratives. A European public sphere would have clearly identified institutions. These would for instance be a Parliament, a government and an established and recognized political *modus operandi*. A European public sphere would have clearly identified and active political actors: political parties, key “European” figures / individuals, NGOs and civil society groups, pan-European epistemic communities and “Europeanized” media outlets. A European public sphere would be characterized by narratives providing the “emotional glue” to emotionally bond the European political community and its peoples. European institutional structures, European socio-political actors and European narratives are today more or less present to different extents in the European Union. Indeed, albeit plagued by plenty of inefficiencies and weaknesses, institutional structures do exist on a European dimension. The European Parliament (EP), the Commission and the Council as well as the *acquis communautaire* are testimony of the existence of truly European institutional structures. For what concerns the existence of European socio-political actors, the situation is rather confused. European political parties sitting in the European Parliament are European only in name and too often still think in national terms and draw their political agendas from national capitals. Pan-European media outlets such as *European Voice* and *Euronews* do exist but are either enjoyed or known only by a tiny percentage of European citizens. No “European grand figures” exist yet in the eyes of the overwhelming majority of citizens, while civil society groups and NGOs display greatly different degrees of “Europeanization”. Epistemic communities might well be “European” in their thinking and functioning, but are either very limited in absolute numbers or have already moved beyond a European dimension onto a global one. Indeed, examples of such post-national epistemic communities are think tanks and research groups working transnationally on European policy issues or informal political and lobbying groups attempting to influence the legislative process. Finally, pan-European narratives are missing. There is no pan-European “story” that Europeans can agree on for what concerns either a shared understanding of what Europe is about or what the Union should be doing. Historically, European national narratives have often been developed in open contrast against an “other” embodied but none less than a neighbouring European state. Europeans share a long common history but a very short commonly understood history.

<sup>21</sup> Hans-Jörg Trenz, “Media Coverage on European Governance Exploring the European Public Sphere in National Quality Newspapers”, in *European Journal of Communication*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (August 2004), p. 291-319.

<sup>22</sup> Ruud Koopmans and Jessica Erbe, “Towards a European Public Sphere? Vertical and Horizontal Dimensions of Europeanised Political Communication”, in *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (June 2004), p. 97-118.

## 7. Which mechanisms would best promote a European public sphere?

It is beyond the scope of this paper to investigate in detail which mechanisms would best contribute to the development of a pan-European public sphere. However, there are a number of observations that can be made that could establish the basic theoretical framework upon which concrete political actions could be undertaken. Indeed, in order to promote the strengthening of an embryonic European public sphere, the “injection” of politics into policy on behalf of the PCs and RCs has to take place in such a way so as to promote conditions most favourable to the development of a European public sphere itself. A significant body of research over the last fifteen years concerns the set of conditions under which a pan-European public sphere could emerge. First of all, policy areas to be addressed would have to be either under exclusive competence of the Union (monetary policy, trade policy, competition rules for the common market)<sup>23</sup> or to be heavily Europeanized (EU institutional set up / Lisbon Treaty, agriculture, internal market, JHA, environment).<sup>24</sup> Secondly, national media would have to report on European issues in that national newspapers (including their internet outlets) and TV stations are still the channels through which the overwhelming majority of European citizens inform themselves.<sup>25</sup> Thirdly, “high politics” and political struggle would have to take place: evidence suggests that when high politics (a meeting of the European Council), a big scandal (mad cow disease) or a specific highly contentious issue (the “Haider debate”) take place, then the debate tends to become more “Europeanized”.<sup>26</sup> Fourthly, the involved member state should display an overall high degree of European integration in that long-term member states with a very high degree of integration and an overall integrationist or federalist agenda have a much more Europeanized public sphere than more recent member states that are integrated in less policy areas or have an intergovernmentalist attitude to the process of European integration.<sup>27</sup> Fifthly, elite strategic articulations and constellations should be favourable: an issue tends to become “Europeanized” when a national executive (which is much more “reported upon” by national media than any other socio-political actor)<sup>28</sup> has a vested interest to “Europeanize” it<sup>29</sup>. Finally, an issue would have to be successfully “adapted” in order to “resonate” within a national context in that an issue has to “resonate” and to be “understandable” in the socio-cultural context and dominant value system of the member state under investigation<sup>30</sup>. In a context where the politicization of policy-making promoted by the Progressive and Regressive Champions

<sup>23</sup> Ruud Koopmans and Jessica Erbe, “Towards a European Public Sphere?”, *cit.*

<sup>24</sup> Thomas Risse, *A Community of Europeans? Transnational Identities and Public Spheres*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2010.

<sup>25</sup> Jürgen Gerhards, “Westeuropäische Integration und die Schwierigkeiten der Entstehung einer europäischen Öffentlichkeit”, *cit.*

<sup>26</sup> Jochen Peter and Claes H. de Vreese, “In Search of Europe”, *cit.*

<sup>27</sup> Barbara Pfetsch, Silke Adam and Barbara Eschner, “The Contribution of the Press to Europeanization of Public Debates. A Comparative Study of Issue Salience and Conflict Lines of European Integration”, in *Journalism*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (August 2008), p. 465-490.

<sup>28</sup> Silke Adam, “Domestic Adaptations of Europe: a Comparative Study of the Debates on EU Enlargement and a Common Constitution in the German and French Quality Press”, in *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (Winter 2007), p. 409-433.

<sup>29</sup> Ruud Koopmans and Jessica Erbe, “Towards a European Public Sphere?”, *cit.*

<sup>30</sup> Thomas Risse, Maria Green Cowles and James Caporaso, “Europeanization and Domestic Change: Introduction”, in Maria Green Cowles, James A. Caporaso and Thomas Risse (eds), *Transforming Europe. Europeanization and Domestic Change*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2001, p. 1-20.

were to display these characteristics, the politicization of the European legislative process would most likely significantly contribute to the development of a European public sphere itself.

## 8. Conclusion

This paper investigated the reasons for the problem presented by the persistent weakness of a pan-European public sphere and how the politicization of European policy-making might contribute to address it. This essay aimed to highlight how the problem of limited democratic accountability and legitimacy of the European project is the direct result of a persistent lack of a European public sphere and how the weakness of a European public sphere stems from the non-politicization of the European legislative process. The paper went on to argue that, within the rapidly-changing nature of political cleavages in Europe, an opportunity for politicization of European policy-making has emerged thanks to the discourses promoted by a set of regressive political forces. If these forces were to be confronted by a set of open and progressive forces, a discursive interaction of political contestation contributing to the strengthening of a European public sphere would ensue.

***Updated: 13 June 2011***

---

## References

Silke Adam, "Domestic Adaptations of Europe: a Comparative Study of the Debates on EU Enlargement and a Common Constitution in the German and French Quality Press", in *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (Winter 2007), p. 409-433.

Cornelia Brantner, Astrid Dietrich and Florian Saurwein, "Europeanization of National Public Spheres: Empirical Evidence from Austria", paper prepared for presentation at the First European Communication Conference on *50 Years of Communication Research, Past and Future*, Amsterdam, 24-26 November 2005, [http://www.univie.ac.at/Publizistik/Europaprojekt/datei/pub/ECC\\_Brantner-Saurwein\\_Vienna.pdf](http://www.univie.ac.at/Publizistik/Europaprojekt/datei/pub/ECC_Brantner-Saurwein_Vienna.pdf).

Klaus Eder, "Zur Transformation nationalstaatlicher Öffentlichkeit in Europa. Von der Sprachgemeinschaft zur issuespezifischen Kommunikationsgemeinschaft", in *Berliner Journal für Soziologie*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (Juni 2002), p. 167-184.

Klaus Eder and Cathleen Kantner, "Interdiskursivität in der europäischen Öffentlichkeit", in *Berliner Debatte Initial*, Vol. 13, No. 5 (2002), p. 79-88, <http://www.linksnet.de/de/artikel/18326>.

Erik Oddvar Eriksen, "An Emerging European Public Sphere", in *European Journal of Social Theory*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (August 2005), p. 341-363.

Jürgen Gerhards, "Europäisierung von Ökonomie und Politik und die Trägheit der Entstehung einer europäischen Öffentlichkeit", in *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, Sonderheft 40 (2000) [Special issue on *Die Europäisierung nationaler Gesellschaften*, ed. by Maurizio Bach], p. 277-305.

Jürgen Gerhards, "Westeuropäische Integration und die Schwierigkeiten der Entstehung einer europäischen Öffentlichkeit", in *Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (April 1993), p. 96-110, <http://www.zfs-online.org/index.php/zfs/article/viewFile/2823/2360>.

Dieter Grimm, "Treaty or Constitution? The Legal Basis of the European Union After Maastricht", in Erik Oddvar Eriksen, John Erik Fossum and Agustín José Menéndez (eds), *Developing a Constitution for Europe*, London and New York, Routledge, 2004, p. 69-87.

Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchungen zu Einer Kategorie der Bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*, Neuwied, Hermann Luchterhand Verlag, 1962 (Transl. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere. An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1989).

Jürgen Habermas, "Warum Braucht Europa Eine Verfassung?", in *Die Zeit*, 28 Juni 2001, p. 7, [http://www.zeit.de/2001/27/Warum\\_braucht\\_Europa\\_eine\\_Verfassung\\_](http://www.zeit.de/2001/27/Warum_braucht_Europa_eine_Verfassung_)

(Transl. "Why Europe Needs a Constitution?", in *New Left Review*, No. 11 (September-October 2001), p. 5-26, <http://www.newleftreview.org/A2343>).

Liesbet Hooghe, Gary Marks and Carole J. Wilson, "Does Left/Right Structure Party Positions on European Integration?", in *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 8 (October 2002), p. 965-989, [http://www.unc.edu/~gwm/~/assets/doc/hoghe,%20marks,%20wilson%20-%20does%20left%20right%20structure%20party%20positions%20on%20European%20inte-gration.pdf](http://www.unc.edu/~gwm/~/assets/doc/hoghe,%20marks,%20wilson%20-%20does%20left%20right%20structure%20party%20positions%20on%20European%20integration.pdf).

Nicholas W. Jankowski and Renée Van Os, "The 2004 European Parliament Election and the Internet: Contribution to a European Public Sphere?", paper presented at the *International Conference on Internet Communication in Intelligent Societies*, Hong Kong, 8-10 July 2004.

Ruud Koopmans and Jessica Erbe, "Towards a European Public Sphere? Vertical and Horizontal Dimensions of Europeanised Political Communication", in *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (June 2004), p. 97-118.

Hanspeter Kriesi et al., "Globalization and the Transformation of the National Political Space: Six European Countries Compared", in *European Journal of Political Research*, Vol. 45, No. 6 (October 2006), p. 921-956.

Friedhelm Neidhardt, "Öffentlichkeit, öffentliche Meinung, soziale Bewegungen", in *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, Sonderheft 34 (1994), p. 7-41.

Jochen Peter and Claes H. de Vreese, "In Search of Europe. A Cross-National Comparative Study of the European Union in National Television News", in *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (Fall 2004), p. 3-24, [http://www.claesdevreese.com/documents/Peter\\_&\\_de\\_Vreese\\_HJPP\\_2004.pdf](http://www.claesdevreese.com/documents/Peter_&_de_Vreese_HJPP_2004.pdf).

Barbara Pfetsch, Silke Adam and Barbara Eschner, "The Contribution of the Press to Europeanization of Public Debates. A Comparative Study of Issue Salience and Conflict Lines of European Integration", in *Journalism*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (August 2008), p. 465-490.

Thomas Risse, *A Community of Europeans? Transnational Identities and Public Spheres*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2010.

Thomas Risse, Maria Green Cowles and James Caporaso, "Europeanization and Domestic Change: Introduction", in Maria Green Cowles, James A. Caporaso and Thomas Risse (eds), *Transforming Europe. Europeanization and Domestic Change*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2001, p. 1-20.

Stein Rokkan, *Staat, Nation und Demokratie in Europa. Die Theorie Stein Rokkans aus Seinen Gesammelten Werken*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 2000 (Transl. *State Formation, Nation-building, and Mass Politics in Europe. The Theory of Stein Rokkan based on his collected works*, Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 1999).

Vivien A. Schmidt, *Democracy in Europe. The EU and National Politics*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006.

Hans-Jörg Trenz, "Media Coverage on European Governance Exploring the European Public Sphere in National Quality Newspapers", in *European Journal of Communication*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (August 2004), p. 291-319.

Hans-Jörg Trenz and Klaus Eder, "The Democratizing Dynamics of a European Public Sphere Towards a Theory of Democratic Functionalism", in *European Journal of Social Theory*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (February 2004), p. 5-25, <http://club.fom.ru/books/trenz.pdf>.

Claes H. de Vreese, "The EU as a Public Sphere", in *Living Review of European Governance*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (2007), <http://livingreviews.org/lreg-2007-3>.



**Latest IAI Working Papers**

- 11 | 13 A. Marrone, Afghanistan in Transition: The Security Context Post-Bin Laden
- 11 | 12 N. Pirozzi and N. Ronzitti, The European Union and the Reform of the UN Security Council: Toward a New Regionalism?
- 11 | 11 V.V. Miranda, Striking a Balance Between Norms and Interests in Italian Foreign Policy: The Balkans and Libya
- 11 | 10 S. Silvestri, A European Strategy for Democracy, Development and Security for the Mediterranean
- 11 | 09 R. Alcaro, Opting for Second Best in Libya?
- 11 | 08 M. Comelli, Italy's Love Affair with the EU: Between Continuity and Change
- 11 | 07 D. Cristiani and R. Fabiani, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM): Implications for Algeria's Regional and International Relations
- 11 | 06 N. Tocci and J.-P. Cassarino, Rethinking the EU's Mediterranean Policies Post-1/11
- 11 | 05 M. Fiore, How Israel Can Turn the Unrest in the Middle East into an Opportunity for Peacemaking
- 11 | 04 J.-P. Cassarino, Confidence-building in Tunisia after the Popular Uprising: Strategies and Dilemmas of the Interim Government
- 11 | 03 D. Pioppi, Is There an Islamist Alternative in Egypt?
- 11 | 02 R. Ayadi, S. Colombo, M.C. Paciello and N. Tocci, The Tunisian Revolution: An Opportunity for Democratic Transition

**The Institute**

The Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), founded by Altiero Spinelli in 1965, does research in the fields of foreign policy, political economy and international security. A non-profit organisation, the IAI aims to further and disseminate knowledge through research studies, conferences and publications. To that end, it cooperates with other research institutes, universities and foundations in Italy and abroad and is a member of various international networks. More specifically, the main research sectors are: European institutions and policies; Italian foreign policy; trends in the global economy and internationalisation processes in Italy; the Mediterranean and the Middle East; defence economy and policy; and transatlantic relations. The IAI publishes an English-language quarterly (The International Spectator), an online webzine (AffariInternazionali), two series of research papers (IAI Quaderni and IAI Research Papers) and an Italian foreign policy yearbook (La politica estera dell'Italia).

**Istituto Affari Internazionali**  
Via Angelo Brunetti, 9 00186 Roma  
Tel.: +39/06/3224360 Fax: + 39/06/3224363  
E-mail: [iai@iai.it](mailto:iai@iai.it) - website: <http://www.iai.it>  
Send orders to: [iai\\_library@iai.it](mailto:iai_library@iai.it)