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The European Public Sphere

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The emergence of a European public sphere in the 1950s, with the beginnings of European integration, is under intensive discussion among the general public as well as among experts. There are two extreme positions taken on this issue. On the one hand, there is the argument that an international network of communication has existed in Europe since the Middle Ages - in the public domain of universities and scholars, the courts, the churches and cloisters, the parliaments, and the repositories of Enlightenment thought. Indeed, one can discern a long history of public spheres emerging and then weakening in this respect. One should add that these geographically-large public spheres existed also in the Arab world, in India, and in East Asia. Reducing the history of public spheres to national public spheres is, in this view, an unrealistic idea held by contemporary historians and social scientists.

On the other hand, one finds social scientists and contemporary historians arguing that the national public sphere is the only realistic possibility, since it is not possible for an international European public sphere to emerge in the 20th and 21st centuries. This is because of the lack of a common language, common media, a common historical experience, and a *demos*. In this view, the European public sphere is an illusion which can even be dangerous, since giving up the well-established and effective national public spheres in exchange for a weak and unpredictable European public sphere might result in a fatal loss for democracy. These two contrasting positions are provocative and stimulating for research – and also for the general debate on the emergence of a European public sphere.

In this lecture I shall first discuss, briefly, the theoretical approach. I shall then give a short review of the research. Finally, I shall try to answer the question as to whether a European public sphere has emerged in recent decades.

Comments on the theory of the public sphere

The most important theory of the public sphere was published by Jürgen Habermas in the early 1960s (Habermas 1962). I shall concentrate on this theory and not discuss other concepts (cf. Gerhards/ Neidhardt 1991; Münkler 1995). Habermas defined the public sphere as the deliberation by free citizens on equal terms on matters of public interest - verbal deliberation in cafés or associations, and written deliberation in journals and books. Free and unlimited access to such deliberation is crucial. Habermas made a clear distinction between this public sphere of the citizenry and the representative public sphere of individual power-holders. In his view, the glorious era of the public sphere of citizens was the Enlightenment of the 18th century. In the Middle Ages and in the early modern period, fully-fledged public spheres did not emerge. In the 19th and 20th centuries, the public sphere declined because the owners of the media and the political power-holders controlled, to a large extent, the media and the public sphere. One should not forget that Habermas wrote his book only about fifteen years after the end of the Nazi regime, in a period in which the memory of Nazi propaganda was still strong. It was also the period in which large and powerful media corporations emerged and in which governments in Western Europe tried hard to get control of the new public television.

Habermas' theory had a strong impact. Still today, fifty years later, it is an inevitable widely-discussed concept. Concepts usually have a much shorter life-expectancy. Habermas' concept has been successful for various reasons. It looks at democracy not only in terms of the functioning of institutions and in terms of good governance, but also in terms of citizens as actors rather than as passive clients. In addition, the concept does not only consider the public sphere in a spatial sense. The term 'public sphere' is a bad translation of the German term *Öffentlichkeit*. Habermas deliberately chose a more abstract notion which allows us to talk not only about the micro level (encounters, rallies, demonstrations, public lectures and assemblies), but also about the public sphere in a more abstract sense (an imagined trans-local public sphere which is crucial for modern democracies). With his scepticism about the 19th and 20th centuries, Habermas

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also laid the foundations for a careful and critical investigation of the history of the public sphere. It is true that he revised his scepticism in the second edition in the early 1990s, after the experience of the social movements of the 1960s and '70s and their usage of the media. Yet he did not totally give up his mistrust of modern media (Habermas 1993).

The concept also has its limitations. I will mention five. First, it has often been argued that a plurality of public spaces exists in each society rather than a single public space as Habermas assumed: ethnic as well as indigenous public spheres, female as well as male, proletarian as well as middle class - also functional, economic, scientific and ecclesiastical public spheres in addition to the political one.

Secondly, it has often been said that Habermas' concept is too normative. It does not sufficiently take into account the fact that public spheres are used not only by democratic-minded citizens, but also by anti-democratic citizens and movements. At the end of the Weimar Republic, only about thirty years before Habermas' book, the Nazi movement succeeded in conquering the public sphere; not only the streets but also the more abstract *Öffentlichkeitt* in a civil-war situation in Germany.

Thirdly, the distinction between the public sphere of the citizenry and the representative sphere of the monarch and power-holders is artificial if applied to the 19th and 20th centuries. In fact, these spheres are intertwined. Public deliberations are often purposefully influenced by power-holders and might even be arranged by them. At the same time, power is not fully separated from the public sphere of the citizenry, but is influenced, threatened, overthrown or supported by it. Deliberating citizens are often involved in power-holding. A strict separation between the public sphere of citizens and the representative sphere describes a pre-democratic situation. It works for the era of the Enlightenment in the face of absolute monarchies rather than for modern democracies.

Fourthly, many historians of the 19th and 20th centuries believe that Habermas was too sceptical as far as this period is concerned. To be sure, the media were used by 20th-century dictatorships to control the public sphere and to destroy independent deliberation on matters of public interest. But in 19th and 20th century democracies, journalists and intellectuals succeeded in remaining independent. Social movements and groups of citizens could successfully launch statements in the media. Public spheres during the Enlightenment period are not distinctly superior.

The final limitation I will mention is that Habermas does not reflect or envisage the *transnational* public sphere. His concept covers only the national and local space. This is astonishing, because not only the international debate over the Habermas concept but also that over the famous statement he made with Dérida on European values are major indicators of the rise of a transnational European public sphere. If one tries to find transnational European intellectuals, Habermas is one of the few recent examples besides Bourdieu, Geremek, Ecco and Giddens. He helped to create a European public sphere, but his concept covered only national and local public spheres. Later I shall come to a further limitation.

The actual state of empirical research and the historians

In spite of Habermas' scepticism towards the contemporary public sphere, research on the emergence of a European public sphere has become intense in recent years. Research projects are currently underway in Florence, Paris, Vienna, Zurich, Amsterdam, Bremen, Gießen and Berlin, and researchers from many other countries have participated in the research groups. These projects concentrate largely on the media - and mainly on the print media rather than on television or radio. The research consists primarily of quantitative and qualitative investigations of European themes in major national newspapers in Western Europe. It does not analyse the few transnational media such as Arte, Euronews, Eurosports, Eurovision, or the Financial Times because these media are not seen as being important enough to justify the conclusion that a European-wide public sphere has emerged. The research concentrates on national media, resting on the fundamental assumption that if there is any European public sphere, it emerges in the form of interconnected national media rather than separate transnational European media. It also concentrates on the 1990s and the early 21st century. Only a few projects in Florence, Bremen, Vienna and Berlin are going further back in time (Schulz-Forberg/ Stråt 2008/ Jones 2007; Peters 2005; Rößner 2007).

The results of this research are ambivalent. To summarize this highly-differentiated and complicated field, two contradictory conclusions have been drawn from these investigations. On the one hand, researchers argue that there are no indicators in the media showing a rising interest in European themes. Articles about Europe have not increased substantially. Fluctuations can be observed, but there are no clear trends towards more articles about Europe in the media. Other researchers such as Klaus Eder, Thomas Risse, Marianne van de Steeg and Bo Stråt argue that the meaning of articles on Europe has changed substantially. They have become more Europeanized in that they are written from a European perspective, appear simultaneously with, and are given the same importance as, articles with a national perspective (Eder/ Kantner 2000; Kaelble 2002; Risse 2002; Risse, in: Herrmann/ Risse/ Brewer 2004; Risse in: Preuß/ Franzius 2004; Steeg 2002; Schulz-Forberg/ Stråt 2008; Trenz/ Eder 2004; Trenz 2005). Ruud Koopmans argues that a transnational European communication exists in the discussion of specific issues related to decisions made by the European Union (Klein/ Koopmans et al. 2003).

Two historians, Jörg Requate and Martin Schulze Wessel, consider that a European space of communication existed in the 19th and 20th centuries in which marginal groups appealed to a fictional European public authority when they could not appeal effectively to a national government (Requate/ Schulze-Wessel 2002). In summing up this ambivalent research, Bo Stråt and Hagen Schulz-Forberg from the European University Institute, in a book on the role of the European public sphere in the history of various European crises (forthcoming), argue that an unfortunate separation exists between the European public sphere and the decision-making of the European Union (Schulz-Forberg/ Stråt 2008). The various crises of the European Union have not arisen as consequences of criticism from the European public sphere in the sense of the *Kritik*

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und Krise by Koselleck, but of intergovernmental crises of the European political elite driven by national interests (Koselleck 1985).

However, besides these studies which focus upon the question of the rise of a European public sphere, there is another type of research which focuses much less on this question but which should not be totally ignored. It primarily covers four fields: (1) the history of the debates on Europe among intellectuals, politicians, and writers which have been frequently investigated by historians (e.g. Borodziej/ Duchhardt/ Morawiec/ Romsics 2005; Chabod 1995; Frank 1998; Frevert 2003; Girault 1993; Pagden 2002; du Réau 1996; Rößner 2007; Schmale 2003; Swedberg 1994; Wilson/ van der Dussen/ Boer 1995); (2) the history of the representation of Europe and the 'other' in the eyes of experts such as historians, geographers, lawyers and anthropologists - with various projects covering this issue (e.g. Rößner 2007; Duchhardt…; Schröder 2005); (3) the more recent research on the history of the visual and symbolic representation of Europe in films, caricatures, television, and European *lieux de mémoire*. Luisa Passerini and Etienne François are known historians working in this field (e.g. François 2006; François 2007; Frank/ Kaelble/ Passerini 2008; Jones 2007; Passerini 1999; Sorlin 1994); (4) recent research on the European cultural sphere - the international cultural festivals which emerged after 1945, and the cultural policy of the European Union in the 1950s and again since the '80s (e.g. Sticht 2000; Lévy, in: Frank/ Kaelble/ Passerini 2008). This is the topic of a research group in Paris. There is much less of a common focussed debate in these fields of research, which also do not usually ask the question concerning the rise of a European public sphere. Hence, it is difficult to summarize them in a few words for the purposes of this lecture, but since these might be the fields in which highly-innovative conclusions are drawn, I shall include them in my argument.

Is a European public sphere emerging?

In the second part of this lecture I try to present the argument for the rise of a European public sphere since 1945. I shall not present it as a narrative but as a plea. For this reason, I must first make an important observation. A narrative would show much more clearly that the rise of a European public sphere has not been a continuous development. Quite the opposite - the European public sphere has emerged intermittently. In the late 1940s and '50s, it seemed as if a European public sphere had emerged in terms of debates, symbols and *lieux de mémoire*. During the Cold War, the indicators of a European public sphere weakened. After a new but very short spring in the early 1970s, the European public sphere was not reinforced again until the 1980s. This does not only mean that the rise of the European public sphere is not continuous. A major lesson from this short history is that it can always subside again. The rise of the European public sphere is not a teleological process with an inbuilt destiny of continuity.

A second remark on the meaning of the European public sphere: its reinforcement does not necessarily coincide with more intensive European integration. In recent years quite the opposite has taken place. We have had a vivid national and international debate on Europe, but the subject was a profound crisis of European integration. A century-old link emerged once more. The debate over Europe became more intensive, the deeper 'the crisis of Europe' became. How we interpret the European public sphere depends very much on the outcome of this crisis. If a new solution is found, we shall be able to

talk of a productive rise in the European public sphere. If the crisis is not solved and the European Union is substantially weakened, we might then look at the rise of a European public sphere as an indicator of the decline of European integration.

A third remark: the European public space that existed until the fall of the Berlin Wall was not simply a West European public space. Only the media were Western, since free access to the media in Eastern Europe did not exist. The participants in the public debates in Western Europe were also frequently Europeans from the eastern part of the continent. For dissidents it was crucial to have access to West European media, not only because intellectuals cannot exist without a public sphere, but also because presentation in the Western public sphere could protect against oppression by the regime. Central European intellectuals played an important role in the European debate on Central European issues, and also on civil society in general during the 1980s. These debates, which were not simply Polish or Hungarian but rather transnational, were part of a European public space. In addition, one might speak of a second transnational European public sphere - one without free access and free deliberation, highly-centralised and rigidly-controlled, and without pluralism, i.e. the Communist public sphere. This was not a purely East European public sphere as it had also some pillars in the Communist parties in Western Europe.

I turn now to the question of the rise of the European public sphere. I present my argument in three steps: I shall cover, first, the peculiarities of the European public sphere in comparison with the national public sphere; then the indicators of the rise of a European public sphere; and finally the impact of the European public sphere on European politics.

Peculiarities of the European public sphere

The peculiarities of the European public sphere should be taken into account, since the international European public sphere is different from national public spheres in Europe. We usually compare the European public sphere implicitly and instinctively with national public spheres, and – one should add - with an idealised national public sphere in which a single language is spoken, media are centralised on the national level, and the public sphere is based on a common interpretation of history, common symbols, and common *lieux de mémoire*. The European public sphere would be better compared with other transnational public spheres such as the Arab, Latin American or African public spheres. This comparison, however, is never made.

Four peculiarities of the history of the European public sphere in comparison with national public spheres are important.

First, the European public sphere is a *composite* public sphere which consists, to a large degree, of interconnected national public spheres. The increasing number of interconnections between the national public spheres was crucial for the rise of the European public sphere. The history of the European public sphere is largely the history of transfers and links between national spheres.

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Much less international communication has occurred in Europe through European-wide media such as European newspapers, journals, radio stations, TV stations, and centralised mass meetings. The diffusion of concepts, meanings, and news in Europe has proceeded usually without and beyond such centralised European media. Two historical examples are relevant. First, the Enlightenment was a European process, but it occurred without the participation of a single European journal, a major European salon, or any outstanding European intellectual. Secondly, and perhaps paradoxically, the European nationalisms, in spite of their search for identifying national profiles, were often very similar in the use of symbols, myths, rituals, and written histories. But they were also not diffused by a single central European agency for nationalism. The diffusion of the idea of Europe also occurred without the involvement of any central European journal, meeting or organisation. An unstructured, uninstitutionalised type of international public sphere was supported by numerous intellectuals, scientists, politicians and civil servants, as well as by translators of languages and cultures.

One should not forget that these interconnections between the various national public spheres, which formed the backbone of the European public sphere, did not have the same meaning for each national public sphere in Europe. The history of a European public sphere is also a history of hierarchical interconnections. Central and highly-influential national public spheres existed alongside peripheral public spheres which had only a very limited influence beyond national borders.

For historians, the uninstitutionalised, composite European public sphere is difficult to investigate since there is no single archive to be visited, but only many leads to be followed in many languages. Historians are used to investigating these diffusions bilaterally rather than multilaterally and often trace the cultural walls between two countries rather than the signs of a European public sphere. Doing multilateral research on the European public sphere is a major challenge.

Secondly, the European public sphere has always been *multilingual*. It was not built on one language like most national public spheres. It was based on a multitude of national mother tongues and several international languages. This linguistic multitude, however, has not been an obstacle as such to the functioning of a public sphere. Various democracies in the world work well with two or more languages. This is the case of Switzerland, Finland, India, Canada, and also, to a growing degree, Spain and the United States.

No doubt, the rise of the European public sphere since the 1950s would not have occurred without a cultural revolution in Europe during the second half of the 20th century - pertaining to the increase in knowledge of foreign languages. Around the middle of the 20th century, only a small minority of Europeans spoke foreign languages; perhaps ten percent or less. At the turn of the 21st century, about half of all Europeans spoke a foreign language, and about two-thirds of young Europeans. Three-quarters of

all Europeans saw English as a useful international language, while for a third it was French, only a quarter German, and a sixth Spanish (Eurobarometer No.52. 2000, p.52ff.). The knowledge of one or two common foreign languages matters for the European public sphere. This sphere could only emerge in a situation where a substantial proportion of Europeans, not only the elite, spoke a common international foreign language.

It is important, therefore, to discern the two different ways in which the European Union became multilingual. On the one hand, the Union has kept all national languages as official languages in which the juridical and official texts of the European Union are published. It is impossible to give up this policy of multilingualism. European law has to be published in each European language because if the EU used only English or French, there would be no identification by the citizenry with it. On the other hand, the Union has gradually accepted having, *de facto*, two working languages for parliamentarians, European civil servants, national politicians, and the experts and representatives of civil society who are active in Brussels. These languages are English and French, and far less German or Spanish. It has become clear that one has to express oneself in one of these two international languages, otherwise one faces the risk of not being heard at the level of the European Union. The need to speak one of these international languages would have been an enormous obstacle for the rise of a European public sphere around 1950, but much less so around 2000.

A third particularity: the European public sphere has remained *elitist*. It is usually confined to a small group of politicians, intellectuals, experts, businessmen, and trade-union leaders. It is not unpopular, not a closed shop, not purposefully restricted to an elite, but it also does not mobilise large parts of the European populace. In a way, this is similar to the early beginnings of the national movements in the early 19th century.

The European public sphere is peculiar in a fourth sense. For a long time it was *not confronted with a European centre of power* which could be advised, encouraged, criticised, or overthrown. As a consequence, transnational communication in Europe was not strongly related to politics. A tradition of this kind of communication emerged in Europe about culture, society, international law, religion and economics. For lack of a European power centre, the public debate was often rather utopian, oriented towards a remote future or towards a nostalgic interpretation of the past. In the 19th century and in the first half of the 20th century, such a European power centre existed only for a few years during the military occupation of Europe in, first, the Napoleonic era, and then during the Nazi occupation. However, only underground resistance activities, rather than a free European public sphere, were able to emerge under such conditions - especially in the latter case.

It is important to take into account these peculiarities of the transnational European public sphere – much more than has been the case to date. This implies that the ongoing implicit comparison with the national public sphere in Europe – often with an idealised

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national public sphere – should be made more explicit and should be more in evidence. In addition, it would be very helpful, for an understanding of the transnational character of the European public sphere, to compare it with other transnational or multilingual public spheres outside and inside Europe: with the transnational Arab, Latin American or African public spheres, with the multilingual Indian public sphere, and perhaps also with the transitional public sphere of the former Soviet empire and the multilingual empires of pre-1914 Europe.

Indicators of the rise of a European public sphere

I now come to the central question of my presentation: the question of the emergence of a European public sphere. I shall advance the argument that a European public sphere is on the way to materialization. Five distinct indicators have, in fact, pointed in this direction over the decades since the 1950s and '60s. I shall concentrate on this period, leaving aside the question of the very long-term existence of a European space of communication.

A first long-term indicator of the emergence of a European public sphere was the debate over Europe; over European civilisation, European culture, society, economy, law, and European unity. This debate has been investigated frequently, though with important shortcomings (Borodziej/ Duchhardt/ Morawiec/ Romsics 2005; Chabod 1995; Frevert 2003; Girault 1993; Kaelble 2003; Laughland 1997; Pagden 2002; Passerini 1999; du Réau 1996; Rößner 2007; Schmale 2003; Swedberg 1994; Wilson/ van der Dussen/ Boer 1995). The debate has been continuing since the beginnings of Europe itself. In the contemporary period, three major eras can be discerned: (1) the debate from the Enlightenment until the early 19th century, the beginnings of European nationalism and the rise European empires; (2) after an interregnum, the debate from the late 19th century until the Cold War, which centred around the decline of Europe as the power-centre and as the pioneering civilisation of the world - provoked by the ascendancy of the United States and later the Soviet empire; and (3), after a further interregnum, the most recent debate which began in the 1980s during the decline of the bi-polar world and the end of a homogeneous Third World (Frank 1998; Girault 1993; Kaelble 2001; Osterhammel 1998).

This has been a debate primarily among intellectuals, scholars and writers, but it had important consequences for 'mental maps', for tourist as well as business views, for school books, and for the public interpretation of other civilisations as either hostile and dangerous or neighbouring, friendly and similar.

A second, still long-term, indicator for an emerging European public sphere was the rise of European symbols. To be sure, symbols for Europe have always existed - maps of Europe as well as female symbols for each continent of the world (such as the figure of 'Europa' on a bull). After the Second World War, two distinct eras of invention and creation of European symbols can be discerned.

First, in the post-war period, European movements and a new European enthusiasm led to the invention of new symbols such as the flag with a green "E" on a white background, the European convention on human rights of 1953, the cities of Strasbourg and Brussels as European sites, and numerous European stamps. European rituals such as the dismantling of border barriers by young Europeans and the signing of treaties by elderly European statesmen in magnificent halls also began to occur. Historical myths to do with figures such as Charlemagne were remade to become European rather than national (French or German) symbols; and the Charlemagne Award was introduced.

A second creative period for European public symbols has been occurring since the 1980s. The European Union has tried to create a European identity with symbols such as the European flag with the twelve stars on a blue background, through the introduction of the European passport, by inventing a European Day (8 May) in memory of the declaration by Robert Schuman in 1950, by choosing a European anthem, by establishing a European quarter in Brussels with the construction of buildings for the European Parliament, with the European Commission and the European Council as well as a building for the European Parliament in Strasbourg, by designing the new Euro bills and coins, and by bringing in the Charter of Human Rights in 2000 (Frank, in: Loth 2008; Hedetoft 1998; Jones 2007; Kaelble 2003; Lager 1995; Passerini 2003; Pastureau/ Schmitt 1990; Poignault/ Lecocq/ Wattel-de Croizant; Schmale 1996). The success of these European symbols in the public space has varied: the European flag, especially, has become very much a presence in the public spaces of Europe.

A third, more short-term sign of the rise of a European public sphere was the increasing number of debates, research projects, and public statements by experts on Europe. The public sphere of experts has become a crucial element of the European public sphere. However, not all disciplines have participated to the same degree in this sphere; economics, political science, and law are subjects in which European journals, conferences, and exchanges with European colleagues have been especially intensive - and where the rise of a European public sphere of experts has been distinct. In other fields such as sociology, ethnology, history, geography and educational science, it has been much less distinct, although not entirely negligible. On the whole, the emergence of a European public sphere has been closely linked to the formation of a European civil society, i.e. the rise of European interest groups, trade unions, civic organisations, networks, and governmental agencies at the European level. This is more advanced than is often assumed. Brussels has become a centre of civil society activities in which experts often play a role (Esing/ Kohler-Koch 1994; Fetzer, in: Kaelble/ Kirsch/ Schmidt-Gernig 2002; Greenwood 1997; Kaelble 2007).

A fourth indicator was the rising importance of European topics in the European national media. To be sure, articles on European themes have not increased noticeably since the 1990s according to the available research, which covers only the press (not

radio and television). However, as Klaus Eder has demonstrated for the press, the European public sphere has been reinforced due to 'concomitance' and Europeanisation: European themes have not only appeared in different national newspapers concurrently, but have also been given the same importance as national items. Furthermore, they have been presented from a European rather than a national perspective. This is different from the 1950s when major European events such as the signing of the Treaty of Rome were given very different importance in the European press and were presented primarily from the national point of view (Eder 2006; Eder Kantner 2000; Gerhards 2002; Gramberger 2005; Kaelble 2002; Kaelble/ Kirsch/ Schmidt-Gernig 2002; Meyer 2007a; Meyer 2007b; Müller 2007; Risse in: Preuß/ Franzius 2004; Steeg 2002; Schulz-Forberg/ Strât 2008; Trenz/ Eder 2004; Trenz 2005).

The growing importance of European topics in the media is strongly connected with the growing prominence of the topic of Europe in election campaigns; not only in the elections for the European Parliament since 1979, but also in the campaigns for some national parliaments, and in the rising number of referenda on European decisions (for example, on membership of the European Union or on one of the European treaties since the 1980s). For good reasons, this indicator has often been criticized because campaigns for the European Parliament have remained unduly national, and because Europe has remained too marginal in national campaigns - such as in the last French presidential election. But, at the same time, one cannot ignore the fact that the prominence of the topic of Europe has been greatly promoted by highly controversial referenda such as those in France and The Netherlands. Also, the 'de-Europeanised' election campaigns for the European Parliament have been a constant provocation.

The impact of the European public sphere on European politics

One of the major shortcomings of the historical research on the public sphere is the neglect of its impact on political decision-making. One might argue that the major role of a public sphere is not participation in power, but the civilised exchange of views about Europe, about European identity and the non-European 'other', about European borders and the dialogue with non-European societies, about constitutional moments and crises in Europe, about topical European questions such as unemployment, poverty, values, environment, and peace. One might argue that the public sphere is independent only if it is not part of the power play (Sen 2006).

In a way, this concept of the public sphere is redolent of the 18th century. Central to the concept are phenomena such as public deliberation, independent citizenry, access to the public sphere, the plurality of public spheres, and debates on matters of public interest (although not their impact on politics). In fact, public spheres and decision-making were rather separate in the 18th century, as the cafés, associations and clubs of that era were quite separate from the court of the monarch.

But this concept of a public sphere with no impact on politics does not match the reality of politics which has developed in Europe since the 19th century. The concept has not fully recognised the rise of democracies in which public spheres and politics have become more intertwined. Hence, historical developments since the 19th century have

seen the influence of the public sphere on national politics become crucial, even though this has rarely been investigated in historical analyses of the public sphere. The same is true for the reverse impact of national politics on the public sphere.

The impact of the *European* public sphere on European politics is not completely absent, but is very limited. This is perhaps the major limitation on the emergence of a European public sphere. It is an important but neglected research topic as to why the impact of the public sphere on decision making in Europe has not become stronger since the 1990s when the activity of the European Union has expanded into so many fields beyond the creation of a common market for commodities. It seems that there are several reasons for this which I shall briefly explain.

A first reason is the particular character of civil society at the European level: while it is very advanced, it has been oriented primarily towards a bureaucracy, the European Commission, largely neglecting the European Parliament. As a consequence, the means of intervention by the civil society in Brussels are often non-public, i.e. telephone calls, small meetings with decision-makers, memoranda, and expert statements.

A second reason is the particular character of European election campaigns. They deal primarily with national issues and have become a variant of national elections, mainly because they do not offer an actual choice between two competing teams or between two or more options of European policies, and also because the Parliament does not elect the Commission. As a consequence, the impact of the European public sphere on the election of the President of the European Commission is marginal.

A third reason has to do with the European public sphere of experts and the rarity of European intellectuals. Networks of experts on Europe did develop rapidly and are advanced, as has been mentioned - especially in law, political science, and economics. However, these are rarely linked to the general public. European think-tanks, which intervene continually in the public sphere, are rare – as are individual public experts. Intellectuals able to translate and take up general European issues are also uncommon. Hence, the major driving-force for a public sphere is weak at the European level.

A fourth reason is the role of the European Commission in the creation of a European public sphere. To be sure, the Commission has tried; by organising congresses and conferences, and developing the European programme for research, which has as one of its purposes the creation of European networks of scholars (i.e. a public sphere of experts). This public sphere, to which individuals are invited and admitted, is part of a positive characteristic of the European Commission and a consequence of its limited size, hence its openness to advice from experts and representatives of the civil society. But the Commission can only create such a selected public sphere; one could not expect it to create a completely independent European public sphere, even if it were willing to do so.

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Conclusion

Is a European public sphere emerging? In brief, my answer is 'yes' - for three reasons. First, this is because a long history of transnational public debates among intellectuals, experts, and politicians has existed in Europe since the medieval period. This space of international communication, however, was not a public sphere in the full sense since the other side, the counterpart, a European power centre, was lacking. Secondly, the conditions for a public sphere in the full sense have become more favourable since the 1980s. Since then Brussels has become increasingly recognised by Europeans as an international European power centre, and European public debates have become reoriented towards the critique, attack or support of this power centre.

Finally, my answer is positive because several indicators showing the rise of a European public sphere are evident. To be sure, what emerges is not a complete national public sphere at the European level. Because of its transnational character, it is different from national spheres in Europe. It is also incomplete and insufficient in many ways because it is still emergent. Election campaigns for the European Parliament are far from being truly European. European intellectuals are rare, and very few European experts on European topics have become public experts. The European public sphere is not yet effectively influencing European politics. But one should not underestimate its potential as a rising political platform and political force.

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