Call for papers for the KFG workshop

The Contentious Face of European Politics: Towards an Analysis of Discursive and Visual Strategies of Transnational Diffusion

January 14th-16th, 2010, Freie Universität Berlin

Deadline for abstract submission: October 15th, 2009

Contact: Nicole Doerr, nicole.dorr@eui.eu; Amelie Kutter, akutter@zedat.fu-berlin.de

The workshop seeks to enhance the understanding, conceptual clarity and empirical study of the contentious face of EU politics. In recent years European integration has become subject to popular dissent and increasing public contention. Social actors established themselves who exploit the multilingual, culturally pluralist and contentious potential of European publics for the definition and transnational diffusion of their (alternative) visions of European integration. They trigger and channel transnational debate by spreading specific images and discourses across national and linguistic borders, condensing them in contentious metaphors such as the 'Polish plumber' or the 'fortress Europe'. It is this symbolic dimension of the public sphere that offers an increasingly relevant pathway for non-state actors and civil society groups to intervene as transnational discourse entrepreneurs. Most recently, the current economic crisis gives rise to additional contention of European integration. The crisis challenges acknowledged principles of solidarity, be they defined with regard to the individual's chances and social responsibility, financial support for poorer regions and bankrupt EU states, or vis-à-vis other regions of the world.

The workshop brings together researchers that focus on the empirical investigation and theoretical penetration of processes of transnational diffusion, i.e. of processes of translation between different (national, local, transnational) contexts of communication that are initiated by non-state actors such as grassroots and professional social movement activists, institutionalised civil society organisations, unions, radical parties and journalists. The workshop intends to extend existing research on European public spheres by taking an actor-centered and discourse analytical perspective on these processes. Research on European publics has hitherto focused on the communicative conditions of transnational debates generated by national mass media, primarily applying content analytical methods. It has revealed varying degrees of Europeanisation of national news coverage. However, the discourse entrepreneurs, their contentious interventions in debates about European policies, their discursive and visual strategies of diffusion, and the different discourse contexts they exploit have remained underexplored. The workshop opens this field of study and invites researchers to engage with the multilingual, visual and symbolic dimension of European public spheres both empirically and theoretically.

Empirically, the following questions are relevant: Which successful diffusion mechanisms, which discursive and visual strategies do contentious actors apply to form and spread their visions of European

integration, in particular regarding issues and standards of solidarity? Which images, stories, and media do they construct to bring their message across national and linguistic borders? How are their discourses appropriated within the different communicative contexts of the EU polity and (possibly diffused) beyond the European context? Preferred cases for the investigation of these questions are debates on EU policy initiatives, transnational protest campaigns, and European parliamentary election campaigns. Researchers are encouraged to go beyond 'content' and to focus on narratives, discourse strategies and imageries; they are encouraged to focus on the linkage of different media and communication platforms, e.g. transnational community media, internet sources, and mass media; and should adopt a comparative perspective rather than focusing on single media outlets.

In respect to *theory*, the workshop organizers wish to stimulate conceptual work that explores the contribution of critical discourse approaches and narrative and visual media analyses to the investigation of EU-related diffusion processes in transnational communication. We invite researchers to speculate theoretically about the intersection of the symbolical and the rational in public discourse, discourse entrepreneurship, visual and persuasive strategies in discourse and the translation between discourse contexts.

The workshop arranges a three-day dialog between advanced researchers on European publics, on the one hand, and up to 15 post-graduates and post-docs, on the other, who deal with discourse analytical approaches and contentious actors empirically or theoretically. The workshop combines intense discussion on single papers with keynote-speeches and panel discussions. We could win Cathleen Kantner Klaus Eder, Kathrin Fahrenbach, Thomas Risse, and Ruth Wodak, who all decisively molded the discussion on European publics and on the analysis of contentious politics, for keynote-speeches and a panel discussion. They will introduce us to the problem of transnational publics and discursive and visual strategies of diffusion. W.J.T. Mitchell agreed upon holding a video conference on transnational visual politics with us. The workshop will close with a wrap-up session outlining major empirical insights of the workshop and possible conceptual work to be developed in the future.

Abstract proposals for papers (up to 300 words) should be submitted to the workshop directors before October 15th, 2009. Submitters will be informed about their participation by November 1st, 2009. The paper proposals should relate to the empirical and/or theoretical questions described above and should outline the research question, the argument, methodology and expected findings.

Contact: Nicole Doerr, nicole.dorr@eui.eu; Amelie Kutter, akutter@zedat.fu-berlin.de