An Emerging European Public Sphere?
Empirical Evidence and Theoretical Clarifications

by

Thomas Risse and Marianne Van de Steeg

Authors' Address:
Center for Transatlantic Foreign
and Security Policy
Department of Political and Social Science
Free University of Berlin
Ihnestr. 22
14195 Berlin
Germany
Tel.:   +49-(0)30-838 55527
Fax: +49-(0)30-838 54160
Email: risse@zedat.fu-berlin.de
Web: http://www.fu-berlin.de/atasp

Introduction[1]

A lively political and academic debate has emerged about the normative viability and the empirical possibility of a European public sphere. This debate is linked to the controversy about the democratic or legitimacy deficit of the European Union (EU). An open, pluralist, and critical public discourse rooted in independent media is considered crucial for providing an interface between state and society in a democratic polity. If we conceive of the EU as an emerging democratic polity beyond the nation-state, the issue of a European public sphere is raised quite naturally.

But there is little agreement in the literature on what constitutes a democratic public sphere (*demokratische Öffentlichkeit*), let alone a European public sphere – and how do we know one when we see one. Different concepts of a public sphere inevitably result in different empirical indicators how to measure it which leads to almost incompatible empirical data. Take two prominent examples: Gerhards uses time series data from 1951-1995 on the treatment of European issues in German quality newspapers to demonstrate that Europe matters very little in the German public sphere (Gerhards, 2000, 294-295). In the same volume, Eder and Kantner see an emerging European public sphere with regard to issues such as citizenship and "fortress Europe" (Eder and Kantner, 2000, 317-319).

This paper tries to make sense of the empirical and theoretical literature by asking two questions:
1. What do we know empirically about a European public sphere?
2. How can we make theoretical sense of the empirical findings?

We concentrate on media reporting on European issues as an – albeit problematic – proxy for the (non-) existence of a European public sphere. As to the first question, the most recent evidence available suggests that the overall salience of European themes seems to be rising, while similar meaning structures and frames of reference prevail in media reporting about

Europe. As to the second question, a European public sphere emerges out of the interconnectedness of and mutual exchanges between various national public spheres. An ideal typical European public sphere would then emerge

1. if and when the same (European) themes are discussed at the same time at similar levels of attention across national public spheres and media;

2. if and when similar frames of reference, meaning structures, and patterns of interpretation are used across national public spheres and media;

3. if and when a transnational community of communication emerges in which speakers and listeners not only observe each other across national spaces, but also recognize that "Europe" is an issue of common concern for them.

It follows that a European public sphere constitutes a social construction in the strict sense of the word. It does not pre-exist outside social and political discourses. Rather, it is being constructed through social and discursive practices creating a common horizon of reference and, at the same time, a transnational community of communication over issues that concern "us as Europeans" rather than British, French, Germans, or Dutch.

We proceed in three steps. First, we discuss what we seem to know empirically about a European public sphere. Second, we present some results from our own empirical research project on media reporting of the so-called 'Haider debate' in five European countries. Third, we discuss critically various ways to conceptualize a transnational community of communication.

What Do We Know Empirically About a European Public Sphere?

Systematic empirical research about a European public sphere and about cross-national media reporting about European affairs is still in its infancy. In other words, the theoretical and normative debate on a European public sphere far outpaces our empirical knowledge about these themes. Different empirical studies use different criteria and, as a result, come to different conclusions as to the (non-) existence of a European public sphere.

Yet, one can essentially distinguish two approaches to measuring a European public sphere in the literature (for an excellent review see Kantner, 2002, ch. 3.3). The first approach essen-

tially measures European public sphere by counting how often "Europe," "European institutions," or "European affairs" are mentioned in the media (e.g. Gerhards, 1993, 2000, 2002). The result has been so far that European questions pale in comparison with national, regional, or local issues: "European questions receive the lowest level of media attention in comparison to all other … issue areas" (Gerhards, 2000, 294). However, Meyer reports some increase of media attention to European affairs during the 1990s (quoted from Kantner, 2002, 166). Recent results from a project by Eder, Kantner, and Trenz confirm that the salience of European affairs in quality newspaper reporting seems to be on the rise (Trenz, 2003). In 2000, one third of all political news articles of single newspapers in six EU member states contained some references to Europe or European themes. As to these themes, they mostly concern economic affairs, but also institutional questions of European integration and foreign and security policy. Another recent cross-national study comparing media reporting on national, European, and global affairs indicates that "Europe" matters particularly in media reporting on monetary questions, agricultural issues, and, of course, on issues of European integration itself (Ruud Koopmans, personal communication). Interestingly enough, the dominant themes being discussed and reported in national media seem to vary little across the EU (Kantner, 2002, 168; Sievert, 1998; Diez Medrano, 2001). We can conclude from this research that the issue salience of European affairs seems to be rising during the 1990s. Earlier assessments that media do not pay much attention to Europe have to be revised apparently. Yet, increased media attention for Europe appears to be one crucial pre-condition for the emergence of a European public sphere.

A second approach toward measuring a European public sphere concentrates on analyzing media reporting on particular European issues, such as the corruption scandal of the European Commission, BSE, the debate about the future of the EU, or about EU enlargement (e.g. Eder, 1998, 2000; Eder and Kantner, 2000; Trenz, 2000; Van de Steeg, 2000, 2002; see also Schmitz and Geserick, 1996). Most of these studies observe that European issues are being discussed and reported in the various media across Europe at the same time, at similar levels of attention in the issue cycle of media reporting, and in a similar fashion. Moreover and more important, particular European themes are framed in rather similar ways across national media leading to similar interpretive schemes and structures of meaning. Issues might be discussed in a very controversial fashion, but at least we all agree about the frames of reference. One study with a contrasting result is Trenz (2000), which reports prevailing

national meaning structures in a study comparing Spanish with German media reporting of the EU Commission's corruption scandal. The Spanish press reported the scandal as a German attack on a poor Spanish Commissioner. In contrast, the German media framed the issue as another example for the fact that Southern Europeans in general and the Spanish in particular have not really understood yet that corruption constitutes a violation of core principles of liberal democracies. Thus, the frames of reference giving meaning to the corruption scandal were constructed along national lines.

If we find similar meaning structures when European issues are being discussed in the various national public spheres, this would be another important pre-condition for the emergence of a transnational community of communication. For, we can only communicate in a meaningful way (and this includes polarization and contestation), if we have a common sense of what we are talking about. Our own empirical research followed this line of reasoning. In 2000, a lively debate emerged across Europe about the rise to power of a right-wing populist party in Austria (Jörg Haider's FPÖ) and about whether or not the EU should somehow sanction the Austrian government in this case. We wanted to know to what extent newspapers from various countries used similar frames of reference when discussing the Haider issue. We will now report our findings (for further details see Van de Steeg et al., 2003).

The "Haider Debate:" An Emerging European Community of Communication

We analyzed the debate on the so-called sanctions of the EU member states against the Austrian government formed by the ÖVP and Jörg Haider's FPÖ. We coded newspaper articles (both quality papers and tabloids) in five EU countries (Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, and Austria) and in the U.S. as a control (see list of newspapers in the appendix).[2] Of course, the "Haider debate" concerns a most likely case for the emergence of a Europan public sphere – if we cannot find one here, we should probably abandon this type of research. Yet, this debate allowed us to discern how a transnational European public sphere is structured. What is an EU-wide debate in its essence all about? Besides developing a shared repertoire of frames of

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[2] You can contact marianne.vandesteeg@iue.it with any comments or questions on this media analysis.

reference and meaning structures, does it also give rise to a European transnational community of communication?

Methods

In order to answer these questions, we conducted a frame analysis of the "Haider debate." Following Snow and Benford (1992: 135), a frame is an interpretative scheme used to make sense of the 'world out there.' Objects and situations are simplified and condensed into a frame. The main focus of our analysis asks for the dominant interpretive schemata which used by the various print media to encode and judge the Haider case and the European reaction to it. We aimed at providing a comparative typology of the dominant interpretive schemata. In the case of the "Haider debate," the frames often contain a judgment in shorthand. For example, Haider is framed as a Nazi, Europe as a moral community, and Austria as being European.

We developed a list of frames through a mix of inductive and deductive procedures. It was impossible to develop the coding categories deductively in advance, since we would have missed salient frames. Proceeding in a purely inductive fashion, however, would have seriously hampered inter-coder reliability. Thus, the initial coding scheme was developed by having all three researchers code a small set of articles from the British "Guardian." Subsequently, the definition of the frames was discussed and refined throughout the stages of the empirical research. We started with rather abstract categories and specified them afterwards by defining the core meaning of each category (including the development of subcontents or connotations), deleting or re-coding those text sequences that did not fit the more precise definition anymore, and, finally, by coding the "authors" of each frame (e.g., journalist, politician, etc.). This protocolled strategy of alternating inductive and deductive coding assured both a high degree of inter-coder reliability and a valid processing of the meanings and contents of the debate. In this manner, a total of approximately 2100 articles from 15 newspapers has been coded.[3] Finally, we used the results of the computer-aided qualitative frame analysis to conduct a factor analysis using most elements of our coding tree.

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[3]For each of the countries (Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, the USA) a left wing and a right wing quality paper has been selected, and for Austria, France and Italy also a popular newspaper. A sample was drawn by taking every third article and making sure that, if possible, all front-page articles were present in the sample.

Similar horizon of reference

Broadly speaking, similar meaning structures emerge across all 15 newspapers from five EU member states and the US (see appendix A for list of newspapers). The same dimensions and frames of reference appear over and over again across all newspapers, even though differences emerge in the degree to which individual newspapers emphasize some frames over others. Still, they all speak the same language.

A first indication for a similarity in meaning is that of the 22 frames identified, six are used most often in every single newspaper: four frames relating to Haider and two to Europe. First, Haider himself is framed as a "Nazi" and a "xenophobe" shortly after the debate started in early 2000. At a certain point, only a hint is enough to invoke these two frames.

Second, we grouped together under the frame 'Haider internal other' all those occasions in which Haider becomes a political problem outside the strict context of Austria and the EU re-actions. It appears that the Haider case is not limited to being an Austrian political problem against which European politicians take a stand. In a way, Haider travels, both literally and conceptually. Haider becomes part of the domestic political debate in various EU countries: The Flemish *de Standaard* discusses how one should act towards the Belgian Vlaams Blok in relation to Haider's FPÖ coming to power in Austria. In Germany, Bavarian Prime Minister Stoiber (CSU) is attacked for not following the national policy towards the FPÖ. In Italy, various visits by Haider cause problems for Berlusconi's right-wing alliance. 'Haider' also travels as a symbol that can be used on any imaginable occasion. There is an anti-Haider skirt at the fashion show in Milan, a special Haider-section at the architecture Biennale in Venice, a 'Haider from the Rhine' in Germany, and a Danish "Haider." In an article on US immigration policy, it is enough to refer to 'the closure à la Haider' in order for anyone to understand that this is a shorthand for very restricted immigration policies en vogue in Europe. Since we all know that Haider stands for Nazism and xenophobia, he can become an "internal negative other" in any context. Haider is not treated as a foreign affair, but as something inside us. Haider becomes a de-contextualized icon for what "we as Europeans" are not.[4]

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[4]The fourth Haider frame is called 'Haider's personality' and groups together all statements on how Haider looks, on his character and his political style.

Finally, the two 'Europe' frames are related to two different - but not necessarily contrasting - visions of the EU. "Europe as a moral community" connotes that the EU is based on values such as freedom, democracy, and justice and stands for fighting against Nazism, xenophobia, and nationalism. With their decision to "sanction" Austria, European leaders have shown that the EU is not only a market, but also has a soul. "European legal standards" stands for a frame that refers to the rule of law as codified in the EC/EU Treaties. For example, the Amsterdan Treaty stipulates that there can be sanctions against those countries who seriously and continuously infringe on the European values. Yet, within the EU, decisions should follow legal rules and procedures, for, if not, the injured party - in this case Austria - can take legal action.

This first indicator of a similar horizon of reference is based on simple frequencies with which certain frames appear in individual newspapers. But we also ran our data on most elements of the coding tree through a factor analysis (details in Van de Steeg forthcoming). No matter which combination of newspapers is included in the factor analysis - e.g. all newspapers, only EU newspapers, or only EU quality newspapers - always the same four dimensions are identified. The factor analysis was based on all frames, including data on the particular frame's "author" (the journalist writing the article, quotes from politicians, experts, other media, and the like). In the case of the two "Europe" frames – "Europe as a moral community" and "European legal standards" -, we also included data on whether these frames are explicitly used to support or reject the "European sanctions" against Austria. The factor analysis identified the following four dimensions underlying the data:

 (1) "Waving the European flag:" a vision of Europe as a community based on moral values and legal standards, pro sanctions;[5]

(2) "Holding up the law:" Europe as a legal community (legal standards), against the sanctions and against interference in the composition of a democratically elected government, defending Austria against accusations of being a Nazi and racist country;

(3) "Haider is a Nazi": use of strong evaluative frames, such as "Haider Nazi," "Austria Nazi" by the author of the article;

(4) "Haider is said to be a Nazi": use of these evaluative frames, but by a cited foreign actor.

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[5] A very strong symbolic expression of this dimension was a cartoon in *Le Monde* (GET DATE) depicting a slightly puzzled looking 'European' carrying a European flag with one star replaced by a swastika and a small piper followed by rats in one corner of the cartoon.

The following account is informed by a regression analysis of these four dimensions of the factor analysis (see Van de Steeg forthcoming), and by the results also from a more qualitative and interpretetive analysis of our data.

Even though the Haider debate was unleashed by a particular event, in reality it dealt with more fundamental issues. In the end, the question was what the EU stands for and how should it react when somewhere in the European political space Nazism and xenophobia rear their ugly head? Of course, everybody agreed that Nazism and xenophobia have to be fought. Yet, should this danger be denounced in relation to the newly formed Austrian government? Are sanctions against another member state the right answer in light of the European values and the EU Treaties? We can group the positions in the "Haider debate" according to their answers to these questions. They all shared the same meaning structure, the same horizon of reference, but they disagreed on the political conclusions. On the one hand, many commentators argued that Europe, in the name of its fundamental values codified in the treaties, should not accept the entry into government of a party led by a man considered to be a Nazi and racist. On the other hand, others attacked this position and pointed out that the moral and legal values constitutive for the EU prohibited sanctioning a member state, as long as this member state did not violate European law and legal standards. This controversy fueled the debate. While the participants shared the same horizon of reference, they disagreed in the claims put forward and, therefore, were forced to argue their own case while taking into account the position of the other.

Two examples to illustrate the reasoning supportive of the decision of the EU-14:

But it is not a question here of a problem of hidden motivations: this government is objectively and a priori unacceptable if one takes the founding values of the Europe after the war seriously. It is not a psychological question; these sanctions are morally motivated. (le Monde, 14. Feb. 2000)

[Italian president Ciampi:] 'The EU is not only an alliance between states, but also a supranational unity. Now, the fact that in one of these countries (...) a political party may enter in government that manifests understandings which are not completely respectful of the values founding the Union, and that which I call pax europea, well that arouses concern.' (il Corriere, 1. Feb. 2000)

Two examples to illustrate that precisely because the EU is a community based on values and legal standards, one can also question the decision of the EU-14:

[A letter to the editor in an Austrian newspaper] The reason indicated for the sanctions of the 14 is that in the united Europe inhumane politics should already be fought from the outset. The participation in government of the FPÖ and its propagated agitation against foreigners is against the European thought and therefor rightly criticized. But, why are they not getting together and discuss the problem together? (die Presse, 17. May 2000)

[Austrian prime-minister Schüssel, ÖVP:] 'The refusal of dialogue, the ostracism, the boycott and discrimination are unacceptable in the current Europe, and more precisely within the European Union. Being in contradiction with the spirit and the letter of the European Treaties, these facts constitute a violation of the basic right of the European Union.' (le Figaro, 4. April 2000)

Cleavages along national and/or ideological lines?

These four examples illustrate that no matter what one's particular position is, the EU is identified as a moral community against Nazism and racism and a community based on legal rules and standards. The next step in our analysis was to figure out whether it is possible to identify certain patterns. It could be expected that a national patterns emerges, such as the one identified by Trenz (2000) in the debate on the corruption scandal of the European Commission, where the debate was constructed along national lines. In the Haider case, this would mean that one would expect the Austrian newspapers to rally around the (Austrian) flag by denouncing the unfair attacks from outside, and defending their country and newly elected government. Thus, the expectation would be that the Austrian newspapers would pay more attention to those who put forward the position questioning the decision of the EU-14, and the non-Austrian newspapers, if they would take up a position, to be more receptive for statements supportive of the sanctions. A further expectation in this context would be that a German-language community emerges pitching together Austria and Germany with their common Nazi past (maybe joined by Italy, as Austria's neighbour also shared a fascist past) against particularly France and Belgium.

We can clearly disconfirm such patterns along national lines, no matter how one constructs them. Neither can we discern a pattern of "Austria against the rest" nor "German-speaking community against the EU" (even if we add Italy to this group). In fact, it is very hard to dis-

cern *any* pattern or cleavage in this debate among the European newspapers. We can speculate about the reasons for this non-finding.

The only, albeit weak pattern which we could identify in terms of supporting or rejecting the "European sanctions," concerns a left-right cleavage. Left-wing newspapers challenge the legitimacy of the "sanctions" much less often than the other newspapers. There were various explicit and implicit ways in which the legitimacy of the sanctions were questioned. First, some argued that the motivation behind the sanctions was unfounded, Austria was neither a Nazi nor a racist country. Second, some pointed out that the Austrian government was freely and democratically elected and that the sanctions went against the moral values and the legal standards on which the EU is based. In each country, the left wing newspaper(s) contain such statements to a lesser extent than more conservative newspapers. For example, the Austrian center-left *Der Standard* pays significantly less attention to this type of argument than the conservative newspaper *Die Presse*. The three newspapers that contain most statements that could be considered as defending Austria's position, are the Austrian *Die Presse*, the German *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, and the French *Le Figaro*.

A Western or a European public sphere?
At this point, one could object that this debate was not about Austrians against non-Austrians, but about moral values and rules codified in treaties which, however, are not particularly European but Western values and rules. What was so European about this debate? How about Americans who share the same values of freedom, justice, and who also fight against Nazism and xenophobia? In other words, we needed to examine whether we found a general *Western* community of communication during the "Haider debate," or a more confined *European* public sphere. Namely, are there traces of a European transnational community of communication in which speakers and listeners recognize each other as legitimate participants in a common discourse pertaining to European affairs?

To answer this questions, we coded two U.S. newspapers – the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* in addition to the thirteen European newspapers. The main result of this analysis is that the issues at stake in the Haider debate do not touch upon the identity of the American political community. In sum, the Haider case is considered newsworthy in the US,

but experienced at a distance. Of course, US newspapers used similar frames as the European ones when reporting or commenting on the "Haider debate."

But from the US perspective, the Haider affair was something happening 'over there in Europe', i.e. elsewhere. US newspapers did not report the Haider case as a Western problem, but as a distinct European issue. This can already be seen in the headlines, for example *Europe moving cautiously in punishment for Austria* (NYT 02.04.2000) and *Report clears way for Europe to drop Austrian sanctions* (NYT 09.09.2000), and in the designation of some of the actors in the news stories, e.g. *the Europeans* (NYT 01.02.2000), and *European diplomats* (NYT 02.05.2000).

Moreover, statements dealing with a definition of the political community were not made by the (American) authors of US newspaper articles, but consisted of citations from European politicians. In general, most actors in US news stories about the "Haider debate" were European actors. The only US politicians mentioned in this regard are once Pat Buchanan (NYT) and three times the Hillary Clinton campaign team (WP). American newspapers did not report the Haider debate as an issue which directly involved the American polity. This constitutes a strong contrast to our findings from the European newspapers.

Reports in US newspapers were usually written in neutral language (in comparison with the EU newspapers). Both facts and statements by major actors were reported, but the newspaper did not leave its mark or commented on them. One indication for this is that, in contrast to EU newspapers, by far the most frequent type of article was a purely descriptive report. A final indicator that US newspapers in comparison with European newspapers took a neutral and more distant stance in the Haider affair, concerns the fact that US journalists hardly made judgemental statements. In European newspapers, it was rather common to find journalists portraying Haider as being Nazi and a xenophobe, Austria as being a Nazi country, or to denounce that xenophobia is generally on the rise in Europe. In US newspapers, the article's author does not take responsibility for judgments, even when he or she are clearly the author of judgemental statements. For example, in cases such as "a man some label a neo-Nazi" (NYT 26.10.99), or "Mr. Haider's allies (...) seem deaf to accusations of racism" (NYT 31.01.00), the phrase is constructed in such a way that the journalist distances him/herself from the accusations by shifting the responsibility to vague 'others'. Another strategy, which

has the same effect, is to leave it to the reader to label Haider as a Nazi by mentioning just Haider's Nazi statements or elements from Haider's background that are related to Nazism. The third way in which US newspapers kept their distance was by neutralizing the accusation that Haider is a Nazi by immediately following it with an excuse, by pointing out, for example, that one can have different positions on this issue. For instance, one of Haider's Nazi statements was put into perspective by adding "but the endorsement was one sentence in the heat of a debate for which Mr. Haider later apologized" (NYT 01.02.2000). All in all, the author of the article labeled Haider as a Nazi and/or xenophobe in only seven articles from the two US newspapers.[6] In contrast, portraying Haider as a Nazi was usual business for, e.g., the Italian *La Repubblica*: A journalist declares that *If he is the carrier of the Nazi mark, how could one permit him to pass [to the government]?* (LR 02.02.2000).

This extensive description of reports about the "Haider debate" in US newspapers serves to further indicate what this debate was all about in Europe. In the EU, the "Haider debate" was an occasion to discursively construct a political community and to define and redefine the EU's identity and rules of conduct. The FPÖ entering into government is not felt as being something that is happening "somewhere out there" in another country. Instead, people from all over the EU used the "Haider debate" as an occasion to debate the essence of the community to which they belonged. Or, in the words of the Israeli ambassador to Belgium: *In an era of full European integration with common values and a common belief, the coming to power of the 'Freedomparty' of Jörg Haider in Austria has consequences that far surpass the political battle in Vienna, and of which the magnitude, at this point, cannot be grasped easily. Austria is not the backyard of Europe. It forms an integrated part of the EU. What is happening now in Vienna has repercussions in the whole of Europe. Every European citizen has to take a stand and decide what kind of face it wants to give to his Europe* (De Standaard, 10.2.2000).

In sum, our own research confirms the finding of similar analyses that similar frames, horizons of reference, and meaning structures are used when media report about Europe and the EU. In other words, they have a common collective understanding of what it is that they talk about, irrespective of their political standpoint. Moreover, they consider European affairs as

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[6]NYT 02.02.2000, NYT 02.04.2000, NYT 03.02.2000, WP 01.02.00, WP 05.02.00, WP 06.02.00, WP 21.09.00.

the issues of a community to which they themselves belong. We might disagree about how we judge the European "sanctions" against Austria during the Haider affair, but we discuss the issue in terms of what the EU is all about, a 'moral community of values based on legal standards'. In other words, if media use similar criteria of relevance and similar frames of reference across national public spheres when discussing European issues, this constitutes a precondition for a viable European public sphere and for the emergence of a transnational community of communication. The following figure summarizes the current state of the empirical art.

Dimensions of a European Public Sphere and Empirical Findings

Media Attention for European Affairs *Frames of Reference in Media Reporting on European Affairs*	HIGH	LOW
SIMILAR	Emerging European public sphere; most recent data	Empirical findings up to the mid-1990s
DIFFERENT	Prevailing national perspectives on Europe	No European public sphere

An Emerging European Public Sphere? Theoretical Clarifications

Challenging the Conventional Wisdom

What do these results tell us about the (non-) existence of a European public sphere? Conventional wisdom holds that there is no European public sphere, because there is no "community of communication" on the European level based on a common language, genuinely European media and a common European perspective (Kielmansegg, 1996; Grimm, 1995; overview in Kantner, 2002, 91-100). This suggests that we must somehow transcend our national public spheres and that a "European public sphere" is somehow located above and beyond the various national media and publics. In concrete terms, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and *Le Monde* could never be part of the same public sphere, by definition. This argument against the very possibility of a European public sphere is closely linked to claims that Europe and the

EU lack a collective identity and a "*demos*" and that, therefore, a truly democratic European polity is impossible to achieve.

These and other arguments are based on implicit claims that can be challenged one by one. First, there is no reason why we should all speak the same language and all use the same media in order to be able to communicate across national borders in a meaningful way. If people attach similar meanings to what they observe in Europe, they should be able to communicate across borders irrespective of language and in the absence of European-wide media. Very few people would argue that Switzerland lacks a national public sphere because of its three language communities. It is equally questionable to claim the absense of a public sphere when people read different newspapers. In fact, the opposite is true. A lively public sphere in a liberal democracy should actually be based on a pluralistic supply of media competing for the citizens' attention.

Second, it is unclear what is meant by the definitional requirement that a common perspective is needed to speak of a public sphere, be it European or national: "Only when there are reports about Europe and only when these reports are written from a perspective which transcends national perspectives, could a Europe of citizens emerge" (Gerhards, 1993, 99/my translation; see also Gerhards, 2002). If this means that a common public sphere – whether local, national, or European – presupposes that speakers in the public space refer to the same structure of meaning in a community of communication, we agree. This is precisely what we can show with regard to media reporting about the "Haider debate." However, if this argument means that we have to discuss European themes with an eye on whether they promote or hinder European integration, or that we actually all agree on a common European standpoint, such a conceptualization would miss the mark. There is no reason why we should expect agreement or consensus on an issue in a common public sphere. Agreement about European policies across boundaries, ideological, and other cleavages cannot serve as an indicator for the existence or non-existence of a European public sphere. The same holds true for support levels for European integration. One could even argue that the lively debates in France, Britain, and Denmark about whether or not to join Euroland at least show that people care about Europe, in comparison to the silencing of such debates which we witnessed in Germany, Italy, or among other staunch supporters of the Euro.

In short, contestation is a crucial pre-condition for the emergence of a European public sphere rather than an indicator for its absence. The more contentious European policies and politics become and the more social mobilization occurs on European issues, the more we should observe truly European public debates. If political issues are not contested, if European politics remains the business of elites, the attention level for Europe and the EU will remain low. European issues must become salient and significant in the various public debates so that a European public sphere can emerge. Politicization of European affairs would then be crucial to raise the salience of Europe in the national media reported in the empirical studies. It is well possible that the increased salience of European issues in quality newspapers results from increased contestation of European affairs.

This leads to a final point challenging the conventional wisdom. Claims about the absence of a European public sphere as well as related arguments about the non-existence of a European collective identity are often based on essentialist notions of public spheres and collective identities. Public spheres are not a given, are not out there waiting to be discovered by some analysts. Rather, they are social constructions in the true sense of the word. Public spheres emerge in the process in which people debate controversial issues in the public. The more we debate issues, the more we engage each other in our public discourses, the more we actually create political communities. Take the worldwide debates, heated arguments, and social mobilization over the Iraq war. In a way, this debate created a global public sphere and a global community of communication. Does this mean that there is a global public sphere out there across issues and themes? Of course not! Public spheres and communities of communication emerge through social and discursive practices, in the process of arguing about controversial questions (see also Risse, 2000; Habermas, 1981). Europe is no exception. It would, therefore, be wrong to assume that European integration and institution-building automatically leads to the emergence of a transnational European public sphere. Rather, such transnational sphere transcending national perspectives is being created through social practice and contestation.

Toward an Empirically Meaningful Concept of a European Public Sphere
However, while social mobilization about and contestation of European policies and politics is a necessary pre-condition for an emerging European public sphere, it is not sufficient. One could easily imagine social mobilization and public debates surrounding European policies within the member states that discuss these questions solely from the various national per-

spective. Is joining the Euro in the British, Danish, or German national interest, or not? If the debate is solely framed in these national terms, people would still debate the same question, but the frames of reference would be different. The study of the Commission's corruption scandal mentioned above showed, for example, that Spanish and German media reported it using very different and nationally encoded frames of reference (Trenz, 2000). In contrast, our own analysis of media reporting of the "Haider debate" showed striking similarities in meaning structures and frames of reference. Yet, similar meaning structures, while a necessary ingredient of a common public sphere, is still not sufficient. In order to communicate meaningfully, we need to be aware of each other.

Thus, so far, we have identified three necessary ingredients of a meaningful concept of a European public sphere as a transnational space:

- high degree of salience of European issues;

- similar frames of reference and meaning structures across national public spheres;

- mutual awareness of each other in a transnational space.

This conceptualization resembles closely a proposal by Eder and Kantner building on Habermas's work on public spheres (Habermas, 1996, 190; also Habermas, 1990). Accordingly, a meaningful concept of public spheres requires that media communicate "the same issues at the same time using the same criteria of relevance" (Eder and Kantner, 2000, 315). Let us now comment on this conceptualization.

The Eder/Kantner definition starts from the assumption that a transnational European public sphere can be built on the basis of the various national publics and media. As long as media report about the same issues at the same time, we do not need European-wide media based on a common language. Keep in mind, once again, that a public sphere is a social construction constituting a community of communication. Communicating about the same issues at the same time is a definitional requirement for a public sphere which is not really controversial in the literature. The graph above picked this criterion as "media attention for European affairs." It is also easy to measure, since one can simply count the number of articles on a particular theme in the various media and then examine whether the peaks and lows in the issue cycles of media reporting follow similar patterns across countries. Several studies including our own

on the Haider debate showed that this first indicator of a transnational European public sphere is usually fulfilled.

The more interesting theoretical problems start with the third part of the definition, "same criteria of relevance". On the one hand, there are those who argue that a European public sphere requires that speakers in the sphere adopt a European rather than a national or otherwise partisan perspective. There can still be controversies, but the debate would center on whether or not a particular policy is in the European rather than any other interest. On the other hand, there are those who claim that "same criteria of relevance" simply means that we are taking notice of each other in a common public sphere, that we mutually observe each other. The example above of the German and Spanish media reporting of the Commission's corruption scandal would still qualify as one public sphere, since the two national media still observe each other (see Trenz, 2000 on this point).

Kantner herself has elaborated on this point by taking a middle position between the two: "By same 'criteria of relevance,' I do not mean a 'European' perspective based on a European identity, but common interpretations of the problem concerning an issue which include controversial opinions on the particular question" (Kantner, 2002, 60/my translation). This clarification picks up the argument made above that contestation and controversies are necessary ingredients for a common public sphere. 'Similar criteria of relevance' do not mean that we agree on an issue. But we have to agree on what the problem actually is; we need to 'know' what we are talking about. We can disagree on whether the attack on Iraq is consistent with international law or not. But 'same criteria of relevance' requires that we do agree that compliance with international law is significant in debating questions of war and peace. If we do not agree about international law as a frame of reference to discuss the war against Iraq, we cannot meaningfully communicate about the issue. 'Same criteria of relevance' in a European public sphere then requires that issues are framed in similar ways across national public spheres and that we can observe similar meaning structures and interpretive reference points irrespective of national background or political standpoint of the respective media. Seen in this way, the Eder/Kantner definition is fully consistent with our three ingredients of a European public sphere.

European Public Sphere and European Identity

One issue remains to be clarified, however, the relationship between a theoretical informed and empirically viable concept of a European public sphere, on the one hand, and European identity, on the other. Can we speak meaningfully of a transnational European public sphere without presupposing some degree of collective identification with the European polity? The above quoted conventional skepticism about the viability of a European public sphere in the absence of a European demos appears to be based on the implicit assumption that public spheres and collective national identities go together in liberal democracies. Take Gerhards' skepticism toward a European public sphere, for example: "The territorial boundaries of the public sphere are, therefore, mostly identical with the territorial boundaries of democracies, because the elected representatives of the respective people orient their communicative, public behavior to the 'demos' who elected them and on whom they depend" (Gerhards, 2000, 292/my translation). In the absence of transnational interest groups, parties, and social movements, we are unlikely to see an emerging European public sphere in which the issues are discussed from a European rather than the various national perspectives. The result is clear: We need to fix the democratic deficit of the EU first, before we can fix the deficit in European public sphereness. Others, however, see the emergence of a Europan public sphere as a pre-condition of being able to tackle the European democratic deficit. Is this then a "chicken and egg" type of problem?

But how can we avoid, on the one hand, to simply extend our traditional notions of national democracy unto the European level and, as a consequence, fall back to a conventional notion of public spheres according to which it is impossible beyond the nation-state? And how can we avoid, on the other hand, to conceptualize a European public sphere in such a way that it loses its connection to *democratic and accountable* governance beyond the nation-state? We suggest that one can overcome this dilemma by combining the logic of arguing in Habermas's theory of communicative action (Habermas, 1981, 1992, 1995) with a social constructivist understanding of collective identities (see e.g. Eisenstadt and Giesen, 1995).

If we posit the existence of a common public sphere as a necessary ingredient of a democratic polity – be it on the national, be it on the European level, it is inevitable to talk about a community of communication. 'Community of communication' means that speakers talk to each other and to their audiences rather than simply voicing utterances. It requires reason-giving

and arguing rather than simply mobilizing one's particular constituency for a common cause. Engaging in a debate requires listening to each other's arguments and trying to persuade each other. It certainly implies contestation and it may or may not lead to a reasoned consensus. But a 'community of communication' in a public sphere implies, at a minimum, that speakers in a public sphere recognize each other as legitimate participants in a debate. We might disagree fundamentally, but we take each other's statements seriously in a democratic polity. Nationalist reactions deny this legitimacy. Polarizations along national lines by definition create boundaries using nationalist "self-other" distinctions, as in the case of the corruption scandal: *The* Germans are after *our* (Spanish) Commissioner. *The* Spanish don't know what the rule of law means. In these and other statements, the two public spheres still observe each other and they also use some common reference points. But they do not treat each other as legitimate speakers in one's own public sphere. To give another example: One can agree or disagree with the so-called "European sanctions" against the Austrian government during the Haider debate. But to treat them as illegitimate interferences in one's national affairs would constrain the community of communication to one's nation-state and to discursively establish a boundary against 'foreigners' in one's national public sphere. As has been shown in detail, our analysis led to the surprising conclusion that we could actually observe a transnational community of communication in this particular case. Not even the Austrian press treated the other EU member states and their interventions as 'foreign' and 'illegitimate.'

Thus, accepting other fellow Europeans as legitimate speakers in a common public sphere implies that the "we" in whose name actors speak and to whom they relate, extends beyond national boundaries. Thus, a certain degree of collective identification with Europe is necessary to treat fellow Europeans from other countries as legitimate voices in one's own national public sphere. We can call it "identity light," since it does not imply a deep sense of loyalty toward each other, but some minimum sense of belonging to the same community. In sum, a meaningful concept of a public sphere – whether local, national, European, or global – implies the emergence of a community of communication which presupposes some degree of collective identification with each other's fate. The issue at stake being discussed in public concerns 'us' as members of a community. We cannot remain neutral observers, but we have to take a stance in a community of communication. In the Haider case, this was the difference between the reports in the U.S. media (as neutral observers) and the reporting in Europe whereby media actively framed and participated in a debate of common concern.

Yet, it is important to qualify these statements so as to avoid misunderstandings. As argued above, communities of communication are social constructs that emerge during discursive practices. The same holds true for collective identities. I do not refer here to some primordial understanding of a European identity, but to an identification with fellow Europeans *in the course* of the debate itself. Thus, a European public sphere as a transnational community of communication creates a collective European identity in the process of arguing and debating the common European fate. It is not necessary that we, say, 'Europeanize' every single political issue that concerns us in order to adopt a European perspective and to establish a European community communication. Nobody asks Bavarians to discuss Bavarian politics as issues of common concern for *German* politics, even though one would appreciate that their externalities for German politics in general are being considered. What is required, though, is to debat issues of *German* politics as questions of common concern for the community rather than Bavarian or Lower Saxonian themes. The same holds true for a European public sphere. In a transnational European community of communication, one would expect European themes to be discussed as common themes for "us" as fellow Europeans. If this is meant by the "common European perspective" quoted above, we agree emphatically. Our own study of the "Haider debate" gives ample evidence that such a common perspective is indeed possible.

But how do we know a 'community of communication' presupposing some degree of collective identification when we see one? There seem to be two ways of measuring it. First, we can find out who the "we" is in whose name speakers communicate or to whom they refer in their utterances. We can also find out who the "they" is against whom the community is constructed or who is treated as outside the community. To what degree is a European "we" constructed and how does this relate to the national "we"? Second, it is possible to measure the degree to which national media not only use the same reference points, but *European* reference point and to measure the extent to which issues are framed as common European ones, as questions of common fate. Once again, there is no need to agree on anything here. "Common European perspective" only requires that policy questions are framed as issues of common transnational concern in the European public space. In our analysis of the "Haider debates," we found that across all media and countries Europe was framed as a moral community holding up the values of human rights and democracy, and as a legal community

in which the rule of law prevails. In this sense then, we found a "community of communication" during the "Haider debates."

Conclusions: An Emerging European Public Sphere

This paper argued that we can meaningfully speak of a European public sphere that extends beyond the national public spheres

1. if and when the same (European) themes are controversially debated at the same time at similar levels of attention across national public spheres and media;

2. if and when similar frames of reference, meaning structures, and patterns of interpretation are used across national public spheres and media;

3. if and when a transnational community of communication emerges in which speakers and listeners recognize each other as legitimate participants in a common discourse that frames the particular issues as common European problems.

While a European public sphere implies a community of communication and some degree of collective identification of the speakers with each other, these are all social constructs that emerge through discursive practices.

If we use these criteria to interpret the empirical state of the art on a European public sphere, the conclusion seems to be clear: We can see an emerging European public sphere. It might not always be as obvious as in the case of the "Haider debate." It might also be fragile, fragmented, and constrained to particular sets of issues. But it is remarkable that similar reference points and meaning structures emerge, when people debate European issues, irrespective of one's particular viewpoint in the issue at question. And there is increasing evidence for an emerging community of communication whereby European themes are discussed as issues that concern "us by virtue of our common Europeanness." There is little evidence that media reporting about Europe and the EU varies dramatically from one national public sphere to the other, as far as the frames of interpretation are concerned.

The policy conclusions are equally clear: Many political and business leaders in Europe believe that controversial debates on Europe, the EU, and European policies will endanger the European integration process and slow it down considerably. Therefore, one should not touch

the European elite consensus which still prevails in many, particularly Continental European countries. This belief is dangerous in democratic terms and wrong in empirical terms. Contestation and politicization is constitutive for a democratic polity including the European polity. And it serves a European purpose, since it is bound to increase the issue salience and significance of European affairs in the national polities. The data on frames of reference suggest that raising the salience of the EU in the national polities will not drive the Europeans apart, but pull them together in a European public sphere. Interestingly enough, data on the evolution of European identity point in a similar direction (Herrmann et al., forthcoming). The higher the salience of European issues in people's daily lives, the more people tend to identify with Europe.

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Appendix A: List of the newspapers

	Austria	Belgium	France	Germany	Italy	USA
Quality	Die Presse DP, der Standard DS(A)	de Standaard DS(B), le Soir	le Figaro LF, le Monde LM	die FAZ, die Süddeutsche SZ	il Corriere IC, la Repubblica LR	the Washington Post WP, the New York Times NYT
Popular	Neue Kronen-zeitung NKZ		le Parisien LP		la Nazione LN	