

Will Europe Work?

Integration, employment and the
social order

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8 Missing a European public sphere¹

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In December 1999 the European Council resolved to take up membership negotiations with Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Romania, Slovakia, and Turkey after already having taken them up with Estonia, Poland, Slovenia, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Cyprus in 1998. As a result, the EU is to be expanded by thirteen countries. If one proceeds from the premise that the difficulties of integration are proportionate to the differences between EU countries on the one hand and candidates for accession on the other, then one can expect that eastward enlargement of the EU will not be an easy task. Not only is there a smoldering foreign policy and military conflict between Greece and Turkey, not only are the democratic traditions quite different in these countries, above all there are great economical differences between some candidates (e.g. Romania and Bulgaria) and the present EU countries with consequences in terms of, among others, possible migration movements and transfer payments.

But the European Council not only resolved an enlargement of the European Union but also speeded up the internal consolidation of integration. The size and composition of the European Commission, the vote distribution in the Council, and the range of voting with a qualified majority are to be changed and expanded. The consolidation is supposed to increase the EU's ability to function; that means in essence further allocation of competences to the level of the EU at the cost of sovereignty of the member states. In the future, the citizens of the member countries will be even more directly subject to the EU's decisions and less to those of their respective nation-states. The EU is thus increasingly a supranational regime whose decisions will directly affect the citizens' lives.

It is astonishing, in view of the dramatic changes and potential conflicts in connection with the EU's planned eastward enlargement and internal consolidation, how little the public sphere reacted to the resolutions of the European Council. Indeed, the media reported about it comprehensively as about every other European summit meeting but there were and there are no broad debates about the pros and cons of an enlargement and consolidation, about possible conflicts, decision blockades in the Council, migration movements, etc. The media's attention quickly turned to new subjects when the summit meeting was over. It is by example of the Helsinki resolutions that this article discusses the near absence of a European public sphere.

The theoretical approach that I have chosen in order to analyze the absence of a European public sphere is a macro-sociological perspective that is treated in the literature under the term of globalization. I will analyze the development of the public sphere in conjunction with the development of other subsystems of a society, especially the economic and the political system. The line of argument will be laid out in the following steps. In a first step, I define the terms globalization and transnationalization. I then confine myself in the following empirical sections to analyzing the fields of economy, politics, and the public sphere of the Federal Republic of Germany, because only for these fields is empirical data available. I will analyze in the second section to what extent the economy has been transnationalized over time (1950–96). In the third section I pursue the question whether politics have been transnationalized over time and – in respect to politics and economy – whether the markets have run away from political control. The results will show that there indeed has been a moderate process of transnationalization of the economy, but this turns out to be primarily a process of Europeanization that is accompanied by a parallel process of Europeanization of the political system. In the fourth section I pursue the question to which extent the public sphere has become transnationalized or Europeanized and Europeanized politics have run away from being controlled by a still nationally based public sphere. The results will show that the development of a European public sphere really does lag behind the process of a Europeanized political system. I examine the causes of the empirically diagnosed lag of a European public sphere in the fifth section in order to draw a conclusion in the sixth section.

1. What does globalization or transnationalization mean?

Globalization refers to the idea that we live in a globalized world or are on the way towards a globalized society. The boom of the concept of globalization is – as so often with fashionable concepts – connected with the diagnosis of a crisis. The potential crisis that is ascribed to the processes of globalization results mainly from assumed control problems of the political system. While politics – and with that political control – is still based on and limited by the borders of the nation-state, economics as well as other parts of society have liberated themselves from the confines of the nation-state and have become globalized. The previously existing congruence between economic borders of trade and the political borders of regulations has dissolved. Enterprises invest where conditions for high returns are the best but pay taxes where the tax rate is the lowest; stock holders are supposedly withdrawing more and more from politics that are bound to national borders.

In spite of the wide circulation of the term globalization there is no consensus about what is to be understood by it. I think the following specifications of the term make sense.

- 1 The term globalization will be substituted in the following text by that of transnationalization (de Swaan 1995); other authors speak of denationalization of a society (Zürn 1998; Beisheim *et al.* 1999). This change of terms has

the advantage of defining a starting point for developments – namely societies constituted as nation-states – and at the same time leaving the reference point of the development open: the term transnationalization does not conceptually prejudge whether societies are empirically globalizing, Europeanizing, or Americanizing themselves.

- 2 Furthermore, I will work on the principle that nationally constituted societies can be best comprehended in their internal structures as consisting of various fields or subsystems: economics, politics, public sphere, science, and art, among others, each forms a different subsystem in a nationally constituted society. When examining a society's transnationalization with the concept of differentiation into various subsystems, it allows us to distinguish various grades and levels of each subsystem's transnationalization and to examine their relationships to one another.
- 3 Transnationalization is defined as a relational concept in accordance with the early work of Karl Deutsch (1959) that relates the interactions or transactions within a nation-state to interactions and transactions with units from the outside. Defining the term in such a way takes the fact into account that in addition to transnational communication internal (national) communication can have increased as well, which would not be taken into consideration in an absolute measurement of transnationalization processes.

In sum, transnationalization is defined as the ratio between outer interaction and internal interaction of a social subsystem of a society. The process category transnationalization of a society would mean that the subsystems of a nation-state have increasingly become transnational in the sense that the shares of border-crossing interactions have increased, whereby it is an open question what the reference point of the development is. I have oriented my empirical analyses in the following sections by this definition, but I limit the analysis to the three subsystems – politics, economy, and the public sphere – in the Federal Republic of Germany and ask to what degree they have been transnationalized and how the relationships to one another can be qualified.

2. Level and development of transnationalization of the economy in the Federal Republic of Germany

Together with Jörg Rössel I have attempted to specify empirically the degree and the development of transnationalization processes of some subsystems of German society – art, science, economics, and politics – of the last forty years (cf. Gerhards and Rössel 1999). Here I will concentrate on the field of economics and the transactions that cross the border of the nationally constituted society of Germany from without (to within). Similar to other subsystems, the field of economics is differentiated into different sub-fields. Therefore it seems appropriate to speak of an inner differentiation of the economic system and to distinguish between labor market, market for goods and services, investment market and stock market.

The development of the different subsystems of the economic system and their level of transnationalization can be seen in Figure 8.1.² The level of transnationalization can vary from 0 percent to 100 percent. At 0 percent the respective subsystem remains completely closed nationally, there are no interactions to the external world, and at 100 percent there is a complete transnationalization.

The investment market shows the lowest level of transnationalization. We have calculated the transnationalization of production by the percentage of foreign direct investments in relation to total investments in Germany. At the time of the last survey in 1996 the percentage was 2.21. Conversely, almost 98 percent of the direct investments were domestic ones. For the labor market we calculated the percentage of foreign workers in relation to the total employees in Germany from 1955 to 1996. The percentage of foreign workers came to 5.72 at the time of the last survey in 1996. The labor market also remains limited within the nation-state. The level of transnationalization is higher for goods and services. For goods and services we calculated the percentage of the total imports in relation to the gross national product. In 1995 this quota came to 24.6 percent. In order to measure the transnationalization processes in the financial market, we calculated the share of foreign stocks sold in Germany to the total sales of stocks in Germany. The percentage of foreign stocks in relation to total stocks sold in Germany was 51.9 percent in 1996.

Figure 8.1 makes two analyses possible. On the one hand, one can compare different markets to one another. This comparison demonstrates that different segments of an economic system may have quite a varied level of transnationalization. The markets for labor and direct investments (transfer of companies) are

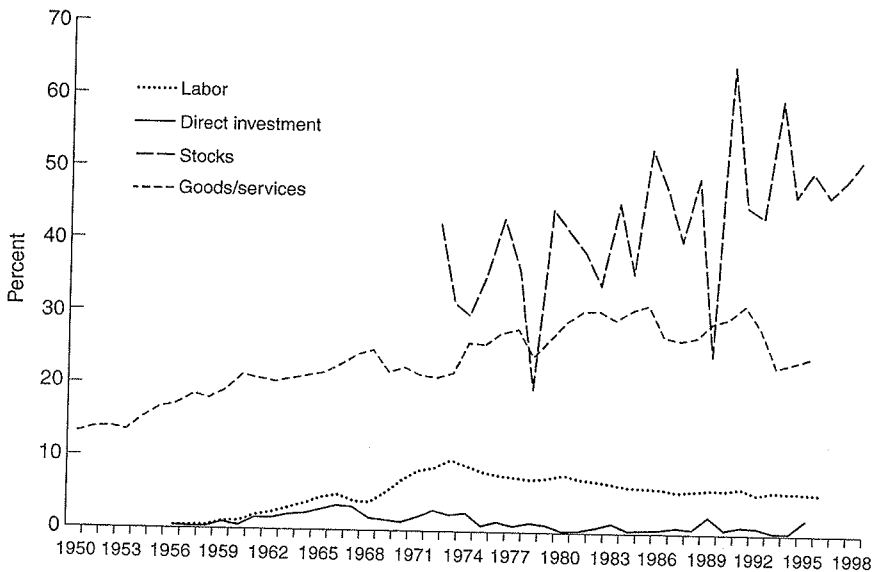


Figure 8.1 Transnationalization of the economy.

at the lower end of the scale, markets for goods and services in the middle, the financial markets at the upper end. Except for the stock market, one cannot very well speak of a transnationalization of the economy since the majority of the interactions remain limited within the nation-state. On the other hand, Figure 8.1 shows us the development of each economic segment over time. If one compares only the beginning and ending points then one can see that the German economy has indeed – with the exception of foreign direct investments – become increasingly transnationalized. As a rule, the process unfolds – with the exception of the financial market that always shows a high volatility – rather slowly and steadily, the rates of increase in all three segments are relatively small. As compared with the public debate about transnationalization the real development is actually rather slow and continuous, but still moving in the direction of an increasing transnationalization.

The fact that border-crossing interactions and transactions take place does not say anything about where these transactions come from, and where they go to. Where do the goods and services, the workers, the investments, the stocks, etc. come from that are imported? We examined the various transnational communications and transactions of the different sub-fields of the economic system as to how they were concentrated, first, on the EU countries and second, on Europe as a whole (for exact data cf. Gerhards and Rössel 1999). Approximately one-third of the foreign nationals in the work force come from EU countries, 87.8 percent come from Europe as a whole, including Turkey that is a candidate for membership in the EU. Almost two-thirds of the imported goods and services come from EU countries, and 71.6 percent come from Europe as a whole. And even when observing foreign direct investments in Germany, nearly half come from EU countries and almost two-thirds from Europe. Of the German direct investments abroad almost two-thirds go to the EU or somewhat more than two-thirds to the whole of Europe. We see that there is indeed a process of economic transnationalization which is, for the most part, a process of Europeanization with a strong concentration on the EU (cf. Hirst and Thompson 1998).

I draw the following interim conclusion: (1) The time comparison shows us that the markets for goods and services, stocks and partially also the labor market are moving in the direction of an increasing transnationalization; however, this process is rather slow and continuous and not quick and erratic, in contrast to the political and scientific debates on globalization. (2) Economic transnationalization means not globalization but rather Europeanization.

3. Transnationalization of the political system

The crisis diagnosis, which is connected to the globalization thesis, presumes that the transnationalization processes dodge the controlling powers of society's politics insofar as political control must stop at the nation-state's border whereas the interactions of other subsystems proceed increasingly across borders. A possible answer to the political control dilemma caused by the transnationalization of the economy is that the political system transnationalizes itself and that the authority

for collectively binding decisions is shifted to a higher level of transnational institutions. The odds for political control of transnational interactions would become increasingly favorable provided that the political system transnationalizes, namely in the direction of a Europeanization because this is really where the transnationalization of the economy has moved to. A Europeanization of politics could thus absorb a large part of transnationalization and thereby reestablish the congruence between the economic and the political system.

This is what appears to be happening with the increasing integration of the European Union. The members of the EU have handed over a part of their national sovereignty to the EU: the nation-states and their citizens are immediately affected by its resolutions; European law supersedes national law; the Commission supervises the implementation of its resolutions and the European Court of Justice can install sanctions upon member countries for non-compliance (Lepsius 1990).

One can attempt to determine empirically the extent of the nation-states' delegation of sovereignty to the EU. If one wishes to stick with the principle of a relational measurement one must relate the European decisions to the national political decisions. Marianne Beisheim *et al.* (1999) surveyed various indices of transnationalization of different fields.

For the political system they calculated the ratio of national decisions to European decisions. Figure 8.2 illustrates the ratio of laws and resolutions passed by the Council of the European Union to the laws passed by the German Parliament (Bundestag) over time. Unfortunately, the time series of the surveyed data only extends back to 1989.

Figure 8.2 shows that the ratio between decisions by the nation-state and EU-decisions has changed in favor of the EU over time which is an indication of the shift of political sovereignty from the nation-state to the EU. Apart from the increase in the proportion of European decisions in relation to decisions on the nation-state level there is an extension of the EU through the creation of a new system of political institutions.³

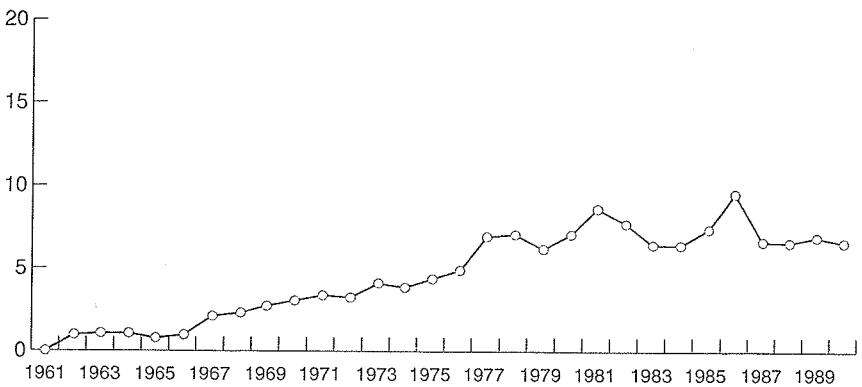


Figure 8.2 Transnationalization of the political system (laws and resolutions passed by the European Council in relation to the laws passed by the German Parliament).

Are politics therefore overcome by the supposed globalization processes of the economy? The empirical results show that the political system has been transnationalized in the same direction as the economy, indeed politics have decisively contributed to the Europeanization of the economy. Transnationalization is foremostly a Europeanization of both domains. Control problems can be resolved by this congruence between politics and economy, or at least the conditions for such a solution have been created.

4. Transnationalization of the public sphere

Before I present empirical data on the transnationalization of the public sphere I must draw attention to some theoretical remarks on the relationship between the public sphere and the political system. A democratic political system means that the production of collectively binding decisions is linked to the citizens' interests. In a representative democracy such a coupling occurs, as is generally known, first and foremost by elections. The citizens of a certain territory elect at periodic intervals persons who take up governing positions and who are authorized to make and enforce generally binding decisions for them. However, these elected persons can also be dismissed from their governing positions at the next election if the citizens do not feel adequately represented.

In order for citizens to be able to make or revise an election decision they must have the chance to acquire adequate information on their representatives and their competitors as well as their actions and platforms. Correspondingly, Robert Dahl (1989: 111 f.) calls the chance to acquire adequate information one of the criteria for a democratic process and terms it "enlightened understanding". It is exactly this function of imparting adequate information that is, among others, the role of a political public sphere. A great number of studies have shown us that, above all, the mass media are the central institutions of information supplies between citizens and politics and that the citizens make adequate use of this possibility: over 80 percent of German citizens get their daily information on politics via one of the media of television, radio, and newspapers, many use several media daily to get their political information (cf. Berg and Kiefer 1996: 183). The mass media are therefore the citizens' most important sources of information on politics.

On the level of the nation-state there exists a congruence between citizens, decision makers, and the public sphere. There is a congruence between the decision makers and citizens insofar as those who can elect the governing powers are also those that are subject to the decisions made by those governing powers. There is a congruence between the public sphere and politics insofar as the media spreads information on the decision makers and their competitors and the citizens can form their opinions based on this information.

This congruence may have begun to sway with the transnationalization of the political system (in the sense of shifting power from the nation-states to the EU) which can become manifest in a democracy deficit on the one hand and a deficit of the public sphere on the other. The *democracy deficit* of the EU is to be found in the fact the addressees of decisions by the EU are not identical to the "demos"

that has elected the decision makers: the European Council as an assembly of the member-countries' heads of government and the Council of the European Union consisting of the member countries' ministers have not been elected by the European people directly but have been indirectly legitimized via national elections. This is discussed commonly in the literature as the EU's democracy deficit (for a systematic summary see Benz 1998).

A *deficit of the public sphere* exists when more and more political decisions are not made by the nation-states but by the EU, but public debate is about national issues and does not, or only to a limited degree, inform about European decisions and discussions. The consequence would be that the citizens are not adequately informed about the discussions and decisions that they are directly affected by. An "enlightened understanding" in Dahl's sense would therefore be unlikely. In the following, I will concentrate on this deficit of the public sphere.

That political decisions have shifted from the nation-state to the European level was described in the previous section. Whether the public sphere in Germany has been Europeanized in its reporting is an empirically open question. One can imagine two different models of a European public sphere: the model of a cross-national European public sphere on the one hand and the concept of the Europeanization of national public spheres on the other (cf. Gerhards 1993).⁴ In the following I will only discuss the concept of a Europeanizing of national public spheres. Empirically it is quite improbable that a cross-national European public sphere will develop (cf. Gerhards 2000).

Up to now, we have not collected any time-series data on media coverage that could help to describe the rate of transnationalization and Europeanization of the public sphere; but thankfully we can fall back on data that Hans Mathias Kepplinger gathered (Kepplinger 1998).⁵ Kepplinger reconstructed the reports on politics in the quality newspapers *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, and *WELT* from 1951 to 1995. Kepplinger differentiates in his analysis various themes to report on. The following thematic fields were aggregated into three upper categories: (1) national German affairs (including those concerning East German–West German relations); (2) themes from the field of European relations; and (3) themes from the field of other international relations. Figure 8.3 shows the development of these three thematic fields over time.

On average, 60.4 percent of the subjects that were reported on in the analyzed media had to do with German internal affairs, so 39.6 percent were transnational subjects. This very high level of transnationalization of media coverage is due to the fact that only quality newspapers were analyzed; their transnational orientation is much higher than that of average newspapers (cf. Deutsch 1959).

If one examines in a first step the share of German themes to transnational themes (European and non-European subjects) then one cannot make out a clear direction of change. In the period from 1960 to 1985 the proportion of transnational themes does increase so that one can speak of a slight increase in the transnationalization of the West German public sphere, but from 1986 on (more exactly: 1989 with the Wall coming down and the reunification in the following year) there was a strong increase in national themes at the expense of

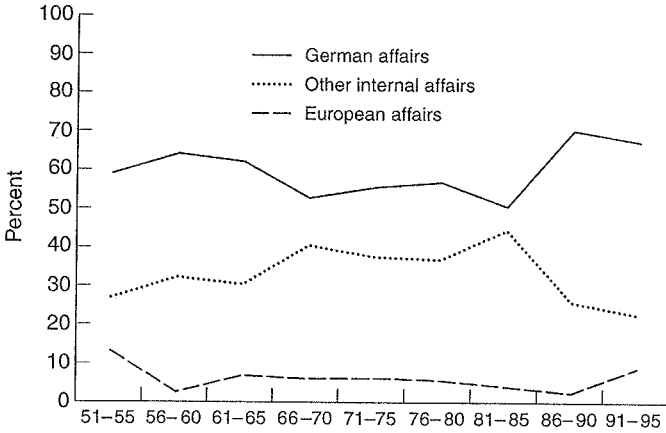


Figure 8.3 Europe in the mass media.

transnational themes. In fact, the fixation of the public sphere on national issues reached an as yet untold high-point in German history.⁶ At least after 1986 the West German public sphere's attention developed in the opposite direction as the economy and the political system did, i.e. the public sphere became fixed on internal matters while the economic actions and political decisions transnationalized.

This change looks slightly different if one compares the European themes to other transnational themes and internal German affairs. The European themes are the ones of all three thematic fields which got the least media attention. Their average proportion value was 6.9 percent over the years. The media's attention decreased continuously in the period 1961-90, in order to return lately to the value of the period of 1961-65. So, while political decisions became increasingly transnationalized and above all Europeanized, the public sphere has continued to lag behind this development and still lingers within the nation-state. Hence, the data gathered by Hans Mathias Kepplinger does not show a Europeanization of Germany's national public sphere. However, one must bear in mind that Kepplinger's content analysis was not laid out for the questions analyzed here so that my interpretations are to be taken with caution. More precise studies are necessary in order to examine whether the conclusions drawn here can be confirmed empirically.

5. Possible reasons for the absence of a European public sphere

If the preliminary impression should be confirmed that the national public sphere has remained fixed mainly on national issues and has not become Europeanized, then the question arises as to the reasons for these findings. The media's attention

to issues generally depends on three factors: the motivation for public relations work and activities by collective actors; the news value of the information; and finally journalistic activities. In reference to all of these factors one can diagnose deficits with regard to the reporting on European issues.

1 The Commission's orientation towards the media is rather weak due to structural reasons. The commissioners are not elected by Europe's citizens; they primarily need backing by their respective national governments that nominated them, and do not require to be supported by citizen voters. Therefore the necessity to acquire approval from the citizens via the media is not given, and the Commission's structurally caused abstinence from the public sphere is the result. In addition, the Commission develops the propositions in the law-making process in closed session, the public being excluded. The propositions are represented – following the collegial principle – by the Commission as a whole. The exclusion of the public as well as the collegial principle of the Commission are factors that hardly favor the Commission's publicity orientation. Finally, the Commission's public relations are not homogenized and synchronized enough and are partially also not organized professionally (Gramberger and Lehmann 1995; Meyer 1999). Christoph Olaf Meyer recounts that while the budget for public relations tripled from 34.9 million to 102.5 million Euro in the years 1992 to 1998 the structural deficits in public relations work that are based on its fragmented structure were not eliminated. There is a similar diagnosis with regard to professionalism in the Commission's public relations activities (Gramberger and Lehmann: 1995; Gramberger 1997).

It is true that the institutionalized counterweight to the Commission and the Council of European Union, the European Parliament, has a stronger publicity orientation, but it is only equipped with weak power resources to make decisions and decision intentions of the Council and the Commission to publicly debated issues. It is true that the European Parliament's rights have been extended but it still remains a relatively weak institution in comparison to the Commission and the Council.

2 The European Union has been described by various authors as being a dynamic multi-level system (cf. Jachtenfuchs and Kohler-Koch 1996). By this the authors mean that there is a pluralization of control levels that extends from the local level via the nation-states up to the different institutions of the EU. Intertwining relations such as these do not easily reveal a distinct actor who alone is competent for making decisions and to whom responsibility can be attributed (Lepsius 1997). Therefore, the important personalization of politics for media resonance is hampered. In addition, the very complex decision-making processes of the EU that are ruled by an administrative rationale (Bach 1999) are hardly transparent and are lacking in many news-relevant factors on which the media orient the selection of their information. So ultimately the EU remains without profile and overly complex and this impedes media reports on it.

- 3 Finally, reporting on issues depends on journalistic activities. To my knowledge there is no empirical data available at this time as to whether these are different or weaker in Brussels than in Berlin or other capitals (for England cf. Morgan 1995). For the beginning of the 1990s I found in a small field study that the German media institutions were quite weakly represented in Brussels (Gerhards 1993) and respectively the journalists' research activities were very limited with regard to personnel.

6. Conclusion and prospects

The empirical analyses have shown that the markets for goods and services, stocks and partially also the labor market demonstrate as a rule slowly moving trends towards an increase in transnationalization. These transnationalization processes in the economic system are not globalization processes but primarily Europeanization processes. One can also find transnationalization processes in the field of politics; moreover, the empirical findings show that politics has been transnationalized in the same direction as the economy. The European unification process means a continuous shift of national sovereignty to the institutions of the EU. This congruence between politics and economy creates at least the conditions to resolve a political control of economic problems. The public sphere has developed in a different way. Even though the empirical data situation is more scant here, the findings show that the public sphere is still nationally bound: the media does not increasingly report on Europe over time. There is an incongruence between a Europeanization of political decisions on the one hand and media coverage of European politics on the other. The public sphere lags behind the transnationalization of the political system; it remains nationally bound while politics has been Europeanized.

Our empirical analyses of the public sphere end in 1995. Since then the focus on European themes may have changed. Even the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty had an enormous response in the media in those countries in which the people were directly polled – as opposed to Germany. The Commission intensified its public relations activities in the 1990s, especially after 1994; this is shown on the one hand by the amount of budgetary means that were spent on information politics (Gramberger 1997: 270) and on the other hand by the professionalization of its public relations activities. Besides the Maastricht crisis it was the introduction of a new currency (EURO) in eleven states on one hand and the reproaches of fraud and mismanagement against the European Commission led by President Santer on the other, which have led to high rates of media coverage. What structural conditions triggered this media coverage and what can we learn from this for the future development of the public sphere?

The fact that there was a wide public debate on the Maastricht Treaty in those countries in which a referendum was held shows to what extent the democracy deficit of the EU and the deficit of the public sphere are interdependent. At those times when the citizens had greater opportunities to decide on European matters the public debate on Europe was also much wider. Therefore one can

assume that a stronger democratization of the EU would lead to a Europeanization of the public sphere at the same time.⁷ An extension of the citizens' decision power will force the political actors to legitimize their actions via the media. Similar to the extension and strengthening of the public sphere during the process of democratization of the nation-states one can expect that the democratization of the EU would speed up the development of a European public sphere. And democratization of the EU is on the EU's future agenda. Should this succeed then one can expect an intensifying of public debate on Europe in the media.

How the Santer Commission was forced to resign by public pressure in March 1999 is insofar an instructive case because other structural parameters create the media coverage. Christoph Olaf Meyer (2000) reconstructed the case. The media coverage resulted above all from changes in the cooperation between journalists in Brussels. The Commission's offenses were put on the agenda by the alliance of a multinational group of journalists who researched in terms of investigative journalism the disappearance of EU funds in Luxembourg, exchanging information, coordinating their publications in their respective native newspapers, therefore determining the coverage of the media, triggering intermedia-agenda-setting-effects, and protecting themselves from sanctions from their editorial departments and the Commission by forming a social group. In addition, there was close cooperation between the journalists and some of the representatives of the European Parliament which increased the pressure on the Commission. Whether this special type of alliance of the structurally "weak" (of journalists from different countries on the one hand and members of parliament on the other) will be durable and whether it will contribute to a Europeanization of the public sphere remains to be seen.

Notes

- 1 This article is an abridged and revised version of an article published in German (cf. Gerhards 2000) and was translated by Catya de Laczkovich. In the first part, I refer to data and analyses that I gathered and analyzed with Jörg Rössel (cf. Gerhards and Rössel 1999). I wish to thank Hans Mathias Kepplinger for providing me with the data on the development of media coverage in Germany.
- 2 The figures are taken from the statistical yearbooks, the capital market statistics and the monthly reports of the German Federal Bank.
- 3 Wolfgang Wessels (1997: 267) calculated various indices to measure the EU's increase in competence.
- 4 For further differentiation see van de Steeg 1999.
- 5 Holger Sievert (1998) presents the best overview on the current state of research in his dissertation. Unfortunately, the data that Sievert gathered does not allow for an analysis of the development of the media's attention on Europe.
- 5 The increase in domestic political themes in the period 1986-90 refers primarily to the years 1989 and 1990.
- 7 This is not a normative statement but a hypothesis. That a democratization of the EU will again be subject to prerequisites and many resulting problems is shown by, among others, Peter Graf Kielmannsegg (1996), Joseph Weiler (1991), and Fritz Scharpf (1998).

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