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## Europe-Topics in Europe's Media

### The Debate about the European Public Sphere: A Meta-Analysis of Media Content Analyses

■ *Marcel Machill, Markus Beiler and Corinna Fischer*

#### ABSTRACT

■ The existence of a European public sphere is often disputed – not only in communication and media science. A common thesis in research is that a European public sphere can be constituted via the Europeanization of reporting in the national media. On the basis of a qualitatively oriented meta-analysis, this article aims to answer the question whether such Europeanization is taking place in European countries. With reference to 17 studies analysing media content from several European countries, the empirical research carried out in German, English and French since the beginning of the 1990s is systematically evaluated. All of the studies examined compare European topics being reported in the media in different European countries. The meta-analysis shows that in the 15 member states of the European Union prior to the 2004 enlargement, developmental tendencies of differing degrees towards a Europeanization of the national public spheres are discernible. Overall, EU topics account for an extremely small proportion of the reporting in the particular national media. Players at EU level only feature in minor roles. It can be concluded that the public spheres of the EU states continue to exhibit a strong national orientation. Keeping in mind that there has been little

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empirical research in this field so far, the results of this analysis are a first step towards a systematization of the existing research – at a time when the debate about a European public sphere becomes even more important against the background of the ongoing expansion of the EU. ■

**Key Words** European public sphere, European Union, media content analysis, media culture, meta-analysis

### Introduction and presentation of the problem

More than one-third of citizens in the European Union are of the opinion that the national media attach too little significance to EU topics. This is the conclusion drawn by the European Commission in its Eurobarometer survey<sup>1</sup> (European Commission, 2004: 22). And yet there were enough opportunities for the media to report on the ongoing political integration in Europe: in 2004, the EU experienced the greatest enlargement in its history, and 342 million eligible voters elected a new European parliament. In addition, the debate on a constitution for the political and economic community continues.

In the EU member states, elections to the national parliament are considered 'big events', which are covered in advance in talk shows, special programmes and special features in the press (Medien Tenor, 2002: 8). The media do not just assume the role of observers here: 'Today . . . the impressions relevant to elections are mainly conveyed by media reporting' (Brettschneider, 2002: 37; for a detailed discussion, see Schulz, 1998). In the national media system, television, radio, print and Internet media make available as a matter of course information on the parties and their political programmes – after all, the politicians standing for election will be determining the fortunes of their country in the coming years.

Important political decisions at the level of the nation-state are therefore associated with the national public sphere. Public sphere in the sense of political public sphere is 'an intermediate system which mediates between society or its sub-systems and the political system or its core, the state administration' (Tobler, 2001: 8). Against a background of increasing European integration (Weidenfeld, 2001: 20), the issue of a European public sphere that fulfils similar functions assumes ever greater significance (see also Hagen, 2004; Lünenborg, 2000: 391).

Two views of the European public sphere, presented in greater detail in the following section, are found in the current discussion within communication and media science: one starts from an ideal image of a European public sphere that is independent of individual states, whereas

the other view lets it emerge as a result of a Europeanization of national publics (Gerhards, 1993: 100). Important in this connection is also the so-called public deficit of the EU, which is accompanied by a democracy deficit (see Trezn, 2002: 11; Kantner, 2003: 213). The public role of the media in modern and complex societies acquires special significance due to the fact that the citizens are essentially dependent on the information provided by the media (see Neidhardt, 1994: 10).

An analysis of media reporting as an essential indicator therefore recommends itself when attempting to answer empirically the question about the existence of a European public sphere. Content analysis can answer questions about which topics occur, when, in which media, about which states and how frequently. In this way, it is possible to examine which information on EU politics is made available to the citizens of Europe via the media. The extent to which the recipients also use the information and the effect that it has cannot, of course, be answered solely by means of a content analysis (Merten, 1995: 29; Früh, 2001: 42). It is, nevertheless, possible to describe the source of information on the EU that is crucial for most of its citizens and therefore the basis of potential effects (see also Wiesner, 1990: 161).

In order to be able to search extensively for signs of the existence or development of a European public sphere, it would be desirable to conduct comparative analyses of media reporting in as many European states as possible over the longest period possible. However, for reasons of research economics, it would be hardly possible to undertake such a research project. All the content analyses of media reporting on the topic 'European public sphere' performed so far have also had to make a selection. Nevertheless, the studies available that compare partial aspects and periods of time as well as the media reporting of a selection of states each provide a piece of the puzzle regarding the question of the European public sphere. The investigations that have already been performed can therefore be utilized in their totality if they are systematized and evaluated by means of a meta-analysis. This is the research approach pursued here.

Before explaining the theoretical background and the methodological implementation of the analysis, it is necessary to clarify what is to be understood by 'Europe' when the expression European public sphere is used. In this study, 'Europe' is used synonymously with the term 'European Union'. The borders of the EU are identical to those of the EU of the 15 member states prior to enlargement in May 2004. This definition is determined by the material available.

## Theoretical background

### *Europe, democracy and public sphere*

The debate about the European public sphere is regarded as fundamental for the preservation or the realization of democracy in the merging Europe as, for example, Kantner explains:

The public deficit of the European Union is considered to lie at the heart of the European democracy deficit. Answering the question about the conditions for the constitution of a European public sphere is therefore essential for answering the question about the democratizability of European governance. (Kantner, 2003: 213)

From the point of view of political science and jurisprudence, the existence of a democracy and legitimacy deficit in the EU is undisputed (e.g. Beetham and Lord, 1998; Majone, 1998; for an overview, see Meyer, 2002: 39). Briefly summarized, this deficit arises from the fact that the EU member states are handing over an increasing number of state responsibilities to institutions such as the European Council, the Council of Ministers or the Commission without democratic legitimization by the citizens of Europe of the decisions taken by those in authority (e.g. Giering, 2001: 116).

Scientific consideration of the topic 'European public sphere' proves difficult: usually, ideas of a public sphere are based on the model of the nation-state (Imhof, 2003: 205; Gerhards, 2000: 54). Although the EU undeniably exhibits some characteristics of a state structure, it is, however, still considered to be a new type of protagonist and not a state (Hrbek, 1998: 143). And, of course, the peoples that live in the territory of the EU belong to different nations, nationalities and nation-states. It is therefore obvious that the existing models of public sphere cannot apply here without being adapted to the conditions that obtain in the EU.

A further problem surfaces: since its foundation, the EU, as a political structure, has found itself in a process of transformation, not only with regard to its inner constitutional order but also in terms of its continuous 'growth' through the addition of new member states. Whoever talks about any type of a European public sphere must in each case take into consideration the current status: is it still a question of the EU of the 12 as in 1993 when Jürgen Gerhards wrote his essay on 'West-European Integration and the Difficulties with the Emergence of a European Public Sphere' (Gerhards, 1993; emphasis added)? Or is it the case of the EU now comprising 25 states? This crucial aspect of a

constantly changing EU territory must be considered when making statements about the European public sphere.

*Two models of a European public sphere*

In the theoretical debate about the existence of a European public sphere, two recurring fundamental ideas are discernible (e.g. Gerhards, 1993: 100; van de Steeg, 2000: 62). Accordingly, a European public sphere is conceivable:

1. As a pan-European public sphere independent of individual states; or
2. As a European public sphere that emerges as a result of the Europeanization of the national public spheres.

Fundamentally, it can be seen that the existence of a European public sphere (whatever its specific appearance) is rejected by the majority of authors (e.g. Sievert, 1998: 18; Gerhards, 2000: 46). In many cases, there is even talk of a public deficit (see Baerns and Raupp, 2000: 39; Meyer, 2000: 107):

A public deficit, that is to be distinguished from a democracy deficit, would exist when political decisions were taken increasingly frequently not by the nation-states but by the institutions of the EU while the reporting to the public remained bound to the nation-state and only considered to a small extent the European decisions and discussions of the decision-makers there: the consequence would be that the citizens would not be sufficiently informed about the decisions and discussions which nevertheless directly affect them. (Gerhards, 2002: 141)

As is seen in the following sections, the model of the pan-European public sphere that is independent of individual states requires different conditions from the model of the Europeanization of the national public spheres. Nonetheless, it is also the more ambitious, the one that is more difficult to achieve and yet the 'more ideal' (Gerhards, 1993: 100).

*A pan-European public sphere* The prevailing view in communication research is that a pan-European public sphere independent of individual states does not exist (e.g. Gerhards, 2002: 142). Occasionally described as a 'utopia' (van de Steeg, 2003: 171), it is also regarded as relatively improbable that there will be a development towards it in the medium term (Gerhards, 2002: 142).

The most important precondition here is the *existence of a common language* in which the EU citizens can communicate with one another

(Grimm, 1995: 42; Kielmansegg, 1996: 55; Kantner, 2002: 98ff.). Such a language is, however, missing (Kielmansegg, 1994: 27ff.). Although English is the most widespread language in the EU states, as EU citizens indicated in December 2000 during the Eurobarometer survey (European Commission, 2001: 1), English cannot be regarded as the language of the masses and is by no means the lingua franca for the entire EU area.

The language aspect is to be seen in connection with the second precondition for a pan-European public sphere that is independent of individual states: *the existence of mass media* (or other public forums) *with an EU-wide reach* (Ruß-Mohl, 2000: 130; Kantner, 2002: 95; Díez Medrano, 2003: 193). The assumption is therefore that since there is no language that all Europeans have command of to the same extent, there also cannot be any Europe-wide mass media via which the citizens of the various states can communicate with each other. There only exist a few media, each with a low readership or audience, which have a pan-European approach or are distributed, at least in part, with largely identical content in different EU states, such as the *Financial Times*, *The Economist*, the *European Voice* (Kevin and Schlesinger, 2000) or, in the case of the audiovisual media, the television news station Euronews (Machill, 1998: 434). Experiments to produce a European 'Television without Frontiers' (Meckel, 1994) such as Eurikon and Europa TV, which were intended to promote the integration process in Europe (see Kleinsteuber and Rossmann, 1994; Siebenhaar, 1994), have failed in particular because of the language aspect (see Beiler, 2000: 14).

Closely associated with the lack of EU-wide media, *the lack of a uniform journalistic and media culture in the EU states* is often cited (Sievert, 1998: 78; see also Wiesner, 1990). It comprises the self-image of journalists, how journalists are judged by others, the organization of journalistic work, the scientific discourse on journalism, the training of journalists, the comparison of journalistic products as well as basic social and legal conditions (Machill, 1997: 13). Added to these are the different historically formed ethical standards to which journalists submit themselves or their understanding of their role (Sievert, 1998: 88). All of this produces a situation in which a German journalist may understand the term 'news item' differently from a Spanish or British journalist (Machill, 1998: 432).

Since neither a uniform European language nor Europe-wide media exist, the most important preconditions for the existence of a pan-European public sphere are absent. Consequently, the model of a European public sphere that emerges as a result of a Europeanization of the national publics is now presented.

*A European public sphere as a result of the Europeanization of national publics* A European public sphere that emerges as a result of the public spheres of the EU member states being Europeanized is considered a possibility by some authors (Kantner, 2002: 121; Gerhards, 2002: 142; see Hasebrink, 1995). EU media policy also needs to be mentioned in this connection (Meckel, 1994; Siebenhaar, 1994; see also Venturelli, 1993): the quota rule in the so-called Television Directive (Council of the European Communities, 1989, 1997) can be interpreted as an attempt to produce a certain Europeanization of the national television stations by means of European media regulation. Accordingly, broadcasters must 'reserve for European works . . . a majority proportion of their transmission time' (Art. 4 Sect. 1).<sup>2</sup>

According to Gerhards, Europeanization would take place precisely when 'in the national public spheres, over time, reporting increasingly focused on the European decisions and the elites taking the decision' (Gerhards, 2002: 142). In Gerhards' view, primarily, Europeanization is indicated by an increase in the reporting of European topics in the national media. Four indicators are frequently cited for the more precise determination of the term Europeanization. These are presented in the following in slightly simplified form:

- *First indicator: Protagonists in the EU enter into a debate with protagonists in other places* (Díez Medrano, 2003: 193;<sup>3</sup> van de Steeg, 2003: 178). Koopmans and Erbe (2003: 6) also call this *horizontal Europeanization*. The term describes communicative connections between protagonists of various EU member states via the national mass media. Within this definition, the EU is not understood as just a European central government. Instead, account is taken of the fact that the governments of the EU member states must look to the neighbouring states with regard to many of their decisions in order that a compromise is finally reached in Brussels.
- *Second indicator: Protagonists in different EU states participate in debates on the same topics and agree with regard to the delineation of the problem* (Díez Medrano, 2003: 193; van de Steeg, 2003: 178). This indicator is based on the previous one. It is directed towards the fact that a topic is discussed simultaneously in the media of several EU states. These debates strongly resemble each other. In an ideal scenario, the reporting in various EU states on topics with Europe-wide significance even takes place *synchronologically* (Sievert, 1998: 66; Grundmann et al., 2000: 300).

- *Third indicator: Protagonists from EU states enter into a debate with protagonists at the EU level.* Koopmans and Erbe (2003: 6) call this *vertical Europeanization*. It is encountered when there are communicative links between the national and the European level which are reflected in the respective national reporting.
- *Fourth indicator: Protagonists debate uniform aims and the same means from the perspective of the entire EU area* (Díez Medrano, 2003: 193).

At first glance, the empirical examination of these indicators appears to be more difficult than in the case of the aforementioned image of a pan-European public sphere. In this case it is obviously necessary to analyse the debates between the protagonists more precisely. Since communication at the level of the political public that is under examination here takes place in the main via the mass media (Brettschneider, 2002: 37), these debates can be followed and analysed on the basis of the content of national media. Accordingly, it is the intensification or the change in the reporting that should be analysed in order for any conclusions to be drawn about a possible Europeanization of the national public spheres or that the emergence of this type of European public sphere might be possible.

The approaches from current theoretical research that are brought together here do not provide any measure for the point from which a national public sphere can be regarded as 'completely Europeanized'. Consequently, in the case of the existence of one or more of the indicators, it is only possible to talk about Europeanization tendencies.

#### *Aim*

This study looks for signs of the existence or development of a European public sphere. The search takes place on the basis of the idea that a European public sphere can develop via the Europeanization of national public spheres, which are in turn essentially constituted via the national media. In this regard, national differences in the reporting of the media in the various EU states are likely. First, there is an examination of the intensity of the reporting by the national media with regard to (1) EU-related topics (Europeanization through synchronization), (2) actions and statements from EU protagonists (vertical Europeanization) and (3) other EU states (horizontal Europeanization), and second, an investigation of how it has developed over time. Third, it is asked whether the reporting on the EU in the national media intensifies at the point of certain EU-specific events, for example the introduction of the euro, and whether therefore a higher degree of Europeanization of the national public

spheres is present. The central importance in journalism of reporting that is oriented towards events results from the assumptions of the news value theory (e.g. Schulz, 1990; Staab, 1990; Galtung and Ruge, 1965). The methodological design by means of which these questions are to be answered is presented in the following section.

## Research design

### *Meta-analytical method*

The question of the existence and development of a European public sphere is examined using a meta-analytical approach since, for pragmatic research reasons, it is not possible to perform one's own extensive content analysis that includes all EU states, compares many media with each other and encompasses a fairly long period of time (see with regard to the research strategies of internationally comparative studies, Wirth and Kolb, 2003). However, meta-analysis enables a large part of existing media content analyses on this topic to be summarized systematically and analysed with regard to the research question.

A meta-analytical research strategy is infrequently applied in communication and media science. In the related disciplines, too (e.g. Hunter and Schmidt, 1990; Glass et al., 1981), meta-analyses often only relate to the comparative evaluation of almost completely identical investigations, e.g. the results of extremely similarly designed experiments. A rough definition of meta-analysis is provided by Kiecolt and Nathan:

Meta-analysis integrates the findings from a universe (or sample) of investigations of some phenomenon. That is, the study itself becomes the unit of analysis. . . . Meta-analysis has been used primarily to evaluate experimental research in psychology and education, but the technique may also be applied to research in other disciplines. (Kiecolt and Nathan, 1985: 10)

In the present study, the challenge of the meta-analytical procedure lies in particular in making the different approaches of the studies included accessible to the question at issue. The quality criteria of scientific research, namely a systematic procedure and intersubjective comprehensibility (see Brosius and Koschel, 2003), must, of course, be observed. For the purpose of the comparison of various studies, an analysis framework in the form of a research-oriented question catalogue was developed.<sup>4</sup> The research tools primarily aim to present the results of the studies so that their contents can be interpreted. The results found in

the studies were compared systematically, keeping in mind the different research designs. The procedure in this meta-analysis is therefore qualitative in nature.

#### *Selection of the studies for analysis*

The subject of this meta-analysis are 17 existing studies on media content that, in the widest sense, concern themselves with the phenomenon of the European public sphere. The results of these studies constitute a comprehensive database for the meta-analysis. However, pragmatic research conditions imposed limits on the selection of the studies. Limiting factors were the languages known by the authors and the searchability of the studies. The selection criteria that resulted in the 17 studies in total were as follows:

- The study must be comparative, i.e. the media of at least two EU states must have been analysed.
- A content analysis of media reporting must have been performed in the study.
- The study must have been published after 1990<sup>5</sup> because it is since about this time that intensive research in the area of the European public sphere has been conducted.<sup>6</sup> Studies published up to the end of November 2003, when the meta-analysis started, were included.<sup>7</sup>
- The subject of the studies must be the political reporting by the media since this corresponds to the understanding of public sphere as a political public sphere, which forms the basis of the current study.
- In addition, the study must concern the European public sphere directly or the EU itself (for example, in the form of its policy or institutions) or a topic field must have been investigated that is important throughout the EU or for the public of several EU states.<sup>8</sup>
- The study must be in a language in which the authors are proficient (German, English or French).<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, due to pragmatic research reasons only studies could be selected that were at all searchable, because they were quoted in the relevant literature or listed in electronic databases.<sup>10</sup> In addition, publication texts of the studies had to be available.<sup>11</sup> Considering these criteria, a broad database for the meta-analysis was created by including the 17 most significant studies in this field.

Some of the studies were available in different versions, i.e. in different languages and scope. Use was always made here of the most detailed presentation, with preference given to German or English texts. In the following section, the most important key data of the studies investigated are first summarized to provide an overview of the analysis material.

#### *Overview of the material for analysis*

Eight of the 17 studies included in the meta-analysis were in the English language, eight were in German and one was in French. A large proportion of the material studied originated in Germany or the UK (see Table 1). In 15 of the 17 studies, German media are the subject of the analysis, and British media are investigated in 14 of the studies. Nine studies concern themselves with French media. Media from all of the other EU states are analysed much more infrequently. This imbalance between the 'big' and the 'small' states as well as the fact that our investigation of the studies originated from Germany must be taken into account during the interpretation of the content-related results (see later). Since considerably more data are available with regard to Germany, the UK and France, it appears possible to make more reliable statements about them than about the other states.

Only one analysis (Díaz Nosty, 1997) concerned itself with media from all 15 states; the analysis by Kevin (2003) included media from eight states, while all of the others considered only a few states. The studies also differ in terms of the types of media that are included. Nine of the 17 studies examine print media exclusively. Daily newspapers are investigated in 11 of the studies, weeklies or news magazines in five. Television reporting is the exclusive subject of analysis in five studies. Both types of media are considered in three studies. It is striking that there is no analysis of radio news or online media. The interpretation of the results of the meta-analysis must also take account of the differing composition of the media sample. For example, it is known from agenda-setting research (for an overview, see Schenk, 2002: 399) that a different function with regard to the public is ascribed to different types of media. It is therefore to be assumed that print media tend to set the longer-term agenda whereas television has a spotlight function (see Eichhorn, 1996: 38).

On average, almost 12 media per study are examined. However, considerable differences exist: the analysis performed by Kevin (2003), which incidentally includes both print media and television as well as the

Table 1 Overview of the studies as well as the media analysed therein and their EU states of origin (in alphabetical order)

Studies	EU states of origin of the media analysed																Analysed media		Type <sup>a</sup>
	A	B	D	DK	E	F	FIN	GB	GR	I	IRL	L	NL	P	S	$\Sigma$	$\Sigma$		
Bange (1999a)			■													3	3	Print	
Bange (1999b)			■													4	5	Print	
Diaz Nosty (1997)		■	■													15	24	Print	
Diez Medrano (2001)					■											3	7	Print <sup>b</sup>	
Grundmann et al. (2000)						■										3	3	Print	
Hackenbroch (2000)																2	25	Print <sup>b</sup> /TV	
Hodless (1998)																2	8	Print/TV	
Hodless (1998)																2	8	Print <sup>b</sup> /TV	
Kevin (2003)										■						8	51	Print <sup>b</sup> /TV	
Law et al. (2000)																4	11	Print	
Leroy and Stune (1994)																4	8	TV	
Meckel (1994)																2	8	TV	
Palmer (1998)																3	3	TV	
Palmer (1998)																4	19	Print <sup>b</sup>	
Sievert (1998)																5	8	Print <sup>c</sup>	
Sievert (1998)		■														2	8	TV	
Sturn and Bange (2000)																2	8	TV	
Trenz (2002)																2	4	Print	
De Vreese (2003)																3	6	Print	
De Vreese et al. (2001)																4	8	TV	
$\Sigma$	2	3	15	4	5	9	1	14	1	3	2	1	6	1	2	M = 4	M = 12		

Notes: <sup>a</sup> If not indicated differently, in the case of print, only daily newspapers.

<sup>b</sup> Dailies and weeklies.

<sup>c</sup> Only weeklies.

second highest number of states, provides a very large set of media. Three studies (Hackenbroch, 2000; Díaz Nosty, 1997; Palmer, 1998), each with about 20 analysed media, offer a medium set. The great majority of the 17 studies include only 10 or fewer media. There is an imbalance in the media represented in the studies: newspapers, which are distributed nationwide and have an elite readership, are analysed more often than other media.

The studies included in the meta-analysis comprise quite different periods of analysis and duration, ranging from very short investigations lasting only several days to long-term investigations (Díez Medrano, 2001). Nine studies pursue an event-oriented approach. The most frequently investigated reporting event (in part, different events in one study) is the introduction of the euro on 1 January 1999 (five studies). Four studies treat different European elections and three study different sessions of the European Council. The different analysis periods and the different events also mean that it is more difficult to make comparative statements about the European public sphere and its development over time.

The essential (formal) 'adjusting screws' for the range of internationally comparative studies are therefore the number of states included, the number and types of media included (and the extent of the analysis of the reporting of these media) as well as the period of the study. The results of the meta-analysis are now presented.

## Results

Since a qualitatively oriented meta-analytical research design is used here in order to be able to bring together 17 studies that differ greatly in terms of methods and content, it is obviously not possible to provide any absolute answers to the aforementioned research questions relating to the degrees to which there is reporting on EU topics, EU protagonists and other EU states. It can only be a question here of establishing a relation between the result of the particular studies for the purpose of interpretation. In addition, attention must be paid to the different definitions of an EU topic or an EU protagonist in each study. The analysis is performed on the basis of the publication texts of the studies examined. It therefore follows the weighting of the particular researchers with regard to the selection of the results of the analysis deemed worthy of publication. In the case of unclear references in the publication texts of the studies, in cases where there is no direct comparability of results from

different studies or if the texts contradict the attached tables or graphics, use of the results is dispensed with.

#### *National differences in the reporting*

Clear differences in reporting by the media between the individual EU states are revealed in the meta-analysis. In the following, they are first subdivided according to reporting on EU topics, EU protagonists and other EU states and then subsequently brought together again.

*Reporting on EU topics (Europeanization by synchronization)* In the case of the topics associated with the EU, clear differences in reporting become evident between the individual states. One special feature is apparent: as soon as a particularly large amount of reporting is devoted to one event in a state, the respective authors of the studies justify this with reference to *national* events or debates connected with the particular EU topic.

German media report more frequently on EU topics than do the media of many other EU states. Four studies agree on this finding. However, in two cases (Hackenbroch, 2000; Hodess, 1998), the more intensive reporting is justified by mentioning national German discussions on the particular topic. Extensive reporting on the EU is also provided by Finnish media. Although only investigated in the study by Díaz Nosty (1997), they are compared here with media from all the other EU states and over a comparatively long period of time.

In connection with Spanish media, too, only the results from Díaz Nosty (1997) are useable with regard to this question. Accordingly, in comparison with the media of other states, Spanish media report a great deal on EU topics. Again only on the basis of one study (de Vreese, 2003), the media in Denmark concern themselves quite frequently with EU topics. This applies both to reporting occasions linked to particular dates such as summits or the introduction of the euro and routine weeks. However, in the case of this study, attention must be paid to the fact that the periods of time evaluated are located relatively close to the EU referendum in Denmark in September 2000. The few possible statements that can be made about the French media indicate that although they report overall to a lesser extent than the German media, extremely intensive reporting occurs in connection with a special event (e.g. the European elections 1999).

By comparison, the media in the Netherlands only report on EU topics to a moderate extent. However, the results for this country in the

study by de Vreese (2003) are justified by the fact that during the period of investigation a national event (government crisis) overshadowed the EU event (European elections), this resulting in a particularly small amount of reporting.

Examination of the studies on British media reveals that the UK represents a special case with regard to EU topics. Although five of the studies agree that the country's media report extremely little on EU topics, this changes when the focus is on currency policy topics. British media report much more intensively on this subject than on other EU topics. In the UK, this topic is also more frequently presented as a political issue, whereas in other states it is seen as an economic matter.

With regard to Italy and Belgium it can be stated, only on the basis of one study each (Kevin, 2003; Palmer, 1998), that there is very little reporting on EU topics in these countries. In the studies examined for the purpose of the meta-analysis, no detailed statements regarding EU topics can be derived for Austria, Greece, Ireland, Portugal or Sweden.

*Reporting on EU protagonists (vertical Europeanization)* Overall, the media in the individual states examined name protagonists from home much more frequently than players on the EU stage (e.g. the European Commission or individual members of the European Parliament).

The studies examined show that the media of the Netherlands report unusually frequently on EU protagonists. This finding applies both to directly EU-related reporting and to Netherlands reporting as a whole.

Although the UK media report more frequently than those of most other states on EU protagonists, one special feature is discernible in the studies: reporting in British media appears to be particularly closely associated with EU protagonists when currency policy issues such as EMU or the introduction of the euro are discussed. Players at the EU level are named in the Danish media at a similarly high frequency to that found in the British media. However, this finding can only be supported with reference to one study (de Vreese, 2003).

In German and French media, EU protagonists are named less frequently than in the media of the aforementioned countries. Austria's media also report less frequently on the players at EU level than the frontrunner, the Netherlands. However, this can also only be supported by the results from one study (Sievert, 1998). This limitation likewise applies to the finding that Spanish media report less on EU protagonists than German media (Trenz, 2002).

On the basis of the studies examined in the meta-analysis, no detailed statements with regard to EU protagonists can be derived for Belgium, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Luxembourg, Portugal or Sweden.

*Reporting on other EU states (horizontal Europeanization)* The studies analysed only rarely examine whether and how reporting on other EU states occurs in the individual EU states. Frequently the situation is viewed from the other side: the researchers check which states are named, and how frequently, in the total reporting of all the other states that are examined in each case. Consequently, this aspect is briefly discussed here.

The analysis performed by Kevin (2003) indicates that the media in Sweden report on other EU states more frequently than the media in other countries. Austria, Germany, France and the Netherlands can be numbered among the states that make reference to foreign EU states moderately often. With regard to Spain, completely contradictory judgements arise from two studies (Kevin, 2003; Sievert, 1998). British media report very little on other EU states as do the Irish and Italian media. No utilizable results can be found in the studies in relation to Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Luxembourg or Portugal.

It becomes clear from the meta-analysis that the most highly populated EU states – the UK, Germany and France – are themselves most frequently the subject of reporting in the other EU states or that reference is made to them in articles or contributions. References to Italy are also quite frequently made in the media of other EU states.

Results for Belgium are only found in one study (Díaz Nosty, 1997). They suggest that information about the EU does not originate from any other EU state so frequently as from Belgium. This finding is hardly surprising in view of the fact that many EU institutions are based in Brussels.

In the case of Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Portugal and Ireland, it can be stated on the basis of the study by Sievert (1998) that the media of other EU states do not make any reference to them at all. It is not possible to make reliable statements about Austria, Spain, Greece, Luxembourg or the Netherlands.

*National differences: summary and discussion* The meta-analysis shows that the Europeanization of the national public spheres in the states of the EU has advanced to differing extents. Characteristics for the public spheres of the individual states are described in the following paragraphs. For the purposes of clarity, the tendencies in EU reporting are represented visually in Table 2.

Table 2 Comparative overview of the national differences in the Europeanization of media reporting (tendencies)

EU states of origin of the media examined	Intensity of the reporting in comparison with other EU states on			Overall tendency of the degree of Europeanization in comparison with other EU states	Naming in the media of other EU states
	EU topics	EU protagonists	Other EU states		
Austria	(▼)	(■)	(■)	Moderate	(▲)
Belgium	(▼)			Low	(▲)
Germany	(▲)	(■)	(■)	High	(▲)
Denmark	(▲)	(■)	(■)	High	(▼)
Spain	(▲)	(▼)		Moderate	(▼)
France	(■)	(■)	(■)	Moderate	(▲)
Finland	(▲)		(■)	High	(▼)
Great Britain	(▼)	(■)	(▼)	Low (special case)	(▲)
Greece					
Italy	(▼)		(▼)	Low	(■)
Ireland			(▼)	Low	(▼)
Luxembourg		(■)	(▲)	High	
Netherlands			(■)	High	(▼)
Portugal					(▼)
Sweden			(▲)	High	(▼)

Notes: ▲ = high; ■ = moderate; ▼ = low; ( ) = assessment only on the basis of one study; empty cells = no statement possible.

Overall, German media report a great deal on EU topics and make reference to other EU states moderately often. However, in comparison with some states, EU protagonists are only named with moderate frequency. Germany itself appears very frequently in the reporting by the media of other states. Danish media also concern themselves quite frequently with EU topics. By contrast, Denmark practically never appears as the subject of reporting in other states. The media of the Netherlands report unusually frequently with reference to EU protagonists. This applies not only to the EU reporting but to reporting as a whole in the country. The media make references to other EU states moderately often.

French media devote themselves with moderate frequency to EU topics and refer to EU protagonists and other EU states as frequently as in the media of other states. France itself is named unusually frequently in the media of other EU states. Compared with the reporting of other states, Austrian media refer moderately often to EU protagonists and foreign EU states. The media in Spain report to a relatively high degree on the topics associated with the EU but refer comparatively rarely to EU protagonists.

The UK media report more on EU protagonists than the media of other states, but only when topics to do with currency policy are involved. Overall, there is unusually little reporting on EU topics in this country, although the situation is different with regard to currency policy. In addition, when EU reporting occurs, the UK media place a political emphasis much more frequently than the media of other states, in which the EU is mostly an economic topic. UK media refer comparatively rarely to other EU states. By contrast, the country plays a very important role in reporting in foreign EU states. Some of these findings on UK media may sound contradictory, but it should be considered that, for example, reporting on EU protagonists and on other EU member states are different research items.

Italian media report only rarely on EU topics and other EU states. By contrast, the media in foreign EU states refer relatively frequently to Italy. Belgian reporting also very rarely deals with EU topics. By contrast, Belgium plays an extremely important role as the country of origin for information on EU topics due to the fact that many EU institutions have their headquarters here. Very little reporting on other EU states is to be found in Irish media just as Ireland hardly features in articles and contributions in other EU states.

It is hardly possible to make definite statements about the reporting of Finnish media on the basis of the material analysed. The few available

results indicate that there is a considerable amount of reporting on EU topics but that Finland itself does not play a significant role in the media of other states. Comparatively speaking, Swedish media report very frequently on other EU states. However, Sweden itself hardly figures in reporting by other states.

No definitive statements can be made on the basis of the meta-analysis on the public spheres of Luxembourg, Greece or Portugal.

In summary, common features in the reporting of the media of various states are also discernible. For example, the meta-analysis shows that, in all states, EU reporting only accounts for a small part of total reporting. Furthermore, the media of all the states mostly focus on national protagonists when topics of EU-wide significance are involved. The results create the impression that national interests and debates often exert a very strong influence on the reporting related to EU topics. When the media of a country refer to other EU states attention focuses – along with Belgium as the ‘capital of Europe’ – particularly frequently on Germany, France, the UK and also relatively frequently on Italy. This is hardly surprising given that these are politically and economically the most powerful states in the EU. Consequently, the news factor ‘elite nation’ comes into play. Partially contradictory results are due to differences in the approaches pursued by the studies. There is still a great need for research, above all in relation to the smaller EU states.

As a result, it can be established as a rough tendency that German, Danish and Netherlands media devote themselves more to Europe than the media in other states. Not only Denmark but the other Scandinavian countries, too, appear to possess relatively Europeanized media whereas in France, Spain and Austria the media tend to report moderately, and in Italy, Ireland and Belgium to a low extent, on Europe. The UK represents a special case because in the British media attention focuses especially on Europe’s currency policy issues, with highly personalized reporting of the EU protagonists. By contrast, only a small amount of reporting is devoted to other EU topics and states.

In connection with the first research question, it can therefore be stated that the Europeanization of national public spheres in the EU has advanced to differing degrees. The results suggest that debates on EU topics often remain linked to national protagonists and interests.

#### *Development of EU reporting over time*

This meta-analysis is unable to find any indications that an increase in the degree of Europeanization of the national public spheres has taken place

over time. This applies to the investigation of a period of time lasting several years and the pure set of reporting on EU topics, EU protagonists and EU states. Account must be taken here of the fact that the studies included in the meta-analysis only very rarely analyse such long periods of time and hardly ever explore the question of differences between individual EU states.

Primarily, such statements are only permitted by the studies by Díaz Nosty (1997) and Díez Medrano (2001). In particular with regard to the reporting of EU topics, both indicate constancy in the type and quantity of reporting. Even these studies do not provide any results in connection with EU protagonists and the thematization of other EU states.

In contrast to the two previously mentioned studies, Hodess (1998) comes to the conclusion during the comparison of the periods 1985 and 1990/1 that clearly more intensive EU reporting can be found during the later period. However, account must be taken of the fact that the author examined events occurring at particular points in time, namely EU summits. Consequently, a generalization does not appear appropriate.

Both Hodess (1998) and Díaz Nosty (1997) establish an increase in commentary contributions in the media they examined. A more intensive commentary may indicate that journalists consider the EU to be more important than previously and that a topic is debated more controversially in the national public sphere than before, something which can be interpreted as a Europeanization tendency, again keeping in mind the limited database.

#### *Importance of reporting events*

The studies examined in the analysis all come to the conclusion that EU reporting by the media in the various states increases considerably at particular points in time. These points in time are closely associated with certain events. However, attention must be paid to the fact that many of the studies pursue an event-oriented approach anyway, i.e. they link their period of analysis to a particular EU event. For this reason, they provide a great deal of information on the importance of reporting events.

The analysis shows that the intensity of EU reporting always increases rapidly when a topic that is of interest EU-wide or at least in several EU states is connected with a particular event. It is possible to differentiate here between several types of events which each impact differently on reporting.

*Events connected with EU policy or the continued development of European integration* Included here, on the one hand, are sessions of the European Council or the European elections and, on the other, for example, the introduction of the euro or the accession of new member states. Such events are examined in the studies preferentially. The analysis makes clear that a considerable increase in EU reporting occurs on the days of such events, sometimes even shortly before. However, it is clearly not the case that the particular EU topic then dominates the national news agenda. In a comparison with a routine period, de Vreese (2003) establishes that the percentage of reporting on the EU summits in 1999 and 2000 is higher by a few percentage points.

*National events in individual EU member states* These can, on the one hand, themselves be occasions for reporting on EU topics. The studies investigated name, for example, the speech on fundamental principles in Europe by the German foreign minister Joschka Fischer at Berlin's Humboldt University in May 2000 (Hackenbroch, 2000). This led, above all in Germany, to increased reporting on the topic of European integration. However, such events can also radiate beyond the country in question: in May 1999, Kevin (2003) established increased reporting on the Common Agricultural Policy in the eight states she analysed – at a time when a dioxin scandal was smouldering in Belgium and a subsidy scandal was making headlines in Spain. As a third possibility, national events in a country can also overlie the EU reporting with the effect that it is hardly still visible even when an important EU event is taking place in parallel. For example, de Vreese (2003) comes to the conclusion that the European elections in June 1999 hardly featured in Netherlands reporting because at the same time a national government crisis was attracting the full attention of the media.

*Events outside the EU* Included here are events that happen outside the territory of the EU or lack any direct link to it. The material investigated in the meta-analysis includes only one example of this type of event, the Kosovo crisis at the beginning of 1999, which falls into the periods analysed by several studies. According to a number of studies (Grundmann et al., 2000; Kevin, 2003; de Vreese, 2003), it dominates the entire reporting and overlies EU events such as, for example, the European elections.

During interpretation of the results, it is necessary to consider that when selecting news journalists generally orientate themselves strongly towards events, as is also postulated by the news value theory. Since,

however, this is also the case with national events, very good comparisons can be made between the EU reporting and the reporting of EU events. Only when journalists consider an EU event to be important enough does it find its way into a newspaper or a programme and possibly displaces a national topic – although overall it is the national topics that are the main focus of reporting in the individual EU states.

Summarizing, it can be stated that the degree of Europeanization of national public spheres – measured as an increase in the reporting of EU topics – rises steeply at the time of special occasions or events. On the other hand, external European events and national events can also hinder or prevent EU reporting.

### Discussion and conclusion

Against the background of the widely discussed public and democracy deficit of the EU, this contribution has attempted to search for signs of the existence or development of a European public sphere. It was assumed here that the European public sphere constitutes itself via the national public spheres, with the media assuming central importance. To this end, 17 studies that investigate media reporting relating to the topic of the European public sphere via content analysis in a national comparison and were published between 1994 and 2003 have been viewed through the prism of meta-analysis.

Different dimensions or indicators of the Europeanization of national public spheres have been taken into consideration, these being (1) a Europeanization through synchronization (operationalized by the reporting of EU topics), (2) a vertical Europeanization (reporting of protagonists at the EU level) and (3) a horizontal Europeanization (reporting of other EU states).

The meta-analysis shows that, overall, EU topics account for an extremely small proportion of reporting in the particular national media. Compared with national protagonists, the players at EU level also only feature in minor roles. It can therefore be stated that the publics of the EU states continue to exhibit a strong national orientation. At best it is possible to talk about the first signs of a European public sphere.

Different degrees of emphasis in EU reporting between the media of the member states become apparent and, therefore, national differences in the extent of Europeanization tendencies. The following findings are among the most striking results. The public spheres of the Netherlands, Denmark and Germany are the most Europeanized. French, Spanish and Austrian media also devote themselves to Europe to a greater degree in

contrast to the below average treatment in the Belgian, Italian and Irish media. The UK represents a special case: basically, British media report on EU topics and other EU states comparatively rarely. However, the reporting of EU topics and the naming of EU protagonists increase greatly when the euro or currency policy aspects are involved. It must be assumed that this reporting then tends to be critical. Hardly any statements can be made about the other member states.

Statements about an increase or decrease in Europeanization tendencies over a period of several years or even decades are not possible either, due to the inadequate state of empirical research on which this meta-analysis depends. The requisite analyses of time series comparing EU countries are not available. Europeanization of the national public spheres increases on particular occasions. This applies in particular to big political EU events or events associated with the further development of European integration such as European elections, sessions of the European Council or the introduction of the euro. However, even in the case of EU-wide events, it is not possible to talk about a complete synchronization of the debates.

With regard to the theoretical basis of this contribution or the meta-analysis, it can be noted that, according to the current status of research, there are gaps in the model of a European public sphere as the result of the Europeanization of the national public spheres. To date no scale has been developed in international communication and media science by means of which the degree of Europeanization of national public spheres can be measured. As from what point is a public sphere (sufficiently) Europeanized? And does 'the' European public sphere emerge if all national public spheres are largely Europeanized?

Empirical research relating to the European public sphere is an extremely demanding field requiring a high level of resources. In view of the considerable differences between the media systems and journalistic traditions, special care is needed with regard to the equivalence of the subjects of the analysis. Only one of the 17 studies evaluated here examines media from all 15 EU states (Díaz Nosty, 1997). On average, the studies are content to analyse newspapers or television news programmes from four states. In addition, most of the studies investigated here analyse only a short period of time around a particular (mostly EU-connected) event. It would be possible to answer the question about signs of a Europeanization of national public spheres considerably better using prolonged time series analyses that additionally include comparisons with routine periods and, as far as possible, examine all EU states. However, in view of the EU enlargement by 10 states in 2004, such

studies will now probably be more difficult to undertake than in the EU comprising 15 states. There nevertheless *is* such a research project, which examines the reporting in all 25 EU states on the European elections in June 2004 by means of a content analysis (see Banducci and de Vreese, 2004).<sup>12</sup> Ideally, future media content analyses on the European public sphere should also pay more attention to the media as a whole, avoiding the existing emphasis on newspapers with a relatively elite readership.

The present study on the basis of a broad meta-analysis inevitably comes to the conclusion that the much-discussed deficit in terms of democracy and public in the EU runs in parallel to a deficit in European media reporting, even if the first signs of a Europeanization of national public spheres are discernible. Again, it should be taken into account that, with the latest enlargement, the EU of now 25 member states consists of even more public spheres with different languages and reporting traditions than before. It will be a very demanding task for communication and media scientists to analyse the development of the deficit in media reporting in a new wave of empirical research.<sup>13</sup>

By means of correspondingly extensive reporting, the media of the EU member states should lay the foundation for a greater Europeanization of national public spheres, which, in turn, can be the basis for the emergence of a common European public sphere. But of course not only the journalists are in charge. EU institutions and national governments should spare no effort to close the information gap between Brussels policy and the everyday life of EU citizens.

This demand is particularly urgent against the background of a situation in which an essential part of the statutory rules and regulations affecting the citizens in the entire EU are today already decided on and passed in Brussels rather than in the nation-states. The present deficit in terms of public and democracy threatens to worsen still further if in future the EU comes closer together politically, something that is expressed, for example, in the disputed European constitution: the more responsibilities the member states hand over to the European level, the more important Europe-wide debates on EU policy become.

## Notes

1. For the biannual Standard Eurobarometer survey, the EU Commission puts questions to about 1000 citizens from all member states in connection with their opinions about, and attitudes towards, the EU (European Commission, 2004: 1).

2. Inter alia, news programmes, which can be expected to have most influence on the public, are, however, exempt from the quota rule.
3. Díez Medrano (2003) derives his argumentation relating to the indicators for a pan-European public sphere from Weber (1983) and Anderson (1983), who concern themselves with the conditions for the emergence of nations or national sentiment. His concept of public sphere is closely linked to the question of how strong the feeling of solidarity is among Europeans or rather how marked the European identity is (see also Kantner, 2002: 85ff.; Wiesner, 1990: 168ff.).
4. In addition, a methodological comparison of the previous research approaches was performed in order to learn lessons for future comparative studies on the European public sphere. However, this cannot be presented here.
5. 'Published' means that the study appeared in a scientific journal or an anthology, was published as a monograph or is a dissertation. Academic theses could not be considered because, on the one hand, they cannot be reliably investigated and, on the other hand, inclusion of all searchable theses would have exceeded the framework of the present study.
6. The period prior to 1990 is partially covered because some of the studies selected for analysis also investigated it (e.g. Díez Medrano, 2001).
7. For this reason, it was not possible to include, for example, the comparative study by Göler and Stammer (2004) on the media reporting of the European elections in Germany and France.
8. This criterion is difficult to understand since, without an analysis of its own, it is hardly possible to describe how much reporting is necessary for a topic to be 'of importance' in the EU states. However, no borderline cases emerged during the practical selection of the studies. Only studies concerned exclusively with bilateral relations between states (for example, German-French summits) are clearly excluded under this criterion – provided that they do not have a connection to the EU. Consequently, this 'soft' description of the criterion for the selection of topics is considered sufficient for pragmatic research purposes.
9. This pragmatic and centrist restriction with regard to the 'biggest' languages can, however, cause the result of the meta-analysis to be distorted in a particular direction. Account is taken of this in the presentation and interpretation. However, on the basis of a cursory search for studies in other languages it can be assumed that this bias is not great at all.
10. For example, national bibliographies, European Commission Library Catalogue (ECLAS), subito, Karlsruher Virtueller Katalog (KVK).
11. For these reasons some studies could not be analysed, e.g. the 'Euromedia' study conducted by the European Commission between January 1995 and September 1997 (European Commission, 1995–7) as well as the study by Peter (2003).
12. The lack of empirical research in this field does not seem to be limited to media content. Therefore, researchers at the ongoing, EU-funded Project

'Adequate Management in Europe' (AIM) concentrate on actors (e.g. institutions, journalists) and on mechanisms (e.g. structures and processes of new management) which shape the media coverage of EU issues (see online: <http://www.aim-project.net>, see also online: [http://www.claesdevreese.com/research\\_european\\_elections\\_2004.html](http://www.claesdevreese.com/research_european_elections_2004.html)).

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