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The Babel of Europe?

An Essay on Networks and Communicative Spaces

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Abstract

The fracture in the European Union during the Iraq war of 2003 threw into relief the fragile nature of the integration process, certainly so far as foreign and defence questions are concerned, and exposed once again the complexity of the EU as a communicative space. Although cultural-linguistic diversity remains an overwhelming fact, the rise of English as a lingua franca is taking place against this backdrop of diversity and to some extent cuts across it. The uneven growth of

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English-speaking competence challenges views of communicative space in which the public domain and the nation are seen as co-extensive. We are therefore forced to consider how states collaborate to constitute supra-national arenas and how this process in turn affects the constitution of publics. Much current theory has fixed upon the idea of a network as a means (and metaphor) for conceiving the changing relations between politics and social communication. From this point of view, constitution building has taken on a transnational communicative role. But does the emergent Euro-networking polity extend widely? And how robust is it? The institutionalisation of the EU has sustained the development of a variety of publics and networks that range across a spectrum from strong to weak. However, the European media space is predominantly oriented towards national publics. And although transnational spaces have emerged in the fields of research, administration and various EU projects, these still remain profoundly conditioned by national interests.

Introductionⁱ

One powerful narrative of the European future goes like this: we can project a process of economic and political integration that, over the *longue durée*, will knit together the diverse communicative spaces within which the continent's identities and cultures are articulated. The driving force will be the European Union, which – at this time of writing – is in the midst of devising a constitution for itself. To the extent that a European public sphere consolidates itself, the role of national languages within the emergent formation will be gradually redefined, in part due to the growing dominance of a *lingua franca* among European populations, namely English. This process will certainly not be linear; nor will it be free of internal conflicts concerning the relationships between state sovereignty and federal or confederate powers. However, it does seem to be a path likely to be taken, even though there are many obstacles on the way.

However, we could hardly imagine this scenario of a New European Communicative Space to be an endogenously generated process, or some sort of immanent unfolding of potential. Indeed, just how much the EU growth-story depends for its success on the benevolent support of the United States – its highly conditional endogeny, as it were – was made rudely apparent on 23 January 2003. In a supposedly off-the-cuff remark, the US Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, challenged opposition from the French and German governments to the Bush administration's handling of the Iraq crisis. He said, dismissively:

“You're thinking of Europe as Germany and France. I don't. That's old Europe. If you look into the entire NATO Europe today, the centre of gravity is shifting to the east. Germany has been a problem, and France has been a problem. But if you look at vast numbers of other countries in Europe, they're not with France and Germany on this, they're with the United States.”

(cited in Harnden and Delves Broughton 2003)

Thus was coined the pregnant distinction between “old” and “new” Europe - one instantly translated into political discourse to become the everyday coinage of pundits

of various ideological persuasions (see, e.g., Baker 2003; Fuller 2003; Guardian Unlimited 2003; Krauthammer 2003; Mönninger 2003). Rumsfeld's formula was rapidly used by analysts to describe the "New European" backing for the US position on Iraq orchestrated by the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, and his Spanish counterpart, José Maria Aznar, in an open letter published by the *Wall Street Journal*. This manoeuvre divided member states, as well as drawing in EU candidate members. A second pro-US letter was signed by a bevy of post-communist candidate members (BBC News 2003).

The consequences of the European fracture named by Rumsfeld are still playing themselves out at this time of writing, and they have had ramifications for the UN and NATO as well as the EU. My purpose here is neither to trace the consequences, nor to apportion blame, but simply to note how the power of a profound conjunctural crisis may challenge settled assumptions. The *prises de position* in the late Winter and early Spring of 2003 raised profound questions about whether the EU could achieve sufficient cohesion to be a counterweight to the USA. A precondition for such a role – arguably – would be not just intergovernmental co-ordination but the formation of a European public that supported a particular projection of the EU's role in the world.

As a thought experiment, let us assume that the EU cannot again reach agreement on how to deal with the USA and that it fractures into (simplistically put) pro- and anti-American camps. Then the EU's further integration – certainly in respect of a common foreign or defence policy, but perhaps in other far-reaching respects too – could be set back for the foreseeable future. An even more far-reaching scenario would be to project the gradual disintegration of the Euro-polity itself, an effective throwing into reverse of the post-World War II unifying trend under the pressure of new international alignments that once again divide the continent, but in ways different from the Cold War. This could engender the atrophy of the capital that the EU institutional complex has built up, namely the politico-cultural *acquis communautaire*.

Would this have specific communicative consequences? There is a two-fold answer. On a linguistic level, a putative Anglo-American hegemony of the so-called "new" Europe would appreciably speed up the progress of learning English as a European

lingua franca. At the level of Euro-networking, and the communicative practices that go along with this, we could see a certain amount of rewiring along the fault lines of “old” and “new” Europe, should that division become increasingly fixed. If we entertain such thoughts, however implausible, we throw into relief the present bedrock of integrationist assumptions.

From *that* point of view, the EU is implicitly conceived as a machine for generating wider – and deeper – social communication, for interconnecting discrete spheres of publics. But the limits in that process were dramatised by the crisis over Iraq and the divergent interests that emerged from it. Due to its present diffuseness as a political formation, the EU could not respond to the Iraq crisis as a *union*. It proved to be governmentally much divided, polarised between France and Germany on the one side and the UK and Spain on the other. But, some argued, at least according to the opinion polls and in terms of demonstrations on the streets, that many of the European Union’s *nations*, responding as singular national publics, had proved to be substantially united in their opposition to war. For those who looked optimistically into the glass, such as the philosophers Jacques Derrida (2003) and Jürgen Habermas (2003), the birth of a European public space could be discerned, at least on questions of war and peace. For some eurooptimists it seemed that linguistic differences and national loyalty were not matters of decisive importance (Toynbee 2003). But the Iraq crisis, however profoundly motivating it may have been for its opponents, did not constitute a sufficient condition for *sustaining* a common public across frontiers. For instance, as the UK became a warring power, the majority initially opposed to an invasion – however questionably measured by the polls – became a supporting majority.

Perhaps the damage-limitation squads will succeed in effecting a new balance between Atlanticism and Europeanism and my crisis scenarios will be seen, in a year’s time, as utterly irrelevant musings. If so, I might as well revert to what I *was* going to say *ante bellum*, and which might still be possible, after extensive post-Iraq repair work and compromise between different visions of the EU’s future.

The EU as a communicative space

If we assume the continued politico-economic integration of the European Union, as well as its continued expansion, its sheer complexity as a communicative space also necessarily grows. Can we sensibly think of it as a space at all? It is rather an increasingly interconnected grouping of overlapping communicative communities with the *potential* to become a loosely integrated communicative space, not just for élites but also for entire peoples. And from there – who knows? The number of official languages spoken inside the Union grows with each wave of accession states. In 2002, there were eleven such languages, whereas in 1957 there were only four. (Let me stress that these are *official* languages, not actual language communities.) With a further ten accessions in 2004, the official language count will increase again. And there are yet more candidates in the wings. On the face of it, therefore, we could be forgiven for thinking the EU to be a self-generating Babel. To invoke “Babel” is to use a shorthand way of talking of the cultural differences embodied in language.

Why self-generating? Because at one level, it is EU policy to promote linguistic diversity and language learning. In spring 2002, EU Member States were invited by a range of EU bodies to pursue just that line. The acquisition of linguistic skills was linked to the fashionable rhetoric of the “knowledge economy”. We encounter once more that all too recognisable mix of low and high politics: let’s improve competitiveness, and yes, by the way, let’s also celebrate cultural difference. In such linguistic pluralism there is an underlying aspiration to fashion a European communicative space out of linguistic diversity so that “citizens have the skills necessary to understand and communicate with their neighbours” (Commission of the European Communities [CEC] 2002: 5). Good Euro-neighbours should speak several languages and not build fences – with due apologies to Robert Frost. This line is consistent with more than two decades of official thinking about the EU as a cultural and communicative space.

Published at the end of 2002, the Commission’s consultation paper bases its picture of the distribution of language skills on a special Eurobarometer survey published in 2001 (European Commission 2001). Over half the population of the Union speaks a language in addition to its mother tongue. In some member states almost everyone is

bilingual. English is the first foreign language for one-third of all citizens; one quarter, however, can speak two other languages (with French and English leading the pack, though for rather less than 10 per cent of the EU's citizens in either case). It is plain that language skills are unevenly spread, with younger people displaying the greatest competence, alongside managers. Two-thirds of the British cannot speak another language.

The Commission observes that English has become a “world lingua franca” and in Europe that “it is rapidly gaining ground as the first foreign language chosen by parents for their children. It is displacing the languages traditionally taught in European schools, such as German, French, Spanish and Italian, even in areas in which the most ‘logical’ first foreign language would be the language of a neighbouring state” (CEC 2002: 7). But a *lingua franca* has its limitations: the Commission therefore argues that over and beyond any common tongue, European citizens require at least “meaningful communicative competence” in other languages (CEC 2002: 7).

The sociologist, Abram de Swaan, has argued that English is becoming the “supercentral” language of communication at the civic level inside the EU. Plausibly, he also maintains that this supercentrality will co-exist with the continuing importance of national languages (which have been state-supported and closely connected with official national identity for at least two centuries in some cases): here the “robustness” of languages and their political protection is a key factor. De Swaan (2001: 173-74) has schematised the likely hierarchy of language uses in the EU as follows:

- A. national languages are used within the domestic sphere of member states, allowing for diglossia with the supercentral language;
- B. civil Europe's first language for “transnational communication” will be English, followed by German/French;
- C. all official languages will continue to be used ceremonially, for public law etc. – as part of the EU's founding principles;

- D. the languages of the bureaucratic corridor are, and will be, English and French - although according to *The Economist*, English is now rapidly becoming the dominant working language (Charlemagne 2003a: 42).

As the Commission's surveys show, the advantages of English have steadily grown. Its prominence is being reinforced by the growing second-language competence of younger generations – sustained by most, if not all, national educational systems. “Over 92% of secondary-school students in the EU's non-English speaking countries are studying English, compared with 33% learning French and 13% studying German” (Charlemagne 2003a: 42). But, as has been widely noted, many factors preventing the formal adoption of a single Union language, not least the strong connection between languages, states and collective identities. What seems clear – largely due to the global cultural, economic and political dominance of the United States – is that the irresistible pull of English language competence will become an important part of the derived European citizenship possessed by citizens of the Union's member states.ⁱⁱ Although the picture sketched out above shows that we do not have conditions of linguistic equality in the EU, or in Europe generally, the continent is less of a Babel than might be supposed, due to the multilingual capacity of many Europeans and the growing ascendancy of English. This will continue to be so, whether the process of European union continues or whether it is disrupted.

Social communication

Language is a key aspect of the broader process of social communication – that is, the gamut of distinctive signifying practices that defines and delimits a communicative community operating within the framework of a broad, anthropological, idea of a culture as a “distinct whole way of life” (Williams 1981: 13). We might try to understand the EU's communicative dimension by developing a social communication theory capable of entertaining the Union's emergent complexity, in particular in respect of the challenges it poses for states, nations and collective identities (Schlesinger 2000). By complexity, I refer to “the number of elements in interaction and the number of different states that those interactions can give rise to” (Boisot 1999:5).

A social communication approach to the theory of nationalism was first explicitly attempted by Karl Deutsch half a century ago (1966 2nd edn [1953]). However, its origins probably lie further in the past. Fifty years before Deutsch, the Austro-Marxist theorist, Otto Bauer, wrote his seminal account of the “national question” (Bauer 1907 and 1924; Eng. trans 2000). This is the likely precursor of Deutsch’s theory. Bauer and Deutsch have together exercised a remarkable – and virtually unacknowledged – influence over some of the most significant recent theorising about the communicative dimension of the nation. Their central contention continues to have a bearing on how we might understand the contemporary, multinational EU. The contemporary relevance of now venerable Austro-Marxist thinking is more than some passing coincidence. Finding a pluralistic solution to communicative complexity inside the European Union has a strong family resemblance to Bauer’s wish to give due recognition to national cultural autonomy in a multinational empire. The intimate connection between language and nationality was central to his analysis – and not least the passions and emotions that linguistic claims could – and did – generate within what Robert Musil made famous as Kakanian.

Bauer (2000: 34) contended that a modern democratic nation should be seen as a “community of culture”. In contemporary conditions that are more sensitive to multiculturalism, it is more apt to think in terms of a community of cultures. Bauer also famously observed that the nation was a “community of fate” (eine Schicksalsgemeinschaft), which was engaged in “general reciprocal interaction” (Bauer 2000: 100), thereby sharing a common language. He remarked:

“The culture’s sphere of influence extends only as far as the communicative possibilities of the language. The community of interaction is limited by the scope of the linguistic community. Community of interaction and language reciprocally condition each other...

(Bauer 2000: 102)

The nation qua linguistic community, then, is conceived as self-contained, or at the very least, as tending towards communicative closure. This is an early statement of a social communication theory of the nation. This effort to address the Kulturkämpfe of the declining years of the Austro-Hungarian Empire has left its conceptual imprint on

a contemporary theorising about the public sphere in the European Union. Karl Deutsch (1966: 19-20) – an early theorist of European union – seems not to have recognised his own debt to Bauer’s conception of the nation as a cultural community. Central to Deutsch’s argument is the view that nations and nation-states are strongly bounded by their patterns of interaction: “People are held together ‘from within’ by this communicative efficiency, the complementarity of the communicative facilities acquired by their members” (Deutsch 1966: 98). Social communication, in other words, produces collective cohesion – and invites us to share in a common fate. Bauer and Deutsch have a fundamentally similar approach to how communicative and cultural practices and institutions (to which language is central) may strengthen the collective identity of a national group by creating boundaries.

This simple – but compelling – idea is reproduced in a number of influential theories of nationalism. Ernest Gellner’s (1983) view that culture is “the distinctive style of conduct and communication of a given community” and that it is “now the necessary shared medium” of the nation is likewise at root a theory of cohesion.ⁱⁱⁱ Cultural boundaries become defined by national cultures, which diffuse a literate “high culture”, in which the key agency is the national education system. Media are seen as sustaining that political community, providing it with its deep codes for distinguishing between self and other. Relatedly, Benedict Anderson (1991) contended that mechanically reproduced print-languages unified fields of linguistic exchange, fixed national languages and created idiolects of power. So, by going to Gellner’s schools, cultured nationals acquire the competence to read Anderson’s novels and newspapers. For each of these writers, the collective consumption of mediated communication (based on a common national language) creates and sustains a sense of national belonging. Michael Billig (1995) both endorses and extends this broad argument. As nationals, he suggests, we live less in a state of perpetual mobilisation than one of the banal assimilation of everyday symbolism and categorisation: flags, anthems, distinctions between home and foreign news, national histories and languages, a particular sense of political geography. National identity is unremarkably reproduced. Culture holds us together: it both conditions and informs our conceptions of national identity. Social communications theorists may differ on the key mechanisms or processes that produce such cultural cohesion, yet all agree that some or other dimension of communication is central to how the nation should be conceived.

Of course, no culture is an island. All ostensibly national systems of communication are influenced by what lies outside. National cultures are usually permeable, however much they are censored and controlled, and in the age of the Internet and satellite broadcasting that relative openness is necessarily greater than ever before. I have argued elsewhere (Schlesinger 2000) that the main thrust of classical social communications theory is to concern itself with the *interior* of the national culture and communication, with what makes us what we are, and that which draws boundaries around us. Look at Bauer's problematic and such interiority is not surprising: it is utterly congruent with the assertion of national communicative space within a wider constitutional framework of competing national cultures. Such a neatly demarcationist theory of social communication and public space is not tenable. It is especially the case, in a "globalised" world, that its limitations are thrown into relief, although that does not mean we should now regard the shaping role of the state in social communications as irrelevant (Street 2001).

Borders and networks

The evolution of the European Union poses Otto Bauer's century-old problem afresh: how may many diverse national, ethnic, linguistic and other cultural communities achieve autonomy within a single, overarching political framework? The old Habsburg empire had to adjust to nationalist claims from below. By contrast, the EU is an importer of already-formed nations shaped by (more or less well) established states.^{iv} The gradual emergence of such a supranational formation modifies how we conceive of established communicative relations between national publics and state-centred systems of power. It makes us aware of the diverse *levels* at which publics might form and how our communicative competence (to which language is indeed central) needs to make appropriate adjustments. However, the analysis cannot stop at the level of the member state, treating this as the simple expression of the nation. Amongst other things, it is made more complicated by the continuing vitality of regional or minority languages, operating at a sub-state level, most potently perhaps in regions that are also stateless nations.

That said, the role played by the state is central to the argument. The EU, after all, is a union of states and a unique political formation. How we now conceive of the key political component or building block is crucial. David Held has argued that we can

no longer think of the political community as bounded by the sovereign nation-state. Political communities, he suggests, are “better thought as multiple overlapping *networks* of interaction...[that] crystallize around different sites and forms of power, producing patterns of activity which do not correspond in any straightforward way to territorial boundaries” (Held 1995: 225; my emphasis). Political communities, in short, are part of an interdependent world and limited by this in their decisions. In consequence, “The cultural space of nation-states is being rearticulated by forces over which states have, at best, only limited leverage” (Held 1995: 126). This view leads Held (1995: 227) to argue that the regulative ideal for the world is to establish a cosmopolitan democratic public law that is “entrenched within and across borders”. It is precisely that aspiration which has been placed in jeopardy by the US-led invasion of Iraq (Held 2003).

Held’s invocation of the metaphor of the network is no accident. It reflects the shift away from thinking of the state as a firmly bounded container of politics, economics and culture, and is increasingly being used to rethink European communicative space. Consider the illustrative movement in Jürgen Habermas’s approach: his early theory took the European *nation-state* addressed as a political community as its framework (Habermas 1989). That was the classic space of *Öffentlichkeit*, of a publicness contained within firm borders. But how are we to think of the multi-level complexity of the EU in Habermasian terms? Both national and European discourses co-exist. “Europe” is inside the nation-state as part of the domestic political agenda and also as a constitutive part of the broader politico-economic framework; yet, it is also still another place, a different political level and locus of decision-making that is outside. In the EU, given this ambiguity, the national, state-bounded context no longer completely defines the political scope of communicative communities. To analyse emergent European communicative spaces, the focus needs to shift to the new, supra-national arenas and their constituent publics. It must also take account of how publics may also emerge at the sub-state level, on the basis of a linguistic or cultural distinctiveness that may be reinforced by media of communication (Cormack 2000; Moragas Spà et al (eds) 1999).

Habermas (1997: 373-374; emphasis added) now argues that communicative space is to be understood in terms of “a *highly complex network*...[that] branches out into a

multitude of overlapping international, national, regional, local and subcultural arenas”. Yet, an underlying conception of a *single* public sphere does remain. It is within this logically presupposed integrative frame that so-called “hermeneutic bridge-building” between different discourses occurs. To put it plainly, a European communicative space conceived in network terms has become the new political playground (Habermas 1997: 171).

Habermas portrays the public sphere as potentially unbounded, as having shifted from specific locales (such as the nation) to the virtual co-presence of citizens and consumers linked by public media. A European public sphere would therefore be open-ended, with communicative connections extending well beyond the continent. Certainly, contemporary communication flows and networks ensure that no – or hardly any – political community can remain an island. But how does the suggestion that we all really belong to a *global* village sit alongside the postulate of a *European* identity? Which are the communicative boundaries most relevant for the development of a distinctive political identity and political culture inside the EU? In other words, how might communicative processes contribute to the Union’s social cohesion? Or, indeed, disrupt it, in line with divergent political interests, as happened during the Iraq war of 2003.

Habermas (2001: 7, 18) has emphasised the key importance of a European constitution as a means of demarcating a distinctive political space and providing “a common value orientation”. Habermas stresses the key role of a “Europe-wide public sphere of political communication” and “the creation of a political culture that can be shared by all EU citizens”. From this standpoint, the “constitutive process is itself a unique instrument of cross-border communication”. In fact, *whether* we may regard this process as an effective form of transnational communication is precisely a matter to be empirically investigated.

Constitutional development is therefore of key importance for the articulation of the EU’s political identity because it acts as a distinctive boundary-marker. It defines the limits within which distinctive patterns of political culture and communication may be encouraged to emerge. This view broadly accords with that of political geographers such as Jönsson et al (2000), who suggest that although the territorial basis of

statehood is being modified by the evolution of networks that transcend sovereign boundaries, bounded relations remain important. For them – like Held – the contemporary European state is now a “negotiating state” that participates in transnational networks.

However, although the emergent European constitution will eventually designate a grand politico-communicative space, it remains important to recognise that the “technical range” of information and communication technologies that are used within it has not totally transformed our “human reach”, central to which is the capacity to communicate face to face. As Jönssen et al (2000: 184-185) argue: “social communication is most effective between individuals whose mental worlds have been ‘formatted’ analogously over lengthy periods of time”. This formulation is strikingly congruent with Deutsch’s principle of communicative complementarity. Jönssen et al hold that “human thought requires boundaries”, based in proximity, likeness and linkage, which means that “place, neighbourhood and region will continue to play important roles as realms of experience and epistemic communities”. This, in turn, “fosters local anchorage and regional identity” so that “In the age of electronic networking, conversation therefore continues to have a major role, as does the face to face meeting” (2000: 185). To rethink “Europe” as a geo-political space, then, does not dispense with the territorial state but rather complements it, taking account of the emergence of networks (such as business associations, NGOs, regional governments) operating and lobbying alongside the national state. For Jönsson et al, the network metaphor encapsulates “the three simultaneous processes of globalization, regionalization and state adaptation” which relate to what they characterise as the “archipelago” that is the new European political space (2000: 186).

The concept of the network is also central to the work of Manuel Castells (1996; 1997; 1998), for whom the new communication technologies contribute to the formation of an altogether new kind of society, the “informational”. From the present standpoint, most significant is the argument that this is the precursor to a new political order, to new forms of association and loyalty: the emerging Euro-polity epitomises what Castells terms “the network state”. Because of its purported network character the EU is imagined not just as a political-economic zone but also as a specific kind of communicative space.

As Garnham (2000a: 61) has rightly reminded us, we should treat this version of the idea of a new information society with scepticism.^v His critique of Castells' account of the network is rooted in a political economy of communication that underlines how relations of power are embedded in networks and their uses. Networks of various kinds, we are reminded, are at the heart of a range of communicative processes, whether a postal service, a broadcasting system or telecommunications links. Garnham's focus is mainly on the economic roles of such communications networks rather than their political aspects, although by bringing to the fore questions of access and equity he puts into play how these may be addressed by the politics of regulation. "A network", he argues, "needs to be seen as a club rather than a market". To understand networks from the standpoint of social communication, it is certainly helpful to stress that they operate as "systems of collaboration and not of competition" (Garnham 2000b: 70). But that is to focus on their *internal* workings from a principally economic point of view. Looked at from the standpoint of a political system, competition *between* networks also becomes a key matter of interest and for analysis. In this regard, Castells' analysis of contemporary political dynamics remains suggestive.

The boundaries of the putative European communicative space invoked by Castells are produced by the nexus of political institutions that constitute Union Europe, the dealings between them, and the growing "subsidiary" horizontal links across the member states (Castells 1998 330-331).^{vi} For instance, he argues that the EU has different "nodes" of varying importance that together make up a network. Regions and nations, nation-states, European Union institutions, constitute a framework of shared authority. Castells (1997: 51) considers the "stateless nation" to be a prototype of potentially innovative forms of post-nation-state affiliation – an exemplar of flexible networking that offers multiple identities and allegiances to its inhabitants. Nations (as distinct from states) are characterised as "cultural communes constructed in people's minds by the sharing of history and political projects".

In short, Castells' approach implies that complex interconnected Deutschian "communicative complementarities" emerge out of the informal processes of making the union. The potentially globalising pull of communications technologies is countered by emergent patterns of social interaction in the European Union's space.

These are polyvalent: simultaneously, they knit together diverse actors economically, politically and communicatively. In the terms proposed by Eriksen and Fossum (2002: 405), it could be argued that the EU has produced some “strong publics” that are characterised by deliberation and decision-making. The European Parliament and the constitution-making Charter Convention are two such institutional frameworks, which are crucial to the development of a democratic culture by holding power accountable. Interconnected with such publics, are “weak or general publics” in which public opinion is formed. These less institutionalised formations may operate as networks of a variety of social and political actors, often focused on particular issues (Eriksen and Fossum 2002: 420).

Arguably, then, the EU is developing a special interactive intensity that favours internal communication and creates an internally differentiated referential boundary with stronger and weaker forms of institutionalisation. This may co-exist with global networking. A new constitution, if actively embraced, however, is likely to reinforce the internal framework of reference and identification.

Although a “Europeanised”, relatively weak, supranational public space has indeed evolved around the policy-making actors in the various institutions, much activity still ultimately derives from national or regional interests. To be a Castellsian Euro-networker does not mean that one has completely forgotten how to wave Billig’s national flag. Networks don’t abolish prior national identities, though they may extend and reconstitute them for some purposes

EU Institutions and Euro-networks

Arguably, the wider “Europeanising” process may be conceived as based in interaction between Euro-institutions and Euro-networks. Not *all* institutions have the same centrality and not *all* networks have the same intensity of interaction. The importance of language may also be of varying importance in the evolution of networks.

If we schematise by way of examples, at one end of the chain are relatively loose and weakly constraining processes of “Europeanisation” with a network dimension. Maurice Roche (2001: 83) suggests that shopping and tourism are constructing a new

Europe “as both a transnational region and also as a meta-cultural space containing a rich variety of cultures...[with] a massive potential for creative cultural hybridization...”. One might raise a sceptical eyebrow about the cultural effects of shopping *tout court*. However, travel might indeed broaden the mind and such mobility can be identity transforming. The drive towards a common European airspace redraws both a new managerial and geographic boundary for air traffic. Eurostar has changed the experience of travel between London, Brussels and Paris. The bridge over the Øresund has had a similar role for southern Sweden and Copenhagen (*The Economist* 2003). The new connections between European “destinations” created during the past decade by budget airlines, may well have wider cultural implications that remain to be researched.

Roche emphasises the importance of Europe-wide sport, notably soccer, for the imagined space of Europe (although this is dominated by male fans). The EU has recognised the role of sport in identity-formation, and the market conditions for both media sport and consumer sport have changed. Roche suggests that spectators’ consumption has been Europeanised and that could result in a “European-oriented cosmopolitanism”. (Quite how this coexists with well-documented instances of sporting xenophobia is another complicated question.) *The Economist* has also taken this line, noting that “over the past decade European football teams have turned into a living, breathing embodiment of European integration” (Charlemagne 2003b: 42). Administratively, the European space of football is shaped in line with the multi-level governance of the EU, and lobbies such as G14 and UEFA operate accordingly (Banks 2002: ch.7). There are tensions and contradictions between each of these levels: the European elite of the Champions’ League shaped by UEFA still has to contend with loyalties centred on the national league level. The supranational still depends heavily on the national, in a word (Boyle and Haynes forthcoming).

Moving along the chain, more directly central to discussion of the public sphere is how the European Union is mediated through journalism. A distinct, complex, Euro-polity has emerged that generates multi-level forms of political communication encompassing lobbying, official information campaigns, and news reporting. As EU policy making and political direction impinge increasingly on member states, the European dimension increasingly shapes both the content and the agenda of the

mediated political discourse of national polities. There is some evidence – at least in elite media – that similar themes are being addressed at the same time, though not necessarily from a shared perspective (van de Steeg 2003).

In member states, however, *national* editorial values influence coverage and *national* governmental sources are still of key importance for journalists covering European Union issues (Morgan 1999). Elements of a European civil society have begun to emerge, organised through the mobilisation of diverse and often competing interests, and orientated towards the political institutions of the EU. National and regional political actors mediate political communication about the Euro-polity. Information about, and the interpretation of, EU activities is disseminated outwards from the Union's administrative heartland through established national and regional networks of communication. Multi-level governance, and the continuing tensions and divergences between the supranational level and those of the member states and regions, require us to think in terms of overlapping spheres of publics.

Inasmuch as a media-sustained, *supranational* communicative space is emerging because of EU integration, this is class-inflected and predominantly the domain of political and economic elites, not that of a wider European public (Schlesinger 1999; Schlesinger and Kevin 2000). The skew of the news market in favour of the powerful and influential is congruent with the EU's widely acknowledged "democratic deficit". This derives from the predominantly executive and bureaucratic style of its governing institutions (the European Commission and the Council of Ministers) coupled with their relatively weak accountability to the legislature (the European Parliament). The new constitutional provisions mooted by Giscard d'Estaing's Convention are intended to address this problem.

In the European communicative space today some news media are, in effect, creating specialised audiences and readerships by way of seeking markets. An incipient change is taking place in the collectivities to be addressed, ultimately due to the EU's development as a novel political form. We may think of such emergent media publics as pre-eminently occupying a highly restricted transnational space, served by such print media as *The Economist*, the *Financial Times*, the *International Herald Tribune* and, perhaps, in the audiovisual sphere by Euronews and Arte.

The mediated public sphere in the EU remains first, overwhelmingly national; second, where it is not national it is transnational and anglophone but elitist in class terms; third, where it is ostensibly transnational, but *not* anglophone, it still decants principally into national modes of address. The continuing national pull of journalistic practice and frameworks of reference explains the sheer difficulty of developing journalism for either a Europe-wide readership or indeed a readership oriented to the European Union contained within a particular nation-state. In this regard, the short life of *The European* (London) and the much briefer one of *l'Européen* (Paris) are instructive cases in point (E. Neveu 2002; Schlesinger 1999).

Field research in Brussels during the past decade suggests that some weakly transnational forms of exchange have emerged at the EU level between journalists and their sources. Meyer (2000) has argued that there is an increasing tendency for transnational investigative journalism to emerge inside the EU, thereby contributing to the accountability of the institutions. Occasionally, but not so far systematically, this can have political effects, particularly in the exposure of scandal and corruption. This appears to be a transient rather than a systemic feature of the Euro-political scene. Baisnée (2002) also refers to the co-operative context of Brussels reporting, but contrariwise does not argue that a transnational context has emerged, except in a specific sense. For him, journalists have been socialised into being “European people”, indeed – because of their real expertise – he contends they have become “Europe’s only real public” (Baisnée 2002: 112, 115). Multinational relations and negotiations have become part of the everyday reporting experience – even if there is often editorial hostility to the EU project (so patently the case in several titles in the UK). That said, the Euro-journalism network remains riven by diverse national ideas of professionalism and domestic markets still hold the key to career success.^{vii}

There are other emergent areas of exchange that require a more direct level of linguistic engagement, a growing depth of cross-cultural knowledge, and the creation of active micro-publics. A prime example is that of European research networks which are increasingly subject to the growing impact of European research funding. The EU integration process brings cohorts of diverse nationals together to deal with matters both of national and wider Community interest. In less than two decades, what once was obligatory Anglo-French bilingualism has given way to the

increasingly hegemonic position of English as the prime language of academic discussion and administration, much in line with the supercentralising trend noted above. What goes on in such meetings, how the conversation is conducted, and what might happen to the identities of participants as a result is largely unexplored. Academics, and the programmes of “framework research” that dance to the European Commission’s tunes, exemplify such encounters.

The attraction of such programmes lies in access to additional resources, adding to prestige, extending the range of contacts, and in raising the game. We need not assume any cosmopolitan intentions at the outset, but at the same time, we should not discount the effects of prolonged exposure to international co-operation in a framework that defines itself as “European”. As van der Meulen (2002: 347) notes:

“The Europeanization of university research can have at least three different meanings: the development of European research networks between university researchers, the participation of university researchers in the European Framework Programme, and the growing importance of the EU as a funding body in the research system with its specific practices of evaluation and priority setting.”

There is some evidence – as, for instance in the case of Finland – that states acceding to EU membership have adapted their networking to what the EU offers, even before joining. Hakala et al (2002: 357) liken this process to a “mobilisation”. While for Finnish researchers “Europeanisation” has not dislodged existing patterns of international research co-operation (notably with the USA), it has evidently “strengthened, intensified and formalized” those with EU partners (2002: 375). Frustration with bureaucratic obstacles has led to a more selective approach by those with greatest experience on the European scene. One conclusion is that “EU initiatives *have supported exchanges and networks* more than the performance of high-quality research itself” (2002: 378; emphasis added).

The anthropologist, Catherine Neveu (2000), has explored the internal dynamics of Euro-networking and has sketched out a *processual* approach to “becoming European”, asking what happens when European institutions invite various categories

of people to participate in transnational activities. She suggests that the resulting acculturation may have a “return effect” once those who participate go back to their places of origin. It is involvement in networks and exchanges that she sees as constituting an important path to the formation of a European public sphere.

Interaction with European institutions constitutes a kind of “training process” that may impact on people’s notions of citizenship and identity. An anthropological approach, Neveu (2000) argues, makes one see this as a “self-producing process”, in which background models and representations come into play and are modified. Is it to this kind of encounter that we should look if we are to imagine the emergence of a common *sentimental* basis for diverse nationals thinking themselves to be European? Such a community emerges through activity rather than by virtue of having any prior identity. In Raymond Williams’ terms, we might ask whether a common “structure of feeling” could emerge in this way. (Whatever it might be, however, it would not have the depth and range of national sentiments.)

Neveu (2002) observed meetings of a three-nation urban regeneration network supported by the EU’s Euro-Cities programme, hypothesising that a common culture would emerge. It did, facilitated by the accentuation of the individual and professional aspects of participants’ identities and by the downplaying of their institutional and national affiliations. However, language remained an irreducibly difficult matter, and debates about the meanings of key terms such as “community” were enmeshed in prior understandings rooted in national political cultures. There were limits to the translatability of these models due to diverse “republican” and “communitarian” assumptions. At points of difficulty, the invocation of national stereotypes became unavoidable. That said, Neveu underlines the potential of such encounters to accentuate reflexivity and extend the range of available representations, which she sees as preconditions for the emergence of a European citizenship.^{viii}

Conclusions

To think about the EU as a potential sphere of publics requires us to look beyond the nation-state to emergent networks that establish their own communicative complementarities. The institutional development of the European Union has clearly provided both an incentive and, in some domains, an active framework of support for such networking. For present purposes, I have left aside any discussion of how Euro-networks embody diverse power relations but that question should be at the core of empirical research. Second, European integration can only partly be understood through top-down policy making; the working out of processes at the base – and their interactions with the institutions – also requires study. Third, the EU's central institutions have been instructively shaken during the Iraq war 2003 and will be challenged by the forthcoming enlargements of 2004 and beyond. As new diplomatic alliances within the EU space, and beyond it, emerge, this is likely to affect the pattern of existing networking over the medium and long terms, a process that warrants study. Fourth, the continuing tenacity of models of thinking rooted in the national (while co-existing with an emergent common space) remains impressive. And here, the issue of language differences and the inherent limits of translatability are very important. This also relates to something else, namely how collective sentiments are still linked to national identities and loyalties to states (and often to regional identities within these polities). Along with cultural factors, there are real political determinants of the extent to which, over time, emergent conceptions of Europeanness will articulate with other identities and weigh significantly in the balance of loyalties. As the crisis over Iraq demonstrated in spring 2003, there can be Babel in Europe, even if most of the key players choose to argue about their divisions in English.

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ⁱⁱ There is much else to be said, not least about the questions raised by languages that are not regarded as officially "national" within several European states as well as those that are termed "lesser-used". In the latter case, we approach the issues concerning linguistic survival addressed by Joshua Fishman and his co-workers (2002) in their work on "reversing language shift". I simply wish to note these concerns, rather than to discuss them. There remain

outstanding questions of claims to linguistic recognition that are deeply connected to questions of identity and sentiment, and these are certainly not going to disappear, whatever the fate of the EU.

ⁱⁱⁱ A similar broad working assumption is to be found in the work of Louis Wirth, a key exponent of the Chicago School's approach (Rothenbuhler, 2002).

^{iv} This is an oversimplification, of course. It is certainly not the case that all EU states are to be regarded as homogeneous, as the politics of devolution and/or separatism in, for instance, Belgium, France, Italy, Spain and the UK shows.

^v Mattelart (2000) has given us a detailed intellectual history and has situated Castells in relation to his key precursor, Daniel Bell.

^{vi} Castells' more recent work has moved beyond this position. However, the utopian vision of an "Internet Galaxy" as a zone of citizen freedom still has to contend with a world of states that combine to regulate threats to their control over information (2001:178-85).

^{vii} Journalistic production in the EU is overwhelmingly oriented to national consumption. In the case of fiction production in the five main media markets, the latest research also suggested that this is overwhelmingly nationally produced and consumed – unless it comes from the USA. Cross-border circulation of films and TV programmes is very low to non-existent (Lange 2003).

^{viii} This has considerable parallels to Baisnée's findings: there is an area of commonality among Euro-journalists but the needs – and models – of different political systems also presently impose insuperable limits.