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European Democracy and Integration
The Role of the Media. Moving towards a Public Sphere

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Summary:

We will focus on EU from a media perspective. We believe that too little critical media research and coverage appear on EU matters, and that EU news too often is presented in a national framework. Therefore a better kind of common media and communication model needs to be developed so EU citizens can get a better media coverage of EU. Also there seems to be a vicious circle; national media don't really report about EU relations because readers don't care or are ignorant in terms of what is happening in the European Union and politicians naturally talk about what the 'people want to hear', which are mostly about domestic topics. This vicious circle highlights a fundamental problem with the current media coverage and exposes the democractic deficit. There are several media models that can be further developed and used in order to improve the EU media coverage on both national and transnational level. We will look into the possibility of a Pan-European public service broadcasting model. We will also explore the potential of Euronews as a Pan-European broadcasting model. We suggest a new communication strategy for EU which is more efficient, inspired after the Nordic Public Service model. We also provide an analysis of the EU policy on

communication and the creation of a European Public Sphere. One of the concrete suggestions is to strengthen the right of the media to make critical journalism for EU funds.

A normative approach

Many prominent scholars have reflected on EU and the lack of a European Public Sphere, this communication deficit exposes a threat to democracy and a threat to the successful integration of the European Union. Thus the vital question is how the citizens of the European Union and European decision makers can meet, if there are no transnational media institutions? And is the emergence of a European Public Sphere a utopia within such a diverse and disintegrated cultural landscape as the EU represents? We believe that an emergence of a European Public Sphere is essential if the functioning of and successfully integration of EU should succeed. Therefore transnational procedures to challenge national frameworks are to be established and strengthened by the help of the European Union. In order to successfully establish a united European Union in diversity, it seems necessary to strengthen the political will and consciousness of citizens (Habermas 1995). Habermas believe that presuppositions for democracy are developed from a society that wants to constitute itself as a political unit and not of people (nor ethnicity etc.). *'What unites a nation of citizens as opposed to a Volksnation is not some primordial substrate but rather an intersubjectively shared context of possible understanding'*, (Habermas, J. (1995) 'Remarks on Dieter Grimm's "Does Europe need a Constitution?"', *European Law Journal*, 3 303-306, p. 305). This normative approcah based on political unity in the European Union, emphasizing the rights of the citizens and the constitution, paves the way for an approach based on heterogeneity and an all-inclusive approach. Empirical examples also proves the validity of this normative approach to democracy. There are numerous examples of culturally and ideologically pluralistic societies (USA etc.).

The current European crisis

Another point of reference that deserves some short attention is the fact that while the current European crisis threatens the whole European Union project, and where several countries such as Greece, Portugal and Italy find themselves reduced to puppets of Angela Merkel and former french president Nicolas Sarkozy, at the same time the crisis has also increased the citizens interest in EU and the integration process.

So while we in this paper, arguably believe that a European public sphere is lacking and currently the European Union lacks an efficient communication policy and implementation, paradoxically at the same time it seems like a growing interest in the media and public are taking place. Even though the crisis has sort of brought the people of the European Union closer, it seems like there still is a long way to go. For instance the framework of the European Union reporting is still bound to the national framework; this represents a huge problem for the emergence of an even more integrated European Union. In a historical context, it is also important to bear in mind that the construction of EU still represents a child's voice, and as it took national states hundreds of years to emerge and to construct internal homogeneity (in so far as this construct exists), mass media and national media made people conscious of their collective identity and gave existence to nationhood etc. at the early birth of modern societies.

European Union attempts to create a European Public Sphere

The European Union has had focus on the lack of a general European public sphere. In 2007 the Commission dealt with the problem of communication in a communication to the European Parliament and the Council among others. The communication, *Communicating Europe in Partnership*, builds on former initiatives such as *The Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate*, which sought to encourage a wider debate on the future of the European Union. The objective of *Communicating Europe in Partnership* was "to strengthen coherence and synergies between the activities undertaken by the different EU institutions and by Member States, in order to offer citizens better access and a better understanding of the impact of EU policies at European, national and local level" and goes on to address citizens, who find the information about the EU disorganized and hard to understand. It thereby deals with a crucial problem of the European Union. As we see it a prerequisite for democratic legitimacy is a basic understanding of the European Union system. In other words, the European Union has to be able to mediate the legislation, as it has a direct influence on citizens' reality. We realize, that this cannot be achieved only through e.g. establishing a European broadcasting company. It necessarily has to be supported through e.g. the educational system etc. It is though beyond the scope of this paper to include the subject of education.

Other initiatives were '*Communicating Europe through audiovisual media*'[1], '*Communicating about Europe via the Internet – Engaging the citizens*'[2] and a White Paper on a European Communication Policy'[3]. The latest initiative was '*Journalism and New Media-creating a public sphere in Europe*' which has some ambitious objectives. The prime objective is to involve citizens in matters regarding the EU and to further European debate, either in the national media or through a European public sphere. The European parliament describes a European public sphere as something referring to debates that transcend national borders and address a European public. In the explanatory statement Parliament states that earlier attempts have failed due to the institutionally complexity of the EU and due to the fact that the creation of such a sphere must, according to parliament, start from the bottom and thus depart from the different European populations. We can only partly agree, that these are the explanations. Failure certainly is due to the complexity of the European Union. This originates partly in the institutional chaos of the European Union where four treaties (Maastricht 1992, Amsterdam 1997, Nice 2001 and Lisboa 2007) have been signed in just 15 years. Furthermore there is a general lack of transparency, which has not been properly dealt with. This raises the question if it is at all possible on this background to effectively

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1! (SEC(2008)0506)

2" (SEC(2007)1742)

3" (COM(2006)0035)

mediate information about EU and it's institutions and policies to ordinary citizens. The other part of Parliament's explanation that the creation of European public sphere must start from the bottom, we cannot agree. The European Union can and must be active in this particular development and should not just leave it to the member states. When it comes to media, one of the major problems is that the media coverage of subjects relating to Europe is almost always framed in a national way, which sort of hinders the path towards a common identity and only reflects the interests of the nation states.

Attempts to make a pan-European Television channel

o   The European Commission is among others spending funding money on Euronews. Although Euronews potentially could represent a pan-European Television channel, in our opinion it fails to do so. Even the European Parliament has criticized the news channel for not creating a proper space for a European Public Sphere and the channel for not directing itself in a coherent way to the populations of the European Union. The European Parliament explains in their Explanatory Statement to the Initiative/*'Journalism and new media-creating a public sphere in Europe'*, that: 'Euronews has not managed to address a wide and collective public in the EU, partly due to the issues of language differences in the perception of journalism and news gathering*'*. Many have also given critique to Euronews, as it has been EU biased instead of critically assessing the project of the European Union and has failed to reflect the different voices within the European Union. It is also problematic, that very few Danish people know the channel and furthermore it is impossible for the Danish people to watch Euronews via the national distribution channels. Another critical point is that Euronews provides eleven language services; and therefore it implicitly implies that linguistic and national language mostly predominate the understanding and framing of European news. It also seems like Euronews rather than creating a space for public interaction for citizens of the European Union, by broadcasting in different languages continues to the disaggregation of the European Union. Meanwhile Euronews may wish to build an image outwardly to the rest of the world that things are going well and this strategy continues to undermine the diversity and different voices in the European Union. This false picture of 'consensus' within the European Union, does not strengthen EU's internal problems and does not hide away all the problems EU are facing. On the contrary it proves that the European Union ought to focus more on creating semi-independent transnational media institutions so a viable European Public sphere can emerge. It's crucial that institutions can emerge, where public interests are being heard and where exchange of opinions and critical assessment of society can be put forward. Instead of just supplying information to the European public, dialogue and critical thoughts should be exchanged between civil society, individuals and decision makers etc. Above arguments also prove that it must be time to recognize the chaotic, opaqueness and heterogeneous character of the European Union, and start building on exactly these cornerstones and accept these as social facts constituting the European Union and the people of the European Union. The first step to overcome these structural difficulties and to make the European Union system more transparent is to set up transnational media institutions, so people can start interact and discuss these issues.

Space for a top-down media approach

Our argument therefore is that it is essential to build up a European Public Sphere from a top-down process. Euronews provides us with an empirical example of something having potential of becoming, but which are not yet (and may never be) an ever grounded pan-European Television channel, bringing the population of the European Union together.

Although the news channel exposes some limitations to the model we suggest, it could nonetheless prove to be a successful model if the channel is being developed on in this direction we suggest. Still the further development of Euronews or the development of a new media institution does not make up alone for the creation of a European Public Sphere. As mentioned earlier other factors such as education also play a big part.

Thus, what is essential to the further integration and democratization of the European Union is to make the European Public Sphere viable and existing. Although the media holds an important task in this relation, the media is only one part of this process of building a common European identity and the media cannot alone provide or make up for the successfully emergence of a European Public Sphere. Since over 80 percent of the national law in Denmark is being passed in the European Union, it is vital that more effort is being put into non-biased communication on EU matters and investments in transnational media are made, which shows effect on all citizens of EU. Since the European Commission yearly spends a lot of money on communication, it seems like it has failed to create and implement an efficient communication strategy. In order to make the population of the European Union interested in the project and active in the European Union, it is essential that different opinions are being expressed via transnational media institutions, so a European Public Sphere can emerge and hopefully different national media cultures can accommodate itself to a transnational media culture. Therefore at least one or several independent pan-European media institutions are essential and necessary to make visible the different voices and opinions in the European Union.

Proposal

In general we do not see Euronews as a pan-European television channel that fits in the model we believe should be erected in the European Union. In so far as Euronews is applicable it needs to be restructured and the service languages within Europe should be English even though it's a controversial suggestion, this change will have a greater effect. In addition our critique is that Euronews concentrates more on being a global player in the media landscape (the channel has already established itself in Iran, with Persian as the television service language – but paradoxically few Danish people have ever heard of the news channel), instead of filling in the gap of the absence of a European media institution. Therefore we suggest that a better solution would be to establish new transnational media institutions which are semi-independent. Working towards this goal and within this scope, which we acknowledge can be a huge challenge, possess great possibilities for a successfully democratization and integration process of the European Union.

One of the major challenges that a new media institution funded by the EU would face, is the question of independence. Surely such an institution would be accused by EU sceptics of serving as a mouthpiece for the European Union. The point here is that people won't believe in news, if the information is influenced by EU and the EU politicians. Therefore a European broadcasting

company has to be semi-independent. A solution could be, that such a European broadcasting company has to rest on general guidelines and principles, much alike the national equivalents. The Danish Law on Radio and Television deals with this problem. It states, that the public broadcasting company has to attach great importance to the notions of freedom of information and speech. Furthermore it has to be impartial and versatile when it comes to the dissemination of information. This could serve as a model for an impartial European media institution.