

In Search of a European Public Sphere

In Search of a European Public Sphere:

*Challenges, Opportunities
and Prospects*

Edited by

Małgorzata Winiarska-Brodowska

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FOREWORD

PHILIPPE J. MAAREK

In the next years Europe will be more fragmented than ever. This is the key lesson of 2019, which was a crucial year for the European Union, with the juxtaposition of two important issues for its future: the European Parliament elections and so-called “Brexit”, the departure of the United Kingdom from the Union.

The European Parliament elections had been conceived as a tool intended to slowly but effectively aggregate European citizens towards a common goal of enforcing the European Union, *de facto* building up the European public sphere. Some were even hoping that cross border political parties would thus be bred: it had somehow been tried by several Green Parties’ similarly designed 2014 campaigns, and was also advocated by some politicians, such as the French President Emmanuel Macron in 2017.

Throughout the previous years, abstentions in these elections had been growing and mainstream parties declined to send their main politicians to run for the European Parliament. In parallel, European issues, which should theoretically be at the core of such political communication campaigns, had been more and more left by the wayside, while national matters took the front stage: attacks against individual governments often became the central topic of debate (see for instance Maarek 2016, 176). Accordingly, many scholars, in the line of Reif and Schmitt (1980), have considered the European Parliament elections as “second-rate elections” compared with the local elections in each of the EU members: a kind of no consequence outlet for opposition and minor parties to harmlessly spill out their frustration.

The 2014 European elections somehow changed the electoral pattern. Abstentions did not grow as before, and the political parties attempting to take advantage of the room left to them by most of the mainstream parties grasped their opportunity more efficiently than usual and achieved much better results. To that effect, they recycled populist claims: they exposed the alleged dangers of workers’ unrestricted movement across borders, the risks of increasing immigration, the perils of free trade, or simply stressed the growing cost of EU membership. This was openly called for much

more violently than before in many countries, notably with some very aggressive campaign posters (Maarek 2016, Holtz-Bacha et al. 2017).

Since then, it appears that in several parts of the European Union this phenomenon has grown and has become a major factor in national political agendas. Rebuttal of immigration, fear of free trade and of liberal economics, acceptance of more authoritarian regimes felt more protective of individuals than democracies, have frequently been called in. Without any doubt this has influenced many local parliamentary and presidential election outcomes, negating traditional mainstream parties' and politicians' input, and considerably reducing their strength and numbers.

Looking back at the 2014 European Parliament elections, they appear less and less to have been the "second-rate elections" they were claimed by many to be. They have instead constituted a major predictive sign of the switch of the minds of the European citizen (Maarek 2016). The 2019 European Parliament elections seem to hold a similarly significant meaning. As a consequence, the European public sphere might become wishful thinking, instead of being the future home of a reinforced, coherent European Union.

Likewise, the UK's exit from the EU is of paramount importance for the Union. Brexit marks the end of a century-old understanding of what Europe is and, from here, of what the European public sphere encompasses, far from the "Europe from the Atlantic to the Ural Mountains" frequently promoted by General de Gaulle (Jouve 1977), seeking a way to balance the British weight by including Russia.

With this in mind, one can only be drawn to the present book, which challenges most of these issues in detail. Indeed, the title alone of the volume, *In Search of a European Public Sphere*, edited by Małgorzata Winiarska-Brodowska indicates its strong approach to the matter. This comprehensive, international collection gathers academics from various countries, in doing so shaping an ensemble that is truly representative of the diversity of the European Union. Their multiple scopes and points of view about the European public sphere also work to make this book an indispensable read, helping researchers to better understand the stakes at play for the European Union in the years to come.

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A EUROPEAN PUBLIC SPHERE

MAŁGORZATA WINIARSKA-BRODOWSKA

The questions of how a European public sphere might be organized and what influence it might have are as basic to Europe's future as the rise of democratic institutions within nation-states was to its past.

—Craig Calhoun (Nationalism, postnational identity, and the project of a European public sphere)

More than a decade ago the European Commission's Vice-President for Communication Strategy Margot Wallström was entrusted with the difficult task of analysing the democratic deficit in the EU (on the EU democratic deficit cf. Follesdal and Hix 2006) and providing solutions to "bridge the gap" between the EU's institutions and citizens. Her efforts, i.a. the "White Paper on a European Communication Policy" (Commission of the European Communities 2006), were widely reported by the media, including an article entitled "Wallström in search of a 'European public sphere'" (EurActiv.com 2006). Soon after, scientific articles appeared dwelling on the search for a European public sphere (Trenz 2008, Splichal 2006)¹. The issue still remains valid today. Indeed, in recent years and in light of the rapid changes in European politics and communication, it has unarguably grown in importance. There is the pressing need for a European public sphere (Russ-Mohl 2019, Lötsch et al. 2019), because "the way in which Europe's public sphere is structured, its current media landscape, is inadequate if not downright dysfunctional. Lingual and cultural segregation lead to fragmentation and 'piling'—inhibiting the flow of news and discourse even in spaces that are meant to bridge these divides." (Ibid.). The chapters in this book continue the search for a

¹ The literature on the problem largely dates back to the 1990s. It has grown significantly after the publication of the English translation of J. Habermas's "The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere" (1989). The mid-1990s also brought important institutional changes, introduced by the Treaty of Maastricht, as well as discussions on the democratic deficit in the European Union and the growing scepticism of EU citizens.

European public sphere, adding new insights to the field from around the continent.

This collection not only revisits the pertinent issues, but it is also vital at a moment that demands a special sense of responsibility regarding the tasks ahead for Europe, especially in the field of media and communication: polarisation, the intermingling of information and misinformation, and greater outside interference in political communication, particularly during elections (for instance subversive use of social networks). At a time when public communication is more and more often characterized by strategic communication practices of different actors inside and outside the EU, fake news and “post-truth politics”, and the general asymmetry between entities in global communication processes, a publication which approaches all of these topics is much needed.

It would not be an understatement to say that the whole European project has been called into question over the last few years. Europe has faced, and continues to face, a unique set of crises that have shaken it considerably, including the financial crisis, the Greek debt crisis, the Ukrainian crisis, migration, Brexit and the rise of right-wing populism, all of which have directly or indirectly challenged the EU’s values and ideals. The EU, as an imagined community *par excellence*, and as a large-scale public sphere relies heavily on communication. As such, research on the development potential of a European public sphere is imperative to better understanding the European public sphere.

The volume is uniquely characterised by the wide range of approaches taken by the authors in their discussions on the complex concept of the European public sphere. Readers will find a combination of various theoretical frameworks and methodologies presented throughout the volume. The key advantages of this publication include: interesting and timely empirical findings, case studies, comparative analyses (based, *inter alia*, on the use of different qualitative and quantitative methods, such as document and web analysis, content analysis, and analysis of public opinion surveys), and critical reflections on the on-going situation in Europe. The multidisciplinary nature of the book is one of its major strengths. The contributors bring knowledge from the different scientific fields in which they specialize: geopolitics, sociology, political science, cultural studies, and philosophy. However, at their core they all have an interest in media and communication issues in/of the European Union.

The contributing authors include well known scholars, established scientists and young researchers, from different European countries. Although representing different geographic regions, at the same time the authors propose a distinctly European perspective of the issues they

investigate, and it is this European perspective that testifies to the originality and strength of this book. The collection provides much-needed insight into both Western and Eastern European perceptions of events and processes in Europe, while at the same time highlighting similarities and differences among countries in each region. What is particularly interesting is the fact that a voice is given to representatives of the less commonly represented regions in the media and communication sciences, i.e. Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). Those who have a background and experience working in different regions are uniquely positioned to offer a wider perspective on the discussed issues. Nonetheless, as stated above, they all situate their chapters within a strong European, rather than regional or national dimension. It is also worthy of note that many of the issues discussed in this publication are connected with the CEE region, which until now, has remained underrepresented in the literature, despite the fact that in recent years CEE has seen increasing interest, especially in a political context.

The volume sheds light on the question of how changes in the media and communication environments affect the public spheres in Europe. The chapters each analyse recent trends in communication (e.g. misinformation, fragmentation, core-periphery division) and search for possible ways to approach them. In doing so, they discuss current issues such as migration, populism, and foreign involvement in European affairs. Most publications dealing with the European public sphere take into account the political institutions' or citizens' perspective and not the media environment. In an attempt to fill this knowledge gap, the authors take into consideration the contemporary state of European media and media trends, including: the declining impact of traditional media—such as major broadcast television networks and major national newspapers—the weakening credibility of media vs. new sources of information, and new channels of communication such as social media and alternative media. It also discusses the disruption processes of political communication as well as the challenges for democratic politics and for the emergence of the European public sphere.

The concept of a European public sphere

As a whole, the volume addresses the essential question of the development potential of the European public sphere. The European public sphere is conceived here, broadly defined, as a space in which current European issues are debated. This definition is based on the concept of the public sphere understood as the space(s) where

relatively unconstrained debate, analysis and criticism of the political order can take place (Fossum and Schlesinger 2007, 1).

The topic of the European public sphere has aroused, and continues to arouse, interest among international academia. Recent exemplary work in this field includes: Walter (2017), Hepp et al. (2016), Sicakkan (2016), Doria and Raulet (2016) and Risse (2015).

Research on the European public sphere can be divided into three groups or strands of research (de Vreese 2007), or in Valentini and Nesti's (2010) terms streams:

- a) the "utopian" one, with a pan-European public sphere conceptualized as a communicative space requiring a common language, a shared identity and a transnational media;
- b) the "elitist" one, with segmented transnational public spheres which have been conceptualized as issue-specific communicative spaces, largely dominated by political and economic elites;
- c) the "realist" one that focuses on Europeanized public spheres and assesses Europeanization of national public spheres with different criteria, e.g. Trenz (2004) and Gerhards (2000), where different types of this process are distinguished, i.e. vertical and horizontal Europeanization (Hepp et al. 2012, Koopmans and Statham 2010, Wessler et al. 2008, Koopmans and Erbe 2004, Koopmans and Erbe 2003), and different dimensions of Europeanization are analysed, e.g. a political unification project or the central penetration of national system of governance (Papathanassopoulos and Negrine 2011, 4-5, Olsen 2002, 923-924).

The first one mainly comprises studies in political philosophy and the theoretical considerations concern the EU's democratic deficit. They see communication processes as a solution to the problem and promote the creation of a supranational public sphere (Fossum and Schlesinger 2007, Eriksen 2007, Grimm 2004, Habermas and Derrida 2003, Habermas 2001, Schlesinger and Kevin 2000, Eriksen 2000, Kielmansegg 1996). These can be considered early works in the field, when interest in the subject of the European public sphere appeared in the 1990s and again in 2005 after the French and Dutch Referenda on the EU Constitution. More recent publications look at communication and democracy in the EU, providing updated insights in response to contemporary conditions. For instance, Zielonka (2018, 124; 2006, 139) writes about the development of mechanisms of public contestation which are more crucial for democracy than the functioning of institutional channels of representation. He underlines that popular contestation could lead to greater legitimacy for

the EU (Zielonka 2006, 188). In this context thriving and dynamic public sphere(s) would be much needed. Also Bennett (2012, 6-7), revisiting Fraser's critique of Habermas' "single public sphere", advocates for contestatory interaction of different, multiple, but unequal publics. This seems more appropriate than a single public sphere paradigm for late modern societies experiencing individualization and challenges to institutional authority.

The second strand refers to empirical studies examining the existence of a transnational public sphere and emerges from the experiences of transnational media (Valentini and Nesti 2010). The research focuses mostly on

structural conditions for, and practical experiences with, transnational communication and discourses about European topics, and on the quality of these communication processes (Ibid., 2-3).

Empirical research on a/the European public sphere concentrates mainly on press coverage, thus disregarding the role of other media. The analyses deal with the elite-dominated, issue-specific communicative spaces (de Vreese 2007), or issue-specific discourse communities as Eder (2000) puts it.

The third group of conceptualisations of the public sphere concerns the process of Europeanization of national public spheres. Empirical research carried out in this field measures the degree of Europeanization of national public spheres, i.e. how frequently European issues are covered by national media. The visibility of European topics as well as the degree of mutual observation and the level of quotation are measured in these studies as well. We would speak of a European public sphere

when the same (European) themes are discussed at the same time with the same criteria of relevance (Eder and Kantner, 2000, 315).

The results of these studies are divergent. Some scholars argue that a Europeanized public sphere is emerging (Stępińska 2014, Kleinen-von Königslöw 2012, Risse and van de Steeg 2003, Eder and Kantner 2002). However the authors working on research from the third group acknowledge the limitations of such a sphere, often pointing to its fragmentation (Bee 2014, Eriksen 2007). There are also texts on "segmented Europeanization" (Kleinen-von Königslöw 2012, Hepp et al. 2012, Wessler et al. 2008)².

² In this context it is worth noting that the term "segmentation" is used to describe fragmented audiences that are internally homogenous. As some researchers have

These texts show that each EU member state displays its own particular pattern of Europeanization. Others researchers claim that Europeanization has not fully emerged yet, as EU-related debates are for the most part domestically oriented and steered by national interests (Russ-Mohl 2019, Triandafyllidou et al. 2009, Siffert et al. 2007, Downey and König 2006). It appears that those scholars who point to the fact that there is no empirical evidence suggesting either the presence or absence of a Europeanized public sphere (as the research results heavily depend on the area of European policy under scrutiny) are largely right (Koopmans and Erbe 2004, Koopmans and Erbe 2003).

Most of the contemporary analyses are directed at a

model of multiple, segmented networks of communicative spaces (Trenz 2008, Fossum and Schlesinger 2007) more capable to grasp the complex nature of the EU (Valentini and Nesti 2010, 4).

Europe is characterised by the diversity of languages, values, identities, and media systems, and therefore the creation of a supranational homogeneous public sphere along the lines of a national public sphere (a monolithic, singular, pan-European public sphere) seems impossible. The research relatively swiftly turned from a “public sphere heavy” notion towards “public sphere light” notion (de Vreese 2007), stressing a multiplicity of co-existing, interlocking public spheres in regard to European politics. As Habermas (2009, 183) emphasizes:

the solution does not consist in constructing a supranational public sphere, but in transnationalizing the existing national public spheres.

A European-wide public sphere must not be imagined as the projection of a familiar design from the national onto the European level. It will rather emerge from the mutual opening of existing national universes to one another, yielding to an interpenetration of mutually translated national communications. There is no need for a stratified public communication, each layer of which would correspond, one by one, to a different “floor” of the multilevel political system (Habermas 2001).

observed, the process of fragmentation—discussed here—can lead to polarization and the division of people into like-minded groups who share similar knowledge, opinions, or value profiles (cf. Tewksbury 2016). This process, in turn, is strengthened by modern media. Contemporary societies are facing increasing divisions (this is applicable to both media content and public beliefs) and these divides are largely caused by changes in the media environment and politics (cf. van Aelst et al. 2017, 12).

The Habermasian concept of the public sphere still offers a lot to researchers interested in communication in Europe. It is true to say that its overly idealistic form has met with many critical voices. Nevertheless, verified and updated (through, for example, taking into account contemporary multimedia such as the internet) is undoubtedly an important framework for reflections on a European public sphere and contemporary conditions of public communication. Some texts in this volume refer to Habermas' conceptualization of the public sphere, however his works serve rather as an inspiration and a starting point for a broader debate on a European public sphere. Contemporary studies of the subject locate their understanding of public sphere between a minimalist (Luhmannian) and a more demanding Habermasian concept of public sphere (see Risse 2015, 5). Research has tended to discard ambitious Habermasian notion of a European public sphere based on the model of the national public sphere (de Vreese 2007, 6).

The European public sphere is also referred to by some authors in this book as Europeanized public sphere(s), underlining the diversity, as well as historical and cultural conditions within which such a phenomenon has arisen. The Europeanization of public spheres is discussed in line with the works of Risse (2015), Kleinen-von Königslöw (2012), Koopmans (2002), and Gerhard (1993). The following definitions—mentioned by de Vreese in an article entitled “The EU as a public sphere” (2007)—correspond with the understanding of the European public sphere in this volume:

an arena of communicative discourse to which citizens have access and may freely contribute to rational discussion of issues collectively deemed of societal importance (Jankowski and van Os 2004)

and

in relation to Europe, a European public space can be equated largely with “European political communication” being any form of communication which refers to European governance in the wide sense, expressing consensus or dissent with regard to particular issues (Trenz 2004). A European public sphere then emerges or is visible whenever and wherever we can identify public communication that takes place between particular communicators (de Vreese 2007, 7)³.

³ As Brüggemann (2010) explains: “the notion of a public sphere differs from descriptive concepts such as ‘political communication’ by its normative implications and its reference to the political community. Normatively, the public sphere is conceptualised as being an integral part of democracy. It serves two basic functions. Public debates have an informative function and they establish the

One also needs to take into account that in the European Union the number of potential and active publics is extremely large, as Valentini and Nesti (2010) remind us, since the EU's multi-level governance involves different types of actors in different institutional settings (supranational, national, and local).

The European public sphere and the media

As can be noticed, it is not only the multi-dimensional nature of communication in the EU that may be challenging nowadays. The media is an important part of the public sphere, and their activity significantly adds to the growing complexity and differentiation of this sphere. Gil de Zúñiga (2015, 3153) aptly points out that the role of media in building a European public sphere has been somewhat overlooked. And yet, the media can make a significant contribution to the development of the European public sphere. They have always been seen as a major actor in structuring and sustaining public spheres (Fossum and Schlesinger 2007, Dahlgren and Sparks 1991). They are perceived as capable of stimulating involvement in European affairs (Harrison and Wessels 2009). The media are deemed

an important and influential stakeholder for the EU, as the media is the first and foremost channel of information for EU citizens on different matters (Valentini and Nesti 2010, 12).

The above-mentioned considerations on the process of Europeanization can also be found in media and communication studies. There are different approaches to understanding the Europeanization process in relation to the different aspects of European integration in the media field, depending on e.g. a legal, institutional, or cultural point of view (see Jakubowicz 2010, 230). The process of Europeanization of media assumes the founding of a European media and creation of a European public sphere. It posits a Europeanization of media content, practice, functioning, and structures of domestic media systems (Williams 2005, 133).

There are several impediments to the existence of a pan-European media, with the foremost one being language diversity in Europe. However, as Heinderyckx (2015, 3167-3168) notices,

transparency of the political process. Beyond that, they have a discursive function: they are the place of exchange of ideas, opinions and arguments (Peters 2005, 104)".

one specific factor hindering pan-European media is often overlooked: the extreme heterogeneity of media uses across Europe. Exposure to television, radio, newspapers, and websites, as well as trust in these different media, show extreme variations across countries, but they also vary greatly among age groups, education levels, and professions.

One can only ascertain that there are some signs of national media and public spheres becoming more European—cf. studies which use the concept of Europeanization or the concept of EU-ization (Flockhart 2010)—and that transnational media and public spheres (in business and cultural circles, and among activists) are emerging (Heinderyckx 2015, 3172).

As for the Europeanization process, the Europeanization of media content in particular has been researched most often (Winiarska-Brodowska 2015, Triandafyllidou et al. 2009, Krzyżanowski 2009, Pfetsch et al. 2008, Meyer 2005, Trenz 2004). Scholars largely pay attention to the prestigious, opinion-forming print press and only some choose to scrutinize other media. One major question that remains as yet unanswered is: Can a European public sphere be constituted via the Europeanization of reporting in the national media? Generally, studies find a modest degree of Europeanization with regard to media attention of selected topics, as well as thematic convergence. A limited but emergent “Europeanization” of journalism has also been found (Statham 2008), although this concerns transnational newspapers serving specialist audiences and to a limited extent European correspondents from the national press. Interestingly, this research states that journalists would be able to adapt and “Europeanize” to a greater extent if politicians improved their own communication efforts and made European governance more relevant to citizens (Ibid.). Europeanization has also driven the convergence of national media policies (Harcourt 2003, Harcourt 2010). The EU has increasingly influenced the functioning of the media in its member states, and in many cases has succeeded in implementing EU-wide policies attempting to shape European media (Papathanassopoulos and Negrine 2011). This notwithstanding, as much as the different aspects of the process of Europeanization of the media are considered, it is worth bearing in mind that the media still function within national media systems and are primarily subject to national policies.

Whilst appreciating the potential role of the media in creating and maintaining the public sphere, it should be noted that we are experiencing rapid changes in media environment and public communication patterns today. New communication technologies have strongly reshaped media and politics, and thus also the public sphere. To this end, the book reflects on the question of how these changes affect the media and communication

environments as well as the public spheres in Europe. Political communication occurs

in complex, hybrid assemblages of older and newer media, as a diverse array of actors, ranging from large professional news organizations to elite politicians to engaged citizens, participate in an incessant struggle to shape public discourse and define the political agenda (Chadwick 2013, 159).

Some scholars remark that the media, instead of streamlining, actually limit the development potential of public sphere; that is that they “distort and trivialize public opinion” (Harisson and Wessels 2009, 7). Other researchers alert readers to the many threats brought about by the massive transformation in media technologies. Howard (2015) indicates the enormous potential for political manipulation. Elsewhere, analysing disinformation Bennett and Livingston (2018, 135) warn of foreign interventions into national affairs that

“have become a clear danger to the integrity of political processes and the coherence of the communication that defines them” and argue that studying the operations of hackers, trolls and bots “should become a more central area of political communication research”.

Their claims point to

looking less at isolated examples of “fake news” and paying more attention to how they and other disruptive processes fit into larger “disinformation orders” (Ibid.).

The response to these communication-disrupting processes should include not only rational aspects, such as media education and fact-checking actions, but also emotional approaches as many citizens actively seek specific information in order to support their identities and political activities, which in the long run might be detrimental to social cohesion.

Describing disrupted and disconnected public spheres, characteristic for contemporary times, Bennett and Pfetsch (2018, 245) emphasize two fundamental changes:

first, the proliferation of social and digital media which has increased the dispersion and cacophony of public voices (Dahlgren 2005, 151); second, this fragmentation of publics has led to an “inability to communicate across differences” (Waisbord 2016, 2).

One of the dangers is the increasing polarization of political views. The selective exposure based on political attitudes and beliefs may significantly weaken a common core of the public sphere and this in the future could lead to various conflicts. Critics of the internet argue that

the net creates a chaotic, fragmented discourse, which in turn may lead to “balkanisation”, or parallel communities; isolated groups cultivating introvert, sometimes extreme views (Rasmussen 2014, 1323).

Such processes contribute also to enhancing illiberal modes of governance which occur across Europe but also beyond (the literature on relations between media and illiberal tendencies is becoming more and more extensive, e.g. Surowiec et al. 2020, Hanley and Vachudova 2018). This is why it is important to observe the direction of public discourses and proposed policies, something that is particularly noticeable in the chapters on CEE in this volume.

The structure of the book

The publication is divided into two parts entitled “Opportunities” and “Challenges”—each considering different themes.

Part I—“Opportunities”: This section presents a constructive approach and puts forward suggestions of different forms of the Europeanization of public spheres in times of crisis. It sheds light on some of the positive outcomes of numerous crises with which Europe is currently concerned. One of the aims here is to show the opportunities for public communication in Europe and the development potential of the European public sphere. This is achieved by pointing to the role of elites and especially intellectuals, and indicating the importance of citizens' participation. This is of great significance in the era of rising populism, misinformation and fake news. The quality of reporting may be shaped both by professional journalistic elites who take up crucial issues for European politics and approach them professionally, as well as by volunteers who engage with topics and undertake citizen journalism, often using online tools to outstanding effects. The chapters in this part examine the statements and actions of political elites. They discuss the role of the media in the public communication process and their importance for the building of the European public sphere. This section also highlights the impact of certain phenomena, for example social media echo chambers, and in doing so proposes possible remedies. The last chapter takes on the topic of information warfare in international relations and discusses the influence of disinformation, half-truths and multiple, often contradictory

versions of events, that occur in international communication on the European public sphere.

The first chapter of this book, “The awakening of the European public sphere amid the crisis” authored by Józef Niżnik, who heads the European Studies Unit in the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology at the Polish Academy of Sciences, critically discusses current issues, in particular the unexpected effects of the numerous crises which have hit the EU in recent years (Brexit, the migration and refugee crises, and the Eurozone crisis, among others). He argues that as well as growing populism and Euroscepticism (cf. Dutceac Segesten and Bossetta 2019), transnational activities of citizens have also appeared. They have discovered their European affinity and entered vivid and dynamic debates about Europe. Referring to the theory of a European public sphere and European integration studies the author explains the significance of the engagement of European intellectuals in the public discourse. Niżnik, referring to Furedi (2006) and Bauman (1987) convinces us that:

it is this category of people which even in postmodern times, and characterized by the devaluation of their role, can still perform the role of interpreters, making the world familiar for average members of society (19).

Moreover, their mission is to transmit values and principles, define and sustain standards. All of this has been largely neglected by the elites in the process of European integration so far. The support of wider public for the special role of elites is needed, however one must remember that it is a very difficult task in times of rising populism. The chapter makes a valuable contribution to the discussion on the development of a European public sphere and it should spur into action public intellectuals, scholars, journalists and activists who believe in the European project.

The second chapter, written by Sophie Schmalenberger from Aarhus University’s School of Culture and Society, concerns the European public sphere and the internet. It seeks an answer to the question of whether Green Members of European Parliaments (MEPs) acting on Twitter can create a European public sphere. It explores how, in their everyday use of Twitter North-Western European politicians contribute to the emergence of a European public sphere in order to reduce the communicational gap between the European Parliament and EU citizens and thus resolve the EU’s democratic deficit. Applying Habermas’ (1996) understanding of the public sphere, Schmalenberger reports on a qualitative content analysis carried out in an attempt to access the horizontal and vertical Europeanization of Green MEPs’ political messages and networks on

Twitter. The search for a truly European space for political communication and deliberation can be concluded with findings that indicate that the Green MEPs included in this study use Twitter for political communication and strongly thematise EU-level issues and to a lesser extent other member states' issues. Furthermore, the analysis directs the reader's considerations to the role of social media in the European public sphere (cf. also Hänska and Bauchowitz 2019, Ruiz-Soler et al. 2019), as well as contemporary online trends such as, for example, the appearance of echo chambers (amplification and reinforcement of beliefs by communication and repetition inside a closed system) and the consequences of this phenomenon. As media consumers expose themselves to content that is more in consonance with their world views and connect with others who share similar political preferences, their political opinions shared on Twitter are

confirmed and reproduced instead of disagreed on by users with diverging political preferences and thus deliberately questioned, criticised and discussed (49).

On the other hand, interaction with partisan affiliates from various groups via Twitter

as everyday practice can contribute to the development of an increasingly strong pan-European Green network and, possibly, identity (49).

Moreover,

MEPs can play a key role in occasionally "bursting" their respective "echo chamber" bubble by retweeting and critically commenting or answering tweets from national or European, parliamentary or extra-parliamentary political opponents in order to fuel a political discussion (49),

that is indispensable for the vibrant European public sphere.

In the third chapter "The emerging European public sphere in the face of Russia's information war" Joanna Fomina from the Polish Academy of Sciences presents communication solutions which are novel in international relations (at least on the scale with which we are dealing now). Following Gerhards' (1993) understanding of the European public sphere she analyses several case studies from 2014-2017, arguing that Russia's information war has had a twofold consequence for the development of the European public sphere. She cites examples showing Russia's actions to contaminate discourses in Europe with counterfactual

information, undermine European values, divide the European public and amplify existing differences within and between EU member-states, thus strengthening Euroscepticism and populism, and deepening social polarization in Europe. However these damaging ventures—among others distraction and manipulation characteristic for Russia’s “sharp power” that exploits the asymmetry of openness between its own restrictive system and democratic societies (Nye 2018)—do not remain unchallenged. The European Union has implemented—as Fomina underlines—concerted and well-targeted measures counteracting Russian strategic communications (e.g. information campaigns refuting myths, designing and tailoring narratives and education projects, and last but not least institutional involvement). This situation may have beneficial effects on the public sphere in Europe as media and various audiences in the EU will be (and to some extent already are) speaking about the same issues (such as threats posed by Russia—for instance more and more texts have begun to appear in the media in the context of the European Parliament elections in May 2019). As Fomina states:

Russia’s efforts to undermine and discredit the EU could paradoxically contribute to greater communication between various audiences and speakers across the EU’s member-states’ boundaries and thus promote the European public sphere’s development and the strengthening of the EU’s resilience (55).

Part II—“Challenges”: The chapters in this section aim to explore various approaches to the distorted communication, dominated by national interests, that serve to hamper dialogue and understanding between people. For instance, one of the chapters in this part contains considerations on the European backlash in CEE and its disruptive potential for European unity. It deliberates on the East-West divide inside the European Union and shows contradictory perceptions and conflicting interests. Another chapter discusses the process of peripheralization, i.e. when national public spheres do not actively participate in the European debates. This phenomenon can be observed particularly in the countries that joined the EU recently. Following chapters present the outcomes of research on debates about European integration and identity as well as EU politics and the Eurozone crisis. They raise the questions of how national identity conceptions impede the development of a European public sphere and whether we can observe a Europeanization of public spheres in crisis. The chapters elaborate on models of European identity formation and integration and examine the state of the European public sphere, referring to respective countries their studies concern. Additionally, the role of the

media within public debate is highlighted. The overarching goal of this section is to present the challenges that Europe is now facing in the context of communication by depicting the different perspectives.

The fourth chapter “Reshaping the European Public Sphere: Preliminary Insights into the European Backlash in Central and Eastern Europe” is co-authored by Alina Bârgăoanu, Flavia Durach and Raluca Buturoiu, from the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration in Bucharest. It considers the European backlash in CEE in reference to the notion of pan-European solidarity. More specifically, the authors point to its disruptive potential for European unity. The reunification of CEE states with Western European ones, starting 2004 and subsequently continuing within EU structures, seemed to put an end a decades-long divide. European unity and the EU as a whole have been taken for granted. Nonetheless, a divide has recently emerged. Some recognize it as a divide resulting from the ideological lines between the so-called liberal, democratic West and the illiberal, authoritarian, statist East. However, on closer analysis, as Bârgăoanu, Durach and Buturoiu write:

the structural causes of the current European backlash in CEE go beyond superficial political and ideological labels, the clash of political values notwithstanding. These structural causes relate, at least partially, to the persistence of socio-economic gaps between the two parts of the EU (90).

These development gaps translate to differences both in status and perception. They also reinforce centre-periphery relations. The chapter attempts to understand the East-West socio-economic divide by studying public perceptions towards several issues relevant for the EU in Old Member States (OMS) and the New Member States (NMS). It delivers secondary data analysis results of public opinion surveys conducted between 2007 and 2017, which indicate that public opinion in OMS and NMS starts to diverge on several important issues. This is extremely important because:

In order to stop the gap from widening on an ever increasing number of issues, awareness needs to be build that what we deal with is a crisis of divergence–socio-economic divergence and divergence in the shape and evolution of the public spheres, which can escalate into a disruptive, geopolitical crisis (112).

In the fifth chapter “Europeanization and peripheralization of Bulgarian public sphere” Ralitsa Kovacheva, from Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, considers whether and how the process of two-tier EU

integration would affect the process of Europeanization of national public spheres. In countries that joined the EU a relatively short time ago the process of Europeanization might only be in a very early phase. Taking the European integration theory (differentiated integration theory: multi-speed Europe or two-speed Europe, otherwise known as “variable geometry Europe” or “core Europe”) as a starting point, the Kovacheva examines the example of Bulgaria and searches for the development potential of the European public sphere. She presents the results of a comparative analysis of European election media coverage of the most popular newspaper websites in Bulgaria and the UK and argues that a process opposite to Europeanization is taking place, i.e. peripheralization. It takes place

when national public spheres do not actively participate in the European debates, due to a lack of wide and informed national public debates on European issues, and as such they have little or no discursive influence at the EU level (116).

This notion—peripheralization of national public sphere—is also valid in terms of the (non)implementation of European media standards and good practices in journalism in Bulgaria.

The following chapter “In Whose Interest? How National Identity Conceptions Impede the Development of a European Public Sphere. The Polish and British Popular Press Discourses on the EU Free Movement of Persons” written by Andrew Anžur Clement, affiliated to Université libre de Bruxelles and University of Warwick, provides a close look at the role of national identities in the development of a European public sphere. Taking issue with transactionalist appeals for supranational affection, this contribution takes news narrative as a conduit through which the “pulse” of public discourse can be taken regarding issues relating to free movement of persons in the EU. Unlike other research projects that mostly make use of prestigious, opinion-forming print press, the chapter examines high-circulation, low-quality press from two states from the West and the East of the European Union—the UK and Poland, as they have opposite approaches to the single market.

In the former, the said right was positioned as a means of eroding the perceived national situation by forcing extension of solidarity ties to unequal, non-members of national identity. In the latter, free movement was framed as failing to fulfil claims of equality with the West. Thus, the identity-based interests of the two states mirrored each other (146).

The chapter ends with an explanation that national identity not only filters perception of interests in free movement, but it may be a considerable barrier to the creation of an affective identification with Europe.

The final chapter “Europeanization of Public Spheres in Crisis? An Analysis of German News Coverage on the Greek Sovereign Debt Crisis”, authored by Laura Prestien from the Freie Universität Berlin, deals with the coverage of the Greek Sovereign Debt Crisis in German quality newspapers. Given its magnitude, the Hellenic crisis serves as a significant setting to investigate the Europeanization of public spheres in the EU member states. The chapter examines how the degree of Europeanization in newspaper coverage on the Greek Sovereign Debt Crisis has changed. The author also tested whether the chosen independent variables, “a newspaper’s commitment towards the European project” and its “crisis awareness”, significantly influence the degree of Europeanization. The results of a comparative political claims-analysis indicate decreasing tendencies within patterns of Europeanization *vis-à-vis* an upward trend emphasizing national perspectives within the public sphere from a longitudinal perspective.

For the German public sphere, this reveals an ambiguous outlook as, despite the dominance of patterns of Europeanization, there are clear tendencies moving the German public sphere away from an “ideal” situation (171).

The author warns that

since the media influences how citizens evaluate political realities, the diminishing visibility of EU-level and other member state actors might not only have implications on how the Greek crisis is assessed on the national level and it might also hamper dialogue and understanding across Europe (171).

It is especially important in the context of Habermas’ (2018) forewarning, concerning “mutual perspective-taking, without which no understanding of and for another can be formed”.

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Presenting critical problems of contemporary public communication and current European affairs, this book will be of great interest to many readers—not only scholars and students involved with questions about the European public sphere, but also journalists and press officers. It can also attract the attention of politicians and public policy makers, as well as

experts on communication and international affairs. The book likewise appeals to concerned citizens and civil society organizations interested in European media and communication.

The new trends in communication that have arisen lately should be researched profoundly and robustly. They require thorough investigation and dissemination. The changes connected with media and communication and their implications for the European public sphere are both interesting to explore and much-needed. The book in front of you is an invitation to study this field further.

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