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“The role of the Internet in the European Union’s public
communication strategy and the emerging European public
sphere”

by

Asimina Michailidou

Doctoral thesis

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award
of PhD of Loughborough University

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Thesis Abstract

The focus of this thesis is on the vertical Europeanisation of the online public debate and more specifically on the EU's online public communication strategy, i.e. the top-down process of the unmediated, direct, online communication between the EU and the general public. The empirical data has been collected in four stages, namely public communication policy-making; public communication policy implementation online; online public communication policy impact on key Internet audiences; and interviews with key senior Commission officials.

The review of the EU public communication documents has shown that the Commission has unambiguously committed to facilitate direct communication with the EU public as part of the process of building the EU citizens' trust towards its institutions and in addressing the issues of transparency and democratic legitimation of the EU's decision-making process, while the Internet is seen as a key tool in facilitating direct communication. However, after monitoring three of the EU's official websites for a year and analyzing the views of 221 Internet users on the EU's Information and Communication strategy online, it has become evident that the Commission has not yet fulfilled these commitments.

The interviews with key Commission officials have revealed that behind this gap between policy and online implementation lie: **a)** an institutional culture which conflicts with the aims of the Commission's public communication strategy; and **b)** constant institutional restructuring in the last six years.

Very recently the Commission has begun to address some of the shortfalls in the online implementation of its public communication strategy, yet there is no indication that the results of the online debate regarding the EU's future will be incorporated in the decision-making process, while further study is required in the future in order to assess any change in the institutional culture in relation to its public communication strategy.

Keywords: the Internet, public communication, public sphere, the EU, democracy, participation, deliberation, the EU democratic deficit.

Table of Contents

Thesis Abstract	i
Acknowledgements	viii
Introduction	1
i. The European public sphere	2
ii. The role of the Internet in the EU's public communication strategy and the emerging European public sphere	4
iii. Structure of the thesis	8
Chapter 1- Theoretical framework	12
1.1 The concept of the public sphere	13
1.2 The case of the EU	19
1.2.1 The European Public Sphere and the Democratic deficit of the EU	19
1.2.2 What public sphere Europe?	22
1.3 Public Communication	30
1.3.1 Why public communication?	31
1.3.2 Public Diplomacy	33
1.3.3 Public Affairs	37
1.3.4 EU public communication	39
Chapter 2- Research questions, methodology and theoretical clarifications	47
2.1 Cyberspace and the public sphere: Who participates?	50
2.2 The democratising potential of the Internet	56
2.3 The Internet as a tool of democratisation of the EU	61
2.4 EU public communication and the Internet	65
Chapter 3- EU public communication: The policy	72
3.1 2000-2004: The "Pre-Wallström" era	74
3.1.1 Historical overview: 2000-2004	74
3.1.2 Component A: EU governance and the European public sphere	78
3.1.3 Component B: EU public communication strategic aims	82
3.1.4 Component C: The role of the Internet	90
3.1.5 Concluding remarks: 2000-2004	93
3.2 2004-2006: Something is changing?	95
3.2.1 Historical overview: 2004-2006	96
3.2.2 Component A: EU governance and the European public sphere	98
3.2.3 Component B: EU public communication strategic aims	100
3.2.4 Component C: The role of the Internet	106
3.2.5 Concluding remarks: 2004-2006	109
3.3 Conclusion	111

Chapter 4- EU public communication: Online policy implementation	123
4.1 Methodology	125
4.1.1 The websites	125
4.1.2 Coding values	126
4.1.3 Descriptive statistical analysis	133
4.2 Findings	134
4.2.1 Coding period March-June 2004	135
4.2.2 Coding period May- July 2005	145
4.3 Conclusion	153
Chapter 5- EU website's online user survey	164
5.1 Methodology	165
5.1.1 Sample	165
5.1.2 Questions and data processing methodology	169
5.2 Findings	170
5.2.1 Demographic data	170
5.2.2 The respondents' Internet profile	174
5.2.3 EU official websites: The respondents' views	177
5.2.4 General questions: The role of the Internet in the EU's public sphere	186
5.3 Conclusion	190
Conclusion- Theory and reality of the EU's public communication strategy online	199
i. From theory to reality: The concept of the online European public sphere	199
The EU's public communication: Information and Communication policy 2001-2006	201
The EU's public communication: Online implementation	203
EU public communication online: Policy impact on key online audiences	204
ii. Is it necessary to bridge this gap between the EU's public communication policy and its online implementation?	209
Bibliography	215
Annex 1- Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate: Tables of actions	238
Annex 2- Semi-structured interviews in a free format	241
Annex 3- EU websites' coding variables	243
Annex 4- EU websites online user survey 2005-2006, questionnaire and results	247

List of Figures

- Figure 2.1:** Key components of the theoretical concept regarding the EU public sphere, Source: The author. 64
- Figure 3.1:** Proposed areas of action, White Paper on a European Communication Policy, Source: The author, adapted from the White Paper on a European Communication Policy (COM(2006)35). 105
- Figure 3.2:** “The circle of prosperity”, the three key ideas underlining the EU’s Information and Communication strategy, Source: The author, based on Commission Information and Communication strategy documents 2000-2004 and 2004-2006, examined in Part 3.1. 112
- Figure 3.3:** Key components of the theoretical concept regarding the EU public sphere: The EU public communication policy documents, adapted from Figure 2.1, Chapter 2 and the analysis of key EU Information and Communication documents. 115
- Figure 4.1:** Europa Discussion topics and type of official input in 2004, Source: The author, Data Source: EUROPA. 141
- Figure 4.2:** EURUNION Discussion topics and type of official input in 2004, Source: The author, Data source: EURUNION. 142
- Figure 4.3:** EUROPA Youth Discussion- Does Europe need a Constitution? (2004), Source: The author, Data source: EUROPA. 143
- Figure 4.4:** EUROPA- Results of the European Summit on the Constitution, Source: The author, Data source: EUROPA. 143
- Figure 4.5:** EURUNION- Number of participants and of discussion topics per week in 2004, Source: The author, Data source: EURUNION. 143
- Figure 4.6:** Public communication in 2004 and 2005 per website, Source: The author, Data Sources: EUROPA, EU@UN, EURUNION. 147
- Figure 4.7:** Relationship-building public communication per website and year, Source: The author, Data Sources: EUROPA, EU@UN, EURUNION. 148
- Figure 4.8:** Proactive public communication per website and year, Source: The author, Data Sources: EUROPA, EU@UN, EURUNION. 149
- Figure 4.9:** Reactive public communication per website and year, Source: The author, Data Sources: EUROPA, EU@UN, EURUNION. 149
- Figure 4.10:** Type of text per website and year, Source: The author, Data Sources: EUROPA, EU@UN, EURUNION. 151
- Figure 4.11:** Interactive communication per website and year, Source: the author, Data Sources: EUROPA, EU@UN, EURUNION. 153
- Figure 4.12:** Online implementation of “The circle of prosperity”, the three key ideas underlining the EU’s Information and Communication strategy, adapted from Figure 3.2, Chapter 3. 155
- Figure 4.13:** Key components of the theoretical concept regarding the EU public sphere: Online implementation, adapted from Figure 2.1, Chapter 2 and the analysis of the EU websites EUROPA, EU@UN and EURUNION. 159
- Figure 5.1:** Nationality of respondents per country, Source: EU websites’ online user survey, conducted by the author in October 2005-January 2006. 172
- Figure 5.2:** Nationality of respondents per category, Source: EU websites’ online user survey, conducted by the author in October 2005-January 2006. 173
- Figure 5.3:** Frequency of accessing governmental/political websites per gender, Source: EU website’s online user survey, conducted by the author in October 2005-January 2006. 176
- Figure 5.4:** Respondents’ criteria for evaluating websites, Source: EU website’s online

user survey, conducted by the author in October 2005-January 2006.	183
Figure 5.5: Can the Internet help eliminate the EU's democratic deficit? Source: EU website's online user survey, conducted by the author in October 2005-January 2006.	187
Figure 5. 6: Key components of the theoretical concept regarding the EU public sphere: Internet users' views, adapted from Figure 2.1, Chapter 2.	194
Figure c. 1: EU public communication- Theory, policy and online reality, Source: The author, based on Figures 2.3, 3.2, 4.12 and 5.7.	207

List of Tables

Table 3.1: Key ideas and related terms in the EU's Information and Communication Strategy documents, Source: Commission Information and Communication strategy documents 2000-2004 and 2004-2006, examined in Part 3.1.	113
Table 4.1: Phase 1 of defining Coding values for the content found in EUROPA, EU@UN and EURUNION homepages, adapted from Table 3.1, Chapter 3.	130
Table 4.2: Phase 2 of defining Coding values for the content found in EUROPA, EU@UN and EURUNION homepages, adapted from Table 3.1, Chapter 3.	131
Table 4.3: Frequency of occurrence for type of public communication and category of topics per website in Year 1 (2004), Source: The author, Source of data: EUROPA, EU@UN, EURUNION.	136
Table 4.4: Frequency of occurrence for type of public communication and category of topics per website in Year 2 (2005), Source: The author, Source of data: EUROPA, EU@UN, EURUNION.	146
Table 4.5: EU core values and related thematic areas as these appeared on EUROPA, EU@UN and EURUNION, adapted from Table 3.1, Chapter 3.	154
Table 5.1: List of initial academic/academic-related contacts per country, Source: The author	168
Table 5.2: Number of respondents per age group and gender, Source: EU websites' online user survey, conducted by the author in October 2005-January 2006.	171
Table 5.3: Number of respondents per occupation and gender, Source: EU websites' online user survey, conducted by the author in October 2005-January 2006.	171
Table 5.4: Number of respondents per level of education and gender, Source: EU website's online user survey, conducted by the author in October 2005-January 2006.	174
Table 5.5: Number of respondents per level of education and age group, Source: EU website's online user survey, conducted by the author in October 2005-January 2006.	174
Table 5. 6: Categories of online fora that the respondents access most often, Source: EU website's online user survey, conducted by the author in October 2005-January 2006.	177
Table 5. 7: Activities that the respondents chose to do on each of the three official EU websites, Source: EU website's online user survey, conducted by the author in October 2005-January 2006.	179
Table 5.8: Types of interaction that the respondents would like to see more on EUROPA, EU@UN and EURUNION, Source: EU website's online user survey, conducted by the author in October 2005-January 2006.	180
Table 5.9: EU websites other than EUROPA, EU@UN and EURUNION, usually accessed by the respondents, Source: EU website's online user survey, conducted by the author in October 2005-January 2006.	183
Table 5.10: Respondents' views on the role of the Internet in eliminating the EU's perceived democratic deficit, Source: EU website's online user survey, conducted by the author in October 2005-January 2006.	189

List of Annex Tables

Table I: Promoting citizens' participation in the democratic process, Source: Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate (COM(2005)494, final: 18).	238
Table II: Assisting national debates on the future of the EU, Source: Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate (COM(2005)494, final: 16).	239
Table III: <i>Generating a real dialogue on European Policies</i> , Source: Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate (COM(2005)494, final: 19).	239
Table IV: <i>Stimulating a wider public debate</i> , Source: Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate (COM(2005)494, final: 17).	240
Table V: Coding Variables 1-3.	243
Table VI: Coding Variables 4-22, Reactive public communication.	243
Table VII: Coding Variables 23-41, Proactive public communication.	244
Table VIII: Coding Variables 42-60, Relationship-building public communication.	244
Table IX: Coding Variables 61-64.	245
Table X: Coding Variables 1A-8A for links that provide interactive communication type 1 (online discussion/forum).	246

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Introduction

The present thesis focuses on the vertical Europeanisation of the online public debate and more specifically on the EU's online public communication strategy, i.e. the top-down process of the unmediated, direct, online communication between the EU and the general public.

Over the past few years the European Commission has unambiguously committed to facilitate direct communication with the EU public as part of the process of building the EU citizens' trust towards its institutions and in addressing the issues of transparency and democratic legitimisation of the EU's decision-making process, while the Internet is seen as a key tool in facilitating direct communication. This commitment seems to have been inspired by two theoretical debates which have been developing in parallel over the past 10-15 years: The democratising impact of the Internet on politics and the conceptual association of the European public sphere with the EU's democratic deficit.

Combining the core elements of these two debates, the concept of the European public sphere is understood in this project in Habermasian terms, i.e. as public realm where **a)** potentially everyone has access to and no one enters into discourse with an advantage over another (**who**); **b)** is a realm in which individuals gather to participate in open discussions (**how**); and **c)** has the potential to be a foundation for a critique of a society based on democratic principles (**what**).

In this context, the questions that this thesis aims to address are formulated as follows: Does the Internet have any impact on the communication process between the EU institutions and the public? Is the EU's online public communication encouraging and enabling public discourse within the EU, with the scope to contribute to the elimination of the EU's democratic deficit?

These questions are addressed in this thesis on four levels, namely:

- a)** Policy-making level of the EU's online public communication strategy;
- b)** Policy-implementation;
- c)** Policy impact on key EU audiences; and

d) Interviews with key Commission communication officials.

The following sections look at the conceptual background of this research project in more detail and present a detailed overview of the thesis's structure.

i. The European public sphere

The concept of a European public sphere has been the subject of a number of scholarly works in recent and contemporary research (Weiler, Begg, Peterson 2003; de Beus 2002; Koopmans, Neidhardt, Pfetsch 2002; van de Steeg 2002; Kunelius and Sparks 2001; Scharpf 1999; Weiler 1999; Weiler 1996). Analysis of this work demonstrates that several key questions remain contentious. Does a European public sphere exist in the first place? Is it only a public sphere for the elites or does it involve the general public too? Are there several or just one European public sphere? Are cultural and linguistic diversity and national identities a serious obstacle or advantage in the construction of a European public sphere?

The academic interest of this debate notwithstanding, how important is it for the day-to-day EU politics that we understand the nature and role of the emerging European public sphere?

The concept of the public sphere is linked with citizens' participation in the decision-making process, equality in the possibility of participation and ultimately democracy (Habermas 1996). In the case of the EU, few scholars reject the notion that there is a link between the public political discourse on EU issues and the EU's democratic deficit. In fact, for most authors, the argument that the EU institutions and decision-making process lack democratic legitimation is a given, although there is no consensus on whether the EU's democratic deficit is the cause or result of an absent/deficient European public sphere (Trenz 2004; de Beus 2002; Weiler 1996)¹. A first step towards democratic legitimation is to establish a public dialogue between the decision-making institutions and the public, with the latter's feedback incorporated in the decision-making process.

The democratic deficit of the EU institutions aside, the Union is currently also facing an identity crisis: The candidacy of Turkey as an EU member has sparked numerous and lengthy debates, nationally and on

EU level, about the geographical and cultural boundaries of Europe. It has also forced politicians and the public alike to rethink what the EU stands for and what we want it to represent in the future. And the issue of Turkey's candidacy is not the only one that has fuelled the debate regarding the concept of the European identity and European values: The rejection of the Constitutional Treaty by national referenda in France and the Netherlands in 2005 highlighted the gap between public opinion and EU policy as far as the future of the EU is concerned. The matter of "what Europe is all about" became yet more pressing in 2006, which saw one of the most intense cultural conflicts erupt within the European society, after the publication by the Danish newspaper Jyllands Posten of cartoons depicting the Prophet Mohammed sparked violent protests by Muslims throughout the world (Wikipedia.org 2006b)².

At the same time, the EU has emerged politically weak from international crises, such as Afghanistan, Iraq, the "War on Terror", the ongoing Palestinian-Israeli conflict and most recently, Israel's invasion of Lebanon and the case of third-country secret services abducting and illegally interrogating individuals on EU ground. In these cases the EU has appeared unable to act with a single voice and to effectively promote and defend its core values of democracy and peace in the international front.

With the number of the EU member-states due to rise to 27 in 2007, when Romania and Bulgaria are set to join the Union, defining the identity of the EU and bridging the gap between public opinion and EU policy regarding the role and aims of the Union are vital if the future of this polity is to be safeguarded. It is for this reason that understanding the concept of the European public sphere is so important: Who are the participants in the debate regarding the identity, values and future of the Union; particularly pertinent, is it an elite public sphere or is it open to the general public as well? Can we observe common reference frameworks regarding the identity and values of the EU emerging from this debate? More crucially, is there any evidence that this identity crisis has finally led to a dialogue of substance between the EU decision-making elites and the general public?

So far, evidence of the emergence of a European public sphere has

usually been sought within the national public discourses of the EU member-states, which are mediated by national conventional mass media, such as the press and television (Koopmans, Statham, Kriesi, Della Porta, de Beus, Guiraudon, Medrano, Pfetsch 2004; Pfetsch 2004; Trenz 2004; Koopmans and Pfetsch 2003; Rauer, Rivet, van de Steeg 2002; Kevin 2001). Examining the emerging European public sphere from such a perspective has provided invaluable data on the level of Europeanisation of national public political discourses (i.e. the level of reporting and debating of EU issues within national public spheres) and on the level of interconnectedness of the national public spheres (reporting and debating within a reference framework of shared European values, linkages between national actors). In other words, this analytical perspective on the emerging European public sphere has offered empirical data on the “horizontal” (Pfetsch 2004) process of the Europeanisation of the national public spheres.

However, the role of EU institutions as both actors in this public sphere, and facilitators of the public debate, has been largely unexplored. The present thesis focuses on the official EU strategy of communication with the general public (**EU public communication strategy**) and its role in the emerging European public sphere. In order to observe the degree of interaction between the EU institutions and the public, i.e. the “vertical” (Pfetsch 2004: 4) Europeanisation of the public dialogue, one needs to move beyond the fora of national/ regional public debates, as these are moderated by national/regional media, which intercede any official EU input and frame the debate within the context of regional/national reference values. The main argument of the present thesis is that an analysis of the public sphere may offer us a clearer idea of the level and quality of interaction between the EU institutions and the public, and more specifically of the aims and outcomes of the EU’s public communication strategy within the online public sphere.

ii. The role of the Internet in the EU’s public communication strategy and the emerging European public sphere

Of all the mass media, it is the Internet that presents the most

interesting, challenging case, because of its rapid growth and unique capabilities for uninterrupted flow of information, identity fluidity and direct interaction of its users. It is not only one of the most popular means of communication but it is 'invading' more and more aspects of our everyday life: Commerce; entertainment; health; the news; economy; politics; lifestyle³. It is the medium that offers to its users the ability to interact and communicate without necessarily knowing each other, let alone having physical contact with each other (Jordan 2000). Time and space also have a totally different meaning in the digital reality of cyberspace. In that sense the concept of matter and non-matter, the concept of interpersonal communication is reconfigured in cyberspace (Poster 1995).

As far as politics is concerned, the opportunities that the Internet offers for interaction with the public, the continuous flow of information and the possibility to reach audiences larger than ever more quickly than ever, have already influenced the way politics is conducted. The more people gain access to the Internet, the more governments, politicians, organizations (governmental and non-governmental) and activists become interested, for various reasons, in this new means of communication and try to gain access and control over it, in an attempt to influence/control their mass audiences.

On the one hand, under the pressure of several governments, as well as religious institutions, even the pioneers of uncensored online information, GOOGLE (Google Inc. 2006), have bowed and have eventually had to impose restrictions on the online material available on certain of its versions (Wikipedia.org 2006a). On the other hand, among the first to realise the potential of the Internet have been political activists from both mainstream and extremist groups and movements, who have been quick to use it to promote their causes, raise support and achieve uncensored coverage of their actions. The anti-globalisation movement started online and fundamentalist militia are using the Internet to circulate their, often gruesome, propaganda videos.

In more recent years, the Internet's influence has also become evident in mainstream politics. An increasing number of parliamentary and local/regional authority candidates in Europe and the US maintain

websites and electronic diaries (blogs) and rely on online political marketing as much as conventional forms of campaigning prior to elections (Howard 2005; Johnson 2004; Todd and Taylor 2004; Zimmermann, Koopmans, Schlecht 2004; Gibson, Nixon, Ward 2003; Koopmans and Pfetsch 2003; Mälkiä, Anttiroiko, Savolainen 2003; Zimmermann and Koopmans 2003). Of course, there is no consensus among scholars over the precise nature of the impact of the Internet on politics. For some, particularly early theorists, the Internet is meant to be an “anti-authoritarian, anarchistic” (Tsaliki 2000: 1) means of communication, introducing a “new, global and antisovereign social space, where anybody can express his or her beliefs without fear” (Barlow 1996). Other theorists take the notion of the (potentially) alternative public sphere that the Internet offers further and examine the role of new communications’ technologies in warfare and diplomacy, suggesting that the Internet and cyberspace are rapidly changing the nature of power, whether this is military or political (Jordan 2000; Arquilla and Ronfeldt 1999). At the same time, several other scholars dismiss the early claims of the Internet being the new Habermasian public sphere as unsubstantiated and adopt a more sceptical view over the democratising potential of the medium (Venkatesh, Nosovitch, Miner 2004; Hibberd, McNair, Schlesinger 2003; le Grignou and Patou 2003).

Political authorities have also been slowly adopting the concept of e-governance, from the more common provision of information and services in electronic form, to electronic voting. According to the latest statistical data available, in the European Union alone, in October 2004, 84% of the public service providers⁴ had a website and 40% of all public service providers measured in all 28 countries⁵ offered 100% electronic case handling (Capgemini 2005). E-democracy still has a long way to go, as far as transparency and citizens’ participation in the decision-making progress are concerned, but certain European countries, like Estonia and Sweden, are paving the way for full online access of the decision-making process.

The Commission of the European Communities has long acknowledged the importance of the Internet as a medium of reaching out

to a wider European public (COM(2005)229, final; COM(2004)196, final; COM(2002)350, final/2; COM(2002)705; final; COM(2001)354, final; Commission of the European Communities 2006h; EUROPA 2006j). The Internet is identified as one of the key public diplomacy tools in every Communication from the Commission to the other European Institutions and in all the versions of the Information and Communication Strategy of the EU. The time-and-space-free, interactive communication that the Internet offers has enabled the Commission to make the policy-making process more open to the public's feedback, while it has also been key in strengthening the networking process between European educational and cultural institutions. Furthermore, the Internet has enabled fast and cost-free access to a very large amount of EU official documentation (from legal documents, to speeches, communications, reports, recommendations etc) and has thus facilitated the "opening-up" process of the EU institutions.

Despite all this, analysis of the impact that the Internet has had on the way the EU institutions operate, and more specifically on the public communication strategy of the EU is non-existent to date. It was only after 2003 that scholars began to look at the potential of the Internet as an all-inclusive space for public discussion of EU issues, mainly focussing on the use of the medium by political actors across Europe and from the perspective of member-states and/or national political parties, rather than the perspective of an EU, centralised public communication strategy online (van Os 2005a; Van Os 2005b; Zimmermann, Koopmans, Schlecht 2004; Zimmermann and Koopmans 2003; Zimmermann and Erbe 2002)⁶. In other words, these research projects did not address the top-down aspect of public dialogue within the European public sphere. Is there any contribution from the EU establishment to the emerging "Europeanised" public debate (vertical Europeanisation: Pfetsch, op.cit.)? And what about the opportunity that the Internet offers for unmediated direct interaction with the general public? Is the EU taking advantage of that possibility when making its messages known to the public? These are questions which this thesis seeks to address.

iii. Structure of the thesis

The conceptual framework for this thesis is based on a correlation of the following key issues. The debate regarding the democratic deficit of the EU Institutions inevitably leads to the discussion of the key terms of participation and deliberation, openness and accountability, all core characteristics of democracy. On the one hand, openness of the decision-making processes and accountability are linked with democratic legitimation of governing institutions. On a second level, openness could be linked with an all-inclusive, non-elitist public sphere. On the other hand, deliberation and participation are key characteristics of the public dialogue. A fundamental prerequisite of both deliberation and participation is interactivity between participating individuals and/or groups/institutions. Public communication is the top-down process of the interaction between the EU institutions and the public. The Internet then becomes relevant because it facilitates interactivity and openness, as well as participation in the public dialogue on equal terms, all attributes found in the theoretical works regarding the concept of the public sphere (Habermas 1989).

A general normative model of the concept of the public sphere is established in Chapter 1, based on the Habermasian approach of the public sphere. Furthermore, that chapter provides an outline of the main theoretical issues concerning the European public sphere and the EU's democratic deficit and defines the term "public communication" in detail, identifying its theoretical origins in the concepts of public affairs and public diplomacy.

These four elements (the Habermasian normative model of the public sphere, the European public sphere, the EU's democratic deficit and public communication) are used to form the theoretical framework within which the research question and objectives of this thesis are defined and further discussed in Chapter 1. More specifically, that chapter examines the theoretical issues concerning the democratising potential of the Internet in general and in the case of the EU in particular and puts the concept of EU public communication within the context of the online public sphere.

Chapter 2 then sets out the research questions and objectives,

within this theoretical context, and identifies the components of the empirical part of the thesis. What is the role of the Internet in the above issues, as far as the EU's public communication is concerned? Furthermore, could the Internet play a role in promoting shared European values and thus assist in the formation of a shared European identity? Is the Internet used by the EU in order to promote this shared collective identity to the European public? Is the promoting of such a collective European identity part of the EU's online public communication strategy at all?

The empirical data regarding these questions is presented in Chapters 3-5, on three levels, namely

- a) Policy-making level of the EU's online public communication strategy;
- b) Policy-implementation; and
- c) Policy impact on key EU audiences.

Interviews with EU officials in key policy-making and policy-implementation positions are used at each stage of the EU's online public communication analysis, in order to put the findings of the policy-making and policy-implementation evaluation into a wider context.

In terms of policy-making (**a**), the thesis investigates the extent to which the EU is aware of the issues regarding the EU's democratic deficit, the European public sphere and the potential role of the Internet in addressing these issues on an EU level. To this end, the main official documents which are at the core of the EU's Information and Communication strategy are critically reviewed in Chapter 3, in order to determine how the above issues are addressed on a policy-making level and identify any further aims that the EU has set for its online Information and Communication strategy.

Following that, the ways in which these official policies are put into practice online (policy-implementation-**b**) are investigated in Chapter 4, by means of a thorough analysis of three key official EU websites. The aim is partly to juxtapose the messages and interaction opportunities provided on these three websites with the goals set out in the EU Information and Communication strategy documents and partly to evaluate how close this policy-implementation is to the normative role of the EU's public

communication online, as outlined in Chapters 1 and 2.

Chapter 5 investigates the impact that the online EU Information and Communication strategy has on key online audiences (c), through a qualitative EU websites' online user survey. In particular, the survey was used to gain an insight into how the messages communicated from a top-down level are actually perceived by the recipients (i.e. the users of the EU's official websites). The survey's results are analysed in relation to the findings of the EU's websites homepage analysis and the goals set out in the EU's official documents regarding its Information and Communication strategy, in order to evaluate to what degree these goals are achieved. On a second level the results of the user survey are juxtaposed with the theories regarding the nature of the emerging European public sphere in order to establish whether the emerging European public sphere has the potential to be all-inclusive or elitist.

Finally, the concluding chapter summarises the empirical findings, and revisits the theoretical model established in Chapter 2, in order to adjust its elements so that they reflect the online reality of the EU's public communication strategy. The empirical findings are used in this final chapter to formulate possible improvements to the online implementation of the EU's public communication strategy. The Conclusion also looks at developments in the online implementation of the EU's public communication strategy in the months after the empirical stage of this research project concluded and evaluates these accordingly.

Notes

¹ See also Pfetsch 2004; Risse and van de Steeg 2003; Kantner 2002; Koopmans, Neidhardt, Pfetsch 2002; Waldenström 2002; Kevin 2001; Kunelius and Sparks 2001.

² The intensity of the conflict has caused the Danish journalists involved to go in hiding, after a fatwa was issued on their name. Jyllands Posten has refused to offer an apology to Muslims to this day, although it has withdrawn the cartoons from its website. The cartoons have become increasingly difficult to trace online.

³ In 1973, when the Internet first appeared, there were only 25 computers in the network. In August 1995, the number of users only in the USA was estimated to be at 9.5 million and in November of the same year another survey showed that the number of users only in the USA had ridden up to 24 million (Castells 2000: 375-376). By 2004, that number had reached 934 million users, while the projected number of Internet users for 2010 is

1.8 billion (ClickZ Stats 2006c).

⁴ The public service providers taken into consideration here were:

a) National governmental units; **b)** Regional governmental units; **c)** Cities and municipalities; **d)** Specific multiple service providers; **e)** Public libraries; **f)** Hospitals; **g)** Universities/institutes of higher education; **h)** Police offices; **i)** Public insurance companies.

⁵ Apart from the 25 EU member-states, the survey also included data from Switzerland, Iceland and Norway.

⁶ The results of these projects were rather inconclusive: Vas Os (2005a) found that French political parties displayed a high level of Europeanisation on their websites' content during the European parliamentary elections of 2004. On the other hand, Zimmermann (2004; 2003) found no patterns of horizontal Europeanisation (i.e. communicative linkages between member-states: Pfetsch 2004: 5).

Chapter 1- Theoretical framework

This chapter sets out the general theoretical framework within which the role of the Internet in the EU's public communication strategy and its role in the emerging European public sphere will be examined:

The concept of the public sphere is analysed from three perspectives:

- a) The participants of the public sphere (**Who**);
- b) The processes within the public sphere (**How**);
- c) The purpose of the public sphere or the outcome/ impact that the processes within the public sphere have on society and politics (**What**).

Each of these components of the public sphere is examined in four stages, through four theoretical aspects: the Habermasian normative approach of the public sphere (1), the debate regarding the EU's democratic deficit (2) in relation to the definition of the European public sphere (3) and the concept of public communication (4).

The first part of the chapter focuses on the concept of the public sphere. The Habermasian approach is used as the basis for a normative definition of the public sphere, in the context of which the other three theoretical components mentioned above are then examined. In Part 2 of this chapter, the focus is on the case of the European public sphere and the theoretical debate regarding its participants and its role in the decision-making process on EU level. The aim here is to analyse the issues regarding the European public sphere within the context of the Habermasian normative model of the public sphere. This part of the chapter also examines the issue of the EU's democratic deficit and its link with the European public sphere. Finally, Part 3 defines the content of the term "public communication", identifies its role in the European public sphere and the role that it could play in addressing the EU's democratic deficit.

1.1 The concept of the public sphere

The concept of the public sphere has been the subject of a number of scholarly writings, in sociology, politics and philosophy¹. However, the present chapter does not present a comparative study of the theoretical approaches of the public sphere, nor does this study aim to evaluate any theoretical models of the public sphere. The aim here is to define a normative model of the public sphere, which will then be used in addressing the research questions concerning the Internet's role in the EU public communication strategy and its impact on the European public sphere.

As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, the theoretical concept of the public sphere is understood here as three-dimensional: Firstly, it is necessary to identify **who** the participants of the public sphere are/ should be. Secondly, we need to define the process through which these participants debate public issues, i.e. to define **how** the public sphere works/ is expected to work. Finally, it is not possible to discuss the concept of the public sphere without looking at **what** this public sphere does, primarily what its purpose is and what impact/outcome it has on society and politics.

These three parameters of the public sphere are discussed here within the context of the Habermasian approach of the public sphere. Jürgen Habermas's work on the context of the public sphere is one of the most influential of recent times and offers the basis for a model of an all-inclusive (**who**) public sphere which ensures that society functions on democratic principles (**what**), by publicly discussing all aspects of societal life (**how**).

In the *Structural transformation of the public sphere* (Habermas 1989), Habermas examines the public sphere as it was formed in what he defines as the bourgeois society of the 17th and 18th-century Europe. He identifies in it a public discourse based on rational critical argument (the process parameter of the public sphere/"**how**") and not influenced by the identity of the participants (the participants parameter/"**who**"). In this public

sphere Habermas saw the beginning of the development of the modern democratic public sphere².

For Habermas the bourgeois public sphere was “above all, the sphere of private people that come together as a public” (ibid.: 27) to claim the public sphere from the public authorities, who until then regulated the public sphere. Thus, the public authorities were forced to engage in a debate over the general rules of governing relations in the “basically privatised but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labour” (ibid.). In other words, from the perspective of the third parameter of the public sphere, i.e. the outcome/impact parameter (“**what**”), the bourgeois public sphere aimed to renegotiate the terms of the decision-making process.

What brought these “private people” together was the liberal, capitalist market (ibid.: 74), driven by profit rather than class, and their will to safeguard their profits and their right to trade freely as individuals. So, although the public sphere of the 17th and 18th centuries was “initially constituted in the world of letters” (Calhoun 1999:10), for Habermas this public sphere was inclusive in principle, in the sense that “it (the bourgeois public sphere) always understood and found itself immersed in within a more inclusive public of all private people [...]” (Habermas 1989: 37).

Habermas identifies the uniqueness of the bourgeois public sphere in the medium that was used in the political confrontation with the public authorities: people’s public use of their own reason (Habermas 1989). The media of that time, i.e. newspapers, books, journals, contributed to the rational-critical debate within the bourgeois public sphere (ibid.). This public rational-critical dialogue influenced, although not always directly, the parliamentary procedures, and contributed to what Poster describes as “a healthy representative democracy” (Poster 1995b).

However, a profit-driven market is only interested in encouraging the establishment of a public sphere to the extent that it can generate profit from that public sphere. That, according to Habermas, ultimately led to the transformation of the public sphere into a sphere of publicity and substituted the rational-critical debate with the consumption of culture³ (Habermas 1989); a transformation in which the profit-driven monopolies

that control the modern media (radio, television) hold a central role⁴ (another factor of the process parameter/"how" of the concept of the public sphere).

In his later work, *Between facts and norms: contributions to a discourse theory of law and democracy* (Habermas 1996), Habermas expands the element of inclusiveness inherent in the bourgeois public sphere model, to the normative concept of the general public sphere. For Habermas, the general public sphere comprises all other public spheres which may be present within a society and which may be class-, race- or gender-specific. Within the general public sphere all participants are equal and their communication is underpinned by the principles of the rational-critical debate (ibid.: 329-387). He proposes a concept of the public sphere which comprises "processes of communication and decision-making in constitutional systems" which "are structured by a system of 'sluices'" (ibid.: 354). According to this "sluice" model, public opinion is generated in a variety of informal ways and eventually "washes through" to influence formal decision-making processes (Stolze 2000:153). Only the decisions which are steered by the bottom-up communication flows (i.e. those discussions that start on the periphery and pass to the parliamentary complex and/or the courts through democratic and constitutional procedures) can be considered binding within a society (Habermas 1996: 356).

The important point to note in this context is that, unlike the bourgeois public sphere which is class-particular, the "sluice" model of the public sphere is based on two interrelated spheres. Firstly, the specific fora organized around administrative bodies of the state, which make decisions and serve as the means of "justification" of the administration and its actions; and secondly, the general public of citizens, which forms the unregulated public sphere, within which the decision-making fora function (ibid.: 307-308).

From Habermas' perspective, the unregulated nature of the general public sphere is both an advantage and a disadvantage. It is anarchic in nature and more vulnerable to the repressive and exclusionary effects of unequally distributed social power, structural violence and systematically

distorted communication (ibid.). However, it also has the advantage of a medium of unrestricted communication and consists of an open and inclusive network of overlapping, sub-cultural publics having fluid temporal, social and substantive boundaries (ibid.). Nevertheless, this general public sphere can only form opinions; it does not have the capability to make any decisions.

This description accepts, in effect, the existence of an elite public sphere/forum and a weaker general public sphere. Not all individuals are included in the more structured and more powerful fora organized around the administrative bodies (e.g. the parliament). The universality and inclusiveness only applies to the general public sphere, which is, however, more vulnerable to all types of external pressures and, although it debates issues freely and forms opinions, is not always able to influence the decision-making process.

Of course Habermas's approach to the public sphere is not entirely unproblematic and has been criticised by feminists, poststructuralists and other schools of thought. One of the main points in the feminist critique of Habermas's approach is that he ignores the absence of women from the bourgeois public sphere (Felski 1989). Park and Wald use the Habermasian approach of the public sphere as an example of how gender, like race and nationality in scholarly feminist discussion, maintains a "position of invisibility" in the scholarly debate regarding the public sphere (Park and Wald 2000). This invisibility of gender means that gender becomes/ is considered to belong to the private sphere, thus women enter the public sphere not liberated from patriarchal restraints, but following precisely the rules and structures of the patriarchal model they are trying to liberate themselves from (ibid.: 232-234). In other words, gender is not acknowledged and discussed and the issues that prevent women from preserving their true identity within the public sphere are not addressed (i.e. women enter the public sphere either "masculinised" or having maintained their private, "degraded" identity (ibid.: 234). From that point of view, the public sphere cannot have a liberating effect on women and, in the case of the Habermasian concept of the public sphere, its claims of universality and rationality are undermined.

Furthermore, from a poststructuralist perspective, Habermas's approach of the public sphere is considered too defeatist, as it is characterised by a lack, or restriction, of collective action (Montag 2000; Stolze 2000). Poststructuralists also question the liberating potential of the public sphere through rational debate, where the rational individual constitutes the universal foundation of democracy (Lyotard 1984). Other theorists have also expressed a similar argument: Dahlgren points out that "a blooming public sphere per se does not guarantee a democracy; it is a necessary but not sufficient ingredient" (Dahlgren 2001: 37). Similarly, Sparks finds that although historically the two concepts have tended to emerge almost simultaneously, there is no direct link between democratic structures and the emergence of a public sphere (Sparks 2001: 76).

Although several points in the critique on Habermas's work may be valid, there is a debate as to whether Habermas's work on the bourgeois public sphere is normative or historical and any criticism on his work depends on how his work is approached. Dahlgren, for example, is of the opinion that it is not clear whether Habermas's work is normative, historical or merely offering the ideological context for a specific social class (Dahlgren 2001). Holub, on the other hand, regards Habermas's approach of the bourgeois public sphere as normative (Holub 1991).

The present thesis adopts the latter's approach of Habermas's work as normative. Habermas's work on the bourgeois public sphere and his later-proposed sluice model of the public sphere offer a normative framework of analysis which may be applied to democratic and non-democratic public spheres alike. The key factor that ties in Habermas's sluice model with his model of an all-inclusive public sphere is the level of democracy within a society. The more authoritative and less democratic a society is, the stronger the division between the decision-making, elite public sphere and the general public. The stronger the democratic values and decision-making procedures, the more accountable the decision-making elite public sphere will be to the general public, which in turn means that the general public will be able to affect the decision-making process rather than just generate opinions.

From that perspective, an extreme version of Habermas's public

sphere model would correspond with an absolute dictatorial regime (no possibility for the oppressed general public sphere to affect the decision-making process) whilst on the opposite side of the spectrum, Habermas's model of an all inclusive public sphere based on the principle of equality and working towards the continuous enlightenment of its participants would correspond with a fully-functioning democratic state of governance (where the decision-making elite public sphere is part of and accountable to the general public, rather than operating separately from it). In between these two versions of the public sphere can be found several variations of the two models, depending on how big or small a part democratic principles and processes play in the formation of a public sphere.

In this context, Habermas's work on the public sphere offers for this thesis the most useful normative model, within which the discussion regarding the European public sphere and the EU's public communication strategy can be located. The Habermasian approach does not presume a specific outcome of the public dialogue. The public sphere could be an elite or an all-inclusive one, and the debate could serve either as a means for people to express dissatisfaction and thus preventing them from taking more radical/extreme actions, or it could lead to changes in the decision-making process, or both. When examined from the perspective of the "**who** (participants); **how** (process); **what** (outcome)" model introduced in the beginning of this chapter, Habermas's normative model of the public sphere is one which **a**) potentially everyone has access to and no one enters into discourse with an advantage over another (**who**); **b**) is a realm in which individuals gather to participate in open discussions (**how**); and **c**) has the potential to be a foundation for a critique of a society based on democratic principles (**what**)⁵.

Having established the general normative model of the public sphere concept, the next part of this chapter looks at the case of the EU in particular and applies the above parameters to the European public sphere.

1.2 The case of the EU

1.2.1 The European Public Sphere and the Democratic deficit of the EU

The discussion regarding the European public sphere is closely related to the debate regarding the democratic deficit of the European Union (Follesdal and Hix 2006; Zweifel 2003; Moravcsik 2002). Scholars agree that a European public sphere is needed in order for the EU to achieve the desired democratic legitimation. However, the approaches on the issue vary and can be broadly divided in two categories:

- a) Those who maintain that, since there are no democratic institutions that allow citizen participation in decision-making processes on an EU level, the European public sphere is dysfunctional/ does not (cannot) exist, and
- b) Those who argue that it is the very absence of a European public sphere which is the cause of the democratic deficit in the European Union.

Interestingly, the first view is supported by theorists who otherwise disagree on the nature of the European public sphere: The “pessimistic, particularist view” (Kantner 2002: 2) maintains that there is a lack of European democratic institutions that establish arenas of public communication and link them to political decision-making (ibid.). If there is no public political debate on a European level, the citizens of the EU cannot exercise and protect their political rights (ibid.). Similarly, Weiler maintains that the democratic deficit of the EU relates to “the deficient processes, e.g. the weakness of the European parliament, rather than the deep structural absence of a demos” (Weiler 1996: 7). The claim that there is no European public (demos) is simply not a valid one: There is a European people, in the sense that there is “a shared history and cultural habits required to bestow potential authority and democratic legitimacy on European institutions” (ibid.).

On the other hand, what Kantner calls the “optimistic, federalist view” (Kantner 2002: 4) considers “the political debate across national borders as one of the most important preconditions for the democratisation of the EU” (ibid.). Likewise, Habermas argues that in the case of the EU,

its democratisation is possible even in the near future, provided that the European public sphere will be institutionalised by a European constitution (Habermas 2004: 28-29). His argument is based on the notion that the arenas of political communication need to be institutionalised and protected by human and political rights, in order for a democratic public sphere to emerge (Habermas 2004; Habermas 1996). For Eriksen and Fossum (2002) this institutionalisation of the European public sphere is already taking place: The European Parliament and the Convention for the (EU) Constitutional Treaty (European Convention 2003)⁶ are considered by the authors as examples of “strong (European) publics” (Eriksen and Fossum 2002: 419) which are characterised by deliberation and decision-making and are crucial to the democratic process, as they are accountable to the citizens (Eriksen and Fossum 2002)⁷.

Although the possibility of a wholly institutionalised European public sphere is still remote, empirical evidence shows that the national media in the countries of the EU do report on European issues (Kantner 2002; Koopmans, Statham, Kriesi, Della Porta, de Beus, Guiraudon, Medrano, Pfetsch 2004; Risse and van de Steeg 2003; Rauer, Rivet, van de Steeg 2002). Therefore, there are simultaneous public debates on European issues on a national level. This also means that the information needed for participation in a public debate regarding the EU is available to the majority of Europeans through conventional media and not just to elites, who have access to more advanced media, such as the Internet. Consequently, there exists the potential for an all-inclusive, democratic European public sphere to emerge. Democratic decision-making is achieved when the citizens can build their opinion on public issues by accessing as much relevant information as possible; consensus is not a pre-requisite for a democratic public sphere. Yet are national media reports on EU issues enough to satisfy the requirements for a European public sphere?

Using the empirical evidence regarding the Haider debate (i.e. whether Austria should have received sanctions by the EU for allowing an extreme-right politician to be democratically elected as leader of the country) in various European countries (Risse and van de Steeg 2003;

Rauer, Rivet, van de Steeg 2002), as well as the evidence collected regarding the whole range of European and Europeanised national issues that appeared in the Austrian, British, French, German, Spanish and US-American quality newspapers in 2000, Kantner dismisses the claims regarding the democratic deficit of media communication in the EU and the absence of a European public sphere (Kantner 2002). However, like Habermas (Habermas 2004; Habermas 1996) and Weiler (Weiler and Wind 2003; Weiler 1999; Weiler 1996), Kantner recognises that, media reporting aside, there is a need for a democratisation of the European institutions, which would help to improve the communication between the European political mass communication and the European decision-making institutions (Kantner 2002). If there is no systematic interaction between the vertical perspective of the European public sphere (i.e. the top-down processes of decision-making) and the horizontal perspective of the interconnected European national public spheres, then EU governance lacks democratic legitimation. Participation, therefore, is key in the process of establishing an all-inclusive and democratic European public sphere.

Leonard and Arbuthnott suggest four key areas where the democratic deficit of the EU is clearly demonstrated and also where improvements can take place towards a more democratic EU:

- a) Matching policies to public priorities**
- b) Accountability**
- c) Political competition**
- d) Participation (Leonard and Arbuthnott 2002).**

Here again participation, in particular, is linked to the issue of the European public sphere: Citizens need to be able to express their opinions and debate over common European issues in a public sphere directly related to the centres of decision-making (ibid.: 11), if an all-inclusive, democratising Habermasian public sphere is to be achieved. It is not enough for citizens to only be able to discuss European issues, if they cannot influence and participate in the process of decision-making. At the moment, one of the main causes of the democratic deficit of the EU is that there is no regular feedback flow from the citizens to the EU decision-making centres (ibid.).

The argumentation regarding the EU's democratic deficit examined so far is linked with a specific type of democracy, i.e. that of participatory democracy⁸. However, even from the point of view of representative democracy, the EU institutions appear insufficiently democratic.

Although the members of the European Parliament⁹, the Council and the Commissioners are either directly or indirectly accountable to the European citizens through national and European electoral processes and despite recent attempts to increase the role of citizens in the decision-making process¹⁰, the latter still have less influence on the decision-making process compared to the various lobbies, corporations, NGOs and similar. Weiler points out that the decision-making process of the EU lacks the structures and controls that ensure parliamentary accountability and administrative responsibility (Weiler 1999: 348). He also draws attention to the increasing expansion of comitology, or what is otherwise defined as “the expert committees largely responsible for administrative rulemaking” (Bignami 1999) or the “discrete administrative process of management the key public actors of which are European and national mid-level civil servants” and the networks of public and private interested parties also involved in the process which “by nature tend to privilege certain interests” (Weiler 1999: 278). Although it would be unrealistic to assume that this phenomenon could be ruled out completely, the demand for comitology to become more transparent is by all means legitimate and feasible (Weiler 1999)¹¹.

Whichever is the case, representative, participatory or deliberative democracy, and whichever stance is adopted on the relation between the European public sphere and the EU's democratic deficit, the consensus among theorists is that: **a)** a European public sphere is at the very least desirable, or, at best, it already exists but its functions need to be enhanced; and **b)** overcoming the democratic deficit of the EU is dependent upon the creation of a European public sphere.

1.2.2 What public sphere Europe?

When it comes to defining the European public sphere, the

theoretical approaches are equally, if not more, divided as those regarding the relation of the European public sphere to the democratic deficit of the EU. To begin with, there is no consensus as to whether a European public sphere of any kind already exists, as seen in the previous section. Furthermore, scholars disagree as to whether we should speak of a “European” public sphere or of a “Europeanised” public sphere. Finally, there is disagreement with regard to the quantity of the European public spheres: Is there only one public sphere, or several? And what is their nature: do elite public spheres or general public spheres exist on a European level? In what follows, each of these issues is examined in more detail.

Is there a European public sphere?

The theories that view the possibility of a European public sphere as impossible [e.g. “the pessimistic, particularist view” (Kantner 2002)] are based on the argument that such a public sphere does not, and could not, fulfil the criteria that define a public sphere in the first place, i.e.:

- a)** A collective identity
- b)** A civil society
- c)** Common mass media
- d)** Common language.

From the particularist perspective, not only these features are absent at the moment on an EU level, but to assume these could appear in the future would also be misguided, since the establishment of pan-European mass media would not be possible, given that there cannot be a common pan-European language in the first place. Furthermore the ethno-cultural differences among the peoples of the EU are many and too deep-rooted to allow for a European collective identity to emerge (Kantner 2002: 2-4).

Such arguments are flawed in several respects. The issues of collective identity, language, mass media and culture can be addressed in such a way that they are not insurmountable obstacles in the emergence of a European public sphere.

According to Risse and van de Steeg (2003: 2 and 21), for example, a European public sphere would have the following characteristics:

- a)** Same European themes are discussed at the same time at similar levels of attention across national public spheres and media.
- b)** Similar frames of reference, meaning structures and patterns of interpretation are used across national public spheres and media.
- c)** A transnational community of communication in which speakers and listeners not only observe each other across national spaces but also recognise that Europe is an issue of common concern for them.

This approach also finds that language is not necessarily a barrier for transnational communications. Furthermore, it agrees with Kantner's approach that although a public sphere presupposes reference to the same structure of meaning in a community of communication, this is not synonymous with consensus over an issue (Kantner 2002; Risse and van de Steeg 2003).

The issues of language, common mass media, collective identity and civil society are convincingly addressed in another approach, which borrows its counter-arguments from the process of the hermeneutic circle (Kantner 2002). According to this viewpoint, in order to communicate, one has to make certain presuppositions. These, namely, are:

- a)** Every competent speaker, who masters a human language, knows a lot about the world (principle of charity). There is only one 'logical space of reason' which is a universal one (Kantner 2002: 7). This means that even in the case of speakers who have no common tradition at all (situation of radical interpretation: Davidson 2001), every competent speaker who speaks any language can enter a conversation and communicate his/her views.
- b)** One need not suspend their antecedent convictions in order to understand another opinion about the issue concerned (Kantner 2002: 8).

Another scholarly approach which supports a similar argument regarding the issue of language in the European public sphere is the one which Kantner identifies as "the federalist view" (Kantner 2002). Federalists define the public sphere as "a universe of many different

arenas of public political communication” (ibid.: 5). Speakers seek the attention of an audience for the political issues they consider important and for which they want to convince the audience of their opinion. Mass media mediate the relation between speakers and general public (ibid.). According to this approach, the language problem can be addressed and the Internet will also play an important role in eliminating the distance between the various national publics, thus helping in the emergence of a European public sphere (ibid.: 6).

In support of this argument, one may also consider the facts regarding Europeans and languages: Over half of the citizens of the EU speak a foreign language, while a large number also speak a second foreign language, with English being the first foreign language for over a third of all EU citizens (Eurobarometer 2005; COM(2005)596, final). Of course the number of Europeans speaking a foreign language varies amongst Member states, yet this number is expected to rise even more in the next years (ibid.). Furthermore, within the EU institutions English is generally accepted as the common “working language” of the EU.

For Schlesinger, this “multilingual capacity of many Europeans and the growing ascendancy of English” indicate that languages in the EU, and in Europe, are not an insurmountable communication obstacle [“the continent is less of a Babel than might be supposed” (Schlesinger 2003: 7)]. If one bears in mind the above points, it becomes more likely that the absence of a common European language and of a common European tradition need not be an obstacle in the formation of a European public sphere.

Coming from a different perspective, Weiler argues that it is unnecessary to approach the concept of the European public sphere from the point of view of an ethno-culturally homogeneous *Demos* like the *demoi* found in the member states. Neither the sense of shared collective identity and loyalty, nor the homogeneity of the ethno-national conditions on which peoplehood depend, exist on an EU level (Weiler 1996: 2). A European *demos* in that sense would be not only “unrealistic” but also “undesirable” according to Weiler (ibid.: 17). In this respect, not only is the absence of a pan-European public sphere not problematic, but

such a public sphere is not necessary either. The aim of the EU should not be to create a European nation/ people but an “ever-closer Union among the peoples of Europe” (ibid.: 4).

European or Europeanised public sphere?

Having established that the potential for a European public sphere exists in the form of the several national public spheres, the next issue to be addressed is whether we should talk about a European or a Europeanised public sphere. Although the difference between these two terms is not always obvious (i.e. scholars tend to use both terms to refer to the same issue at different points within the same text), Pfetsch offers one of the clearest distinctions between the two: She points out that a “European” public sphere denotes a supra-national, unified, pan-European public sphere, which in order to exist, would have to be supported by supra-national, pan-European mass media, which would be almost impossible to establish, because of the cultural and linguistic differences amongst the peoples of Europe, although such a “European” public sphere could exist on an elite level (Pfetsch 2004: 4)¹².

A “Europeanised” public sphere on the other hand, refers to the whole of national public spheres and the degree to which they incorporate European issues into the public debate, or the EU perspective on issues already under public discussion (ibid.). Furthermore, Pfetsch distinguishes between two levels of “Europeanisation” of public spaces: Vertical Europeanisation, which allows for communicative linkages between national and European level to be established; and horizontal Europeanisation, which refers to communicative linkages between various EU member states (ibid.: 5).

As we have already seen, several other scholars also argue that the potentially emerging European public sphere should be sought within the national public spheres of the various European countries (Risse and van de Steeg 2003; Schlesinger 2003; Kantner 2002; Weiler 1996).

Within the context of the present thesis, two points are of interest here: Firstly, Pfetsch’s distinction between horizontal and vertical

Europeanisation of the public discourse offers the conceptual framework within which the EU's public communication is defined, in the following part of this chapter (Part 1.3). Secondly, in distinguishing a European from a Europeanised public sphere, Pfetsch reinforces the argument several other scholars support as well that the possibility exists for a multi-faceted European public sphere rather than a single, homogeneous one. This brings us to the final issue that needs to be discussed in relation to the concept of the European public sphere: How many European public spheres are there?

One or several public spheres in the EU?

In the debate as to whether there exist/ whether we should aim to create one European public sphere or several, Weiler is one of the scholars to support the idea of multiple, interrelated national public spheres (Weiler 1996), as discussed earlier. Schlesinger is another one, although his argument derives from a sociological rather than governance/legal point of view: He, too, views European politics as a system of overlapping and interrelated spheres (Schlesinger 2003; Schlesinger 1999). Risse and van de Steeg also see a European public sphere emerging "out of the interconnectedness of and mutual exchanges between various national public spheres" (Risse and van de Steeg 2003: 2).

An altogether different view regarding the European public sphere is the approach of the no-public thesis (i.e. a missing public) (de Beus 2002). Limited access and publicity are not the breach of norms but necessary tools for integration in the best interests of ordinary Europeans (ibid.). De Beus distinguishes between a public policy sphere, which consists of the interest groups around state organs with major regulatory and financial powers; and the public sphere in society, which is merely the collection of voluntary associations distinct from the state (ibid.).

De Beus suggests that, in effect, what we are dealing with on an EU level is an elite public sphere and a public sphere of the masses. In that respect, his model is not so different from Habermas's "sluice" model,

examined earlier in Part 1.1 of this chapter. Of the two, only the elite public sphere needs to and can have access to decision-making processes and institutional information/data. The “mass” public sphere needs only to know what the elites decide to broadcast/disseminate.

De Beus is not alone in the suggestion that, in fact, there exist two diverse types of public sphere within the EU. Koopmans, Neidhardt and Pfetsch argue that, on a national level, there are mass and elite public spheres and that the “Europeanisation” of national political discourses does not necessarily have to involve national mass publics (Koopmans, Neidhardt, Pfetsch 2002: 4). In this model, the elites assume the role of “translators”, meaning that they are responsible for bringing national discourses on the EU level and vice versa (*ibid.*). In other words, these elites possess soft power, i.e. their power stems from knowledge and expertise on the issues that are being publicly debated at a national and EU level. Their role is to educate the masses, in order to enable them to make informed decisions and also in order to create amongst the EU publics a common identity, a collective conscience.

To support this view, Koopmans et al compare the EU to Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland, three countries whose publics were not always united under a collective identity and where the elites played an active role in unifying the segmented mass publics (*ibid.*: 5-13). What the authors suggest is that the examples of these three states indicate that a model that combines an integrated, transnational elite public sphere with nationally segmented, thematically “Europeanised” mass public spheres is indeed viable (*ibid.*: 4).

The recent negative referenda on the EU’s Constitutional Treaty in France and the Netherlands could be used as an example to support de Beus’s view: One could argue that had the process of the ratification of the Constitutional Treaty been left to the national governments/parliamentary assemblies and not to public referenda, the process would have been successfully completed by now, as the ratification of the Treaty by national parliaments in several other EU Member states indicates. The de Beus and Koopmans models of an elite decision-making public sphere may, therefore, be beneficial when it comes to maintaining power or controlling

the outcomes of the decision-making process to suit the aims of one or few socio-political groups/institutions. Nevertheless, such a model neither constitutes an all-inclusive public sphere, nor does it guarantee democratic procedures.

The problem, with the two-level European public sphere model is that **a)** it assumes that the elites will be willing to inform the masses and educate them in favour of the EU, and **b)** it overlooks the possibility that instead of achieving a “Europeanisation” of the mass public sphere thanks to the efforts of the elite public spheres, the latter could become even more attached to the decision-making institutions. This would lead the elite public sphere/s to gain even more power through their ever-increasing knowledge and expertise on both EU and national issues and to aim to manipulate rather than educate the mass publics, in order to maintain that power.

In order to avoid the flaws of the approaches examined so far and provide a normative concept that fits with the Habermasian normative model of the public sphere outlined in Part 1.1, it is necessary to combine elements of more than one definition. The approach that better corresponds with the Habermasian normative model of the public sphere is one that combines the “Europeanised national public spheres” approaches (e.g. Pfetsch 2004) with Guidry, Kennedy and Zald’s definition of transnational public spheres, according to which a transnational public sphere is

“a space in which both residents of distinct places (states or localities) and members of transnational entities (organizations or firms) elaborate discourse and practices whose consumption moves beyond national boundaries” (Guidry, Kennedy and Zald 2000: p.6).

Such a combined approach allows for the ethno-cultural differences among the various member states public spheres to be taken into consideration, as well as the existence of transnational organisations and lobbies, whose interests stretch across the member states’ national borders and who play a key role in the EU’s decision-making process (participants’ parameter of the public sphere model-“**who**”). At the same

time, such an approach can also incorporate the argument that in the case of the EU the participants in this transnational public sphere do share a history and certain values, as Weiler has pointed out (Weiler 1999; Weiler 1996), as well as a political system of co-decided, supra-national policies. The outcome of such a public sphere (“**what**” parameter) is not actually predetermined in this definition, although the democratisation of the EU decision-making process would be a desired outcome. What is defined, though, is the way that public dialogue happens (the process parameter-“**how**”): Through “elaborate discourse”, in other words through rational-critical debate, also a fundamental element of the Habermasian model of the public sphere.

Consequently, by using this combined definition of the European public sphere, the link with the Habermasian normative model of the public sphere is established: Because of the particularities of the EU decision-making system, transparency and accountability are crucial. If these are to be achieved, an all-inclusive and democratic European public sphere is necessary (the Habermasian all-inclusive public sphere). In addition, this European public sphere is not homogeneous, but consists of several, interrelated national public spheres, the participants of which have not necessarily developed a European collective consciousness.

Having outlined the general normative model of the public sphere and the specific normative definition of the European public sphere, it is now necessary to address the fourth theoretical element identified in the introduction of this chapter: public communication. The following, final part defines the term “public communication” and establishes its role in the European public sphere, within the wider context of the Habermasian normative approach of the public sphere.

1.3 Public Communication

Based on Pfetsch’s definition of what constitutes a Europeanised public sphere examined in the previous part of this chapter, the present study focuses on vertical Europeanisation (Pfetsch 2004: 5), and in particular its top-down process, which from now on will be referred to as

“EU public communication”. Why focus on public communication? And how is this process relevant to the theoretical issues concerning the European public sphere, identified in Part 1.2 of this chapter?

This final part of the chapter aims to answer these questions and further determine the function of public communication (exactly **what** public communication should do) in relation to:

- a) Each parameter of the normative model of the public sphere, i.e. the participants of the public sphere (**who**), the process (**how**) and the outcome of the public dialogue (**what**); and
- b) The European public sphere in particular, in order to complete the theoretical framework within which the research questions will be discussed in Chapter 2.

1.3.1 Why public communication?

The previous part of this chapter has served to highlight the complexity of the European public sphere and the issues of democracy and identity directly linked to it. Citizens’ participation in both the public debate regarding EU issues and the decision-making process has been shown to be a key factor in establishing a European public sphere closer to the Habermasian, all-inclusive, normative model and in achieving the democratisation of the EU institutions.

The role of national media and of civil society organisations in the process of Europeanisation of the interrelated national public spheres has already been examined and analysed both empirically and theoretically by several scholars (for example Pfetsch 2004; de Vreese 2003a)¹³. However, in most of these cases the European public sphere was explored from the perspective of national actors/information gatekeepers rather than EU institutions. Moreover, this research still leaves largely unanswered the question of the EU institutions’ role in the European public sphere. Is there any top-down communication between the EU institutions and the European public, i.e. public communication, taking place at all? If so, does public communication have any other functions within the European public sphere? And why is it important to look at this top-down

aspect of vertical Europeanisation?

While it would not always be necessary to have interaction between EU institutions and the European public within the horizontal process of Europeanisation of the national public spheres [communicative linkages between the several EU member states (Pfetsch 2004: 5)], the vertical process of Europeanisation explicitly requires direct communication from national to EU level and vice versa. This is where the importance of the EU public communication lies: Although the EU may well be established on a formal level, it is not quite established in the mentality of its people, or at least it is not established in a way the EU institutions would like, as the ratification process of the EU's Constitutional Treaty has recently shown¹⁴. Furthermore, since public communication takes place in the public sphere, the nature of the EU's public sphere (the level of democratisation and political legitimacy of the participants) would affect the EU's public communication content and outcome and vice versa.

Very little research has been done on this aspect of the Europeanisation of the public debate so far and the results call for further investigation of the EU's public communication strategy: Meyer has shown how the 1999 resignation of the entire College of Commissioners¹⁵ highlights the shortcomings of the EU's public communication, which in turn is linked to "the fragmentation of political authority" within the EU institutions and "a system of governance, which depoliticises conflict and obfuscates political accountability" (Meyer 1999: 617)¹⁶. Meyer's view was based on the analysis of the role of conventional media in the debate regarding EU issues during the turbulent period of the Commission's resignation in 1999. Seven years and two Commission Colleges later, how has the EU's public communication strategy evolved? Is there any evidence that the issues Meyer pointed out have been addressed? How are the new media, and more specifically the Internet, affecting the EU's public communication strategy and the nature of the European public sphere?

Before proceeding to address these questions, some further theoretical clarifications are necessary, with regard to the concept of public communication and why it has been chosen in this thesis instead of two

more traditional terms used when discussing the communication strategy of a polity with the public: **a) public diplomacy**, if referring to the communication process with foreign publics, and **b) public affairs**, to describe the communication process with domestic audiences. In the following sections, the definitions and main aims of public diplomacy and public affairs and their relevance to the case of the EU are summarised and it is argued that the term “public communication” is more relevant and useful for the case of the EU than these two traditional terms.

1.3.2 Public Diplomacy

The concept of public diplomacy is relatively new in the field of international politics. The term was first used in 1965 by Dean Edmund Gullion of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University, U.S. upon the establishment of the Edward R. Murrow Center for Public Diplomacy (Murrow, Edward R. Center 2005). Two of the most recent definitions of public diplomacy (in 2005) are those of Alan K. Henrickson and Crocker Snow Jr., who both define public diplomacy as the set of actions conducted by governments with the purpose of influencing foreign publics (Henrickson and Crocker Snow Jr. quoted in Murrow, Edward R. Center 2005). They also argue that public diplomacy nowadays stretches to the relations of governments with nongovernmental entities, the media, corporations, faith-based organizations, civil society, ethnic groups and even “influential individuals” (ibid.)¹⁷.

Until recent years foreign policy, including public diplomacy, had been mainly about the pursuit of national interests, by whatever means available, disregarding both the internal working of other states and the importance of values in international relations (Riordan 2003: 120). However, as the experience with the recent cases of Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as the ongoing unrest in the Middle East, have shown, Western political values, and particularly the idea of civil society as it is understood in Western political theory terms, cannot be imposed, together with their Western cultural contexts, on other states (ibid.: 132). Riordan calls the strategy of might-makes-right followed by several Western countries,

including the US and the UK, the “realist school of diplomacy” (ibid.: 120). It became evident already in the late 1990s that this school of thought could no longer deliver satisfactory results in an era of increasingly complicated and demanding global politics.

This is where public diplomacy comes in: For Riordan, it is an indispensable part of the New Diplomacy, which will increasingly be more about promoting values and ideas rather than about might-makes-right strategies (Riordan 2003). In this context, public diplomacy’s main aim is to engage in a country’s political and social debates, in order to create the intellectual and political climate in which desired policies can flourish (ibid.: 122). These policies are also formulated within the context of public diplomacy, i.e. taking into account the other states’ internal political and cultural values. Leonard, Stead and Smewing express a similar view, according to which, public diplomacy should be “less about winning arguments and more about engagement” (Leonard, Stead, Smewing 2002: 6). These approaches can be linked to Arquilla and Rondfeldt’s notion of *noopolitik*¹⁸, according to which the new era of knowledge-based international politics is based on soft power and the idea that right makes might rather than the other way around (Arquilla and Rondfeldt 1999: 20).

The Diplo Foundation¹⁹, a non-profit foundation which “works to assist all countries, particularly those with limited resources, to participate meaningfully in international relations” defines public diplomacy as

“a process of communicating with foreign audiences by addressing them with the help of various tools, aimed at bringing about the positive perception of one’s country, national institutions, culture, foreign policy goals etc, in the minds of the foreign and domestic public and their elites; non-coercive in nature and based on the use of soft power” (DiploFoundation website 2005a).

All the above definitions are brought together in Leonard, Stead and Smewing’s normative approach of public diplomacy’s four main functions:

- a)** To increase people’s familiarity with one’s country
- b)** To increase people’s appreciation of one’s country
- c)** To engage people with one’s country/state
- d)** To influence people (Leonard, Stead, & Smewing 2002: 9-10).

This approach enables us to place public diplomacy in the context of the public sphere, as all of the above functions require some form of public dialogue to take place, if they are to be achieved. Particularly the process of engaging people with one's country explicitly denotes the relation between public diplomacy and the public sphere. Engaging people in the affairs of another country presupposes the existence of a public sphere, where interaction between citizens and state/government bodies/institutions takes place. Interaction is inherent in the engagement of people in any affairs, activities or issues and when it comes to interaction between large audiences and institutions, that interaction can only take place within what in the Habermasian model of public sphere is the general public sphere.

The relevance of the Habermasian normative approach of the public sphere to public diplomacy lies mainly in the element of equal opportunity in participating in the public sphere which is crucial in establishing trust amongst the participants. Any form of exclusion can undermine people's trust towards that public sphere and the state institutions that appear to support it.

This is crucial, as trust is also fundamental when aiming to establish an institution (or polity for that matter) in the minds of a people. According to Fisher, the full conception or image of an institution (i.e. idea patterns, role expectations, assumptions regarding the function of that institution), which make it function, is rooted in the psycho-cultural base of the larger society and in its total way of life (Fisher 1972). Unless this full conception of an institution is established in the minds of people, that institution will not be able to function successfully, even if it has already been formally established (Fisher 1972: 86). Public diplomacy is, therefore, the tool that enables institutions/polities to become established in the collective consciousness of a people. Building the audiences' trust towards a country's governing institutions is a first step towards achieving that aim.

Of course, consistency of actions is also necessary, if public diplomacy is to succeed in building a state's/organisation's credibility among third countries. Invading a third state, for example, and branding the loss of civilian lives "collateral damage", whilst at the same time calling

on people to adhere to the rule of law and the principles of democracy is a political (and ethical) oxymoron that public diplomacy cannot justify, as the US and the UK have discovered in the cases of Iraq and Afghanistan.

Public diplomacy can also be seen as three-dimensional: According to Leonard et al, public diplomacy strategies can be reactive (hours/days after an incident has taken place); proactive (strategy aiming to get results within weeks/months); and relationship-building (long-term strategy that shows results after years) (Leonard, Stead, & Smewing 2002: 10). None of the strategies set within this time-related model can be achieved if public diplomacy is a one-dimensional process of delivering messages (ibid.). It is necessary that public diplomacy encourages interaction with the audiences it is addressing. It is also important that there are methods in place to measure as effectively as possible the reactions of the target audiences to the messages of public diplomacy.

In addition, Leonard et al identify some key areas in which public diplomacy should aim to become more efficient, if it were to produce more effective results:

- a)** Ensuring crisis responses (reactive public diplomacy) do not divert governments from long-term goals (proactive/relationship-building public diplomacy).
- b)** Rapid reaction.
- c)** Internal co-ordination.
- d)** International co-ordination.
- e)** The ability to keep track of long-term goals.
- f)** Moving beyond propaganda: It is necessary to understand the target audience/ Proving relevance to target audience.
- g)** Interaction.
- h)** Moving beyond intellectual forms of communication (Leonard, Stead, Smewing 2002).

Three of the above areas are of particular interest here: Understanding the target audience and proving relevance to it; interaction; and non-intellectual forms of communication. These three areas are crucial in encouraging the emergence of a Habermasian public dialogue (i.e. where anyone can take part, not only those who understand

legal/political/economic terminology or those who already have a solid knowledge of a particular issue; and where the attempt is not to indoctrinate the audience but encourage critical dialogue).

It becomes apparent, therefore, that the connection between public diplomacy and the public sphere is direct: Public diplomacy cannot occur in a vacuum, it presupposes the existence of a public sphere. With regard to the Habermasian normative model of the public sphere, public diplomacy can be seen as the top-down communication process of public discourse (**how** institutions communicate with the general public). Whether these institutions and the general public participate in the public sphere on equal terms depends, in the case of public diplomacy, on the opportunities given to the public to interact with the institutions. The more linear the communication process is, the less likely it is that the public diplomacy strategy will succeed in endearing its messages to the general public (the outcome of the public dialogue).

How is all this relevant to the case of the EU? There is growing evidence that third countries and their citizens have a very unclear idea about what the EU is and what it does (de Gouveia and Plumridge 2005; Youngs, Emerson, Smith, Whitman 2005; Suteu and Counterpoint think tank 2004). As a result certain states, like China, which are of strategic importance to the EU, tend to pursue bilateral relations with certain member states rather than approach the EU institutions, precisely because they are uncertain about how the EU works or about who they need to approach on an EU level (de Gouveia and Plumridge 2005: vii). Furthermore, although the EU is the world's biggest donor in foreign aid, its contribution and work largely goes unnoticed, as a result of poor presentation on behalf of the EU and also because of the better organised and more "aggressive" promotion of aid contributions made by other large donors, such as the US (ibid.: 16). Public diplomacy would be the means of explaining the EU to the world, and of promoting its activities worldwide.

1.3.3 Public Affairs

"Public affairs" is a "blanket" term used to describe a variety of

issues and concepts: The term may denote public policy, public administration, lobbying or public relations, depending on the author's background and target audience. There is also a difference of approach amongst authors, with regard to who conducts public affairs: According to one view, it is the governments' way of informing the public about policies they intend to implement, while for others public affairs denote the actions that non-governmental organisations and businesses take in order to affect policies that a government intends to or has already implemented.

According to Harris and Fleisher, for example, public affairs encompass the relations between governments and organisations from all sectors and include the process of policy-making, and the consequent lobbying process that ensues from it (Harris and Fleisher 2005). For the DiploFoundation, however, public affairs deal with explaining foreign policy goals to domestic constituencies to ensure a positive understanding of a policy and are distinct from Information strategies, which describe the communication process between an institution/ polity and domestic audiences (DiploFoundation website 2005a). A third definition comes from strategic marketing and communications management consultant Prejean-Motanky, according to whom public affairs is a strand of public relations, and concerns the "relationship between an organisation and a government/ political entity" in matters of "societal public policy action and legislation" (Prejean-Motanky 2003). Yet one popular source, the electronic encyclopaedia Wikipedia, distinguishes between public policy and public affairs by defining the first as "partisan", where all parties involved overtly try to achieve their goals through discussion, whilst the latter is generally "non-partisan" and " focuses on methods of public administration, illustrated by historical examples recording outcomes" (Wikipedia.org 2006d).

Regardless of which approach one chooses to follow, the fact remains that public affairs entails the engagement in public dialogue of policy-making elites and civil society and/or the general public. As with public diplomacy, the success of such public dialogue can be measured by the degree of acceptance of the policies by the general public. Of course, in cases of an extreme version of Habermas's sluice model of public

sphere²⁰, there is no public dialogue and the policies are simply imposed upon the general public. If however, a government/ polity is aiming towards a more democratic, more inclusive governance, and therefore, of such a public sphere, then public affairs, similarly to public diplomacy, should be about facilitating public dialogue, rather than just communicating policies to the general public. The degree to which the decision-making elites and the general public engage in a public dialogue regarding intra-state/ intra-polity policies, and the degree to which the general public can influence the policy-making process through public dialogue, ultimately indicates how close a polity is in achieving the ideal, all-inclusive Habermasian public sphere.

Public affairs is not only about influencing policies or “selling” policies to the general public. The fact that there exist so many different definitions and approaches of public affairs, yet all entail public dialogue, indicates that ultimately this is a process through which the various organisations and bodies and socio-economic groups within a society in a way negotiate their coexistence and work towards achieving social harmony. Again, as with the case of Habermas’s models of the public sphere, the degree to which public affairs achieve that role depends on the wider socio-political context in which it takes place. From that point of view, public affairs may be seen as the process through which institutions are accepted in their host cultural and social landscape. This is a necessary procedure, if an institution wants to survive within a society (Fisher 1972: 83)²¹ and achieve political legitimation.

The issues of transparency of the decision-making process through public debate and of legitimation have already been discussed in this chapter as part of the debate regarding the EU’s democratic deficit. In this respect, public affairs, offers the conceptual framework within which the EU’s democratic deficit could be addressed, provided that it incorporates public dialogue on policies and is not limited just to their promotion.

1.3.4 EU public communication

Although the EU could benefit from applying the principles of public

diplomacy and public affairs in its communication strategy with the public, the use of these two terms in research analysis presents certain theoretical problems.

Firstly, both of these terms were formulated with reference to sovereign states and their governmental (political, cultural or otherwise) institutions. Consequently, public diplomacy and public affairs, when used separately, do not reflect the overall communication process between a unique political formation, such as the EU, and the general public for the following reasons:

a) The EU is not a state or even a federation of states, although some would argue that it should aim to become one.

b) The boundaries between foreign and domestic audiences are not always clear, partly because there is no European/ EU identity fully established in the minds of the EU's citizens²² and partly because of technical reasons. Under which category would the UK be classified, for example, where the public is one of the most Eurosceptic and the UK state has permanently opted out of several EU policies/strategies, such as the monetary union? What about Norway and Iceland, two European countries which have special relations with the EU, enjoy several of the benefits and share certain obligation as the EU Member states, but are not members of the EU? Would the Norwegian and Icelandic publics be defined as "foreign" or "domestic"?

c) There is not one, unified supranational European public sphere, but several interrelated Europeanised national public spheres, as discussed in Part 1.2 of this chapter.

Although some authors, like Lynch (2005), Moravcsik and Nikolaïdes (2006), would disagree with this view and confidently use the terms "public diplomacy" and "public affairs" to describe the EU's communication policies, EU officials themselves refrain from using those terms, referring to the EU's Information and Communication Strategy instead, as will be seen in following chapters.

Furthermore, it is difficult to theorise "public affairs" since the term has so many contradictory definitions, which makes it an insufficiently robust basis for analysis. In contrast, public diplomacy is a term that can

be used only with regard to the communication process that is initiated by governmental or other institutions and is directed to foreign general publics. As an analytical concept, it does not allow for the communication process between decision-making institutions and domestic audiences to be included.

What is, then, the role of EU public communication in the European public sphere? In other words, with regard to the normative model of the public sphere examined in Part 1.1, what outcome should public communication aim to achieve through the public sphere (the “**what**” aspect of the public sphere)?

We have already seen that external audiences are not familiar with the EU’s work, structure and values²³ while the intra-EU public sphere is linked with the issues of **a)** democratisation of the EU institutions and decision-making process and **b)** the EU/European collective identity or the lack of it²⁴.

The role of the EU’s public communication with regard to both external and intra-EU audiences²⁵ may therefore be defined as aiming to:

- a)** Increase people’s familiarity with the EU;
- b)** Increase people’s appreciation of what the EU does; and
- c)** Engage people with the EU/ in the debate of EU affairs, to paraphrase Leonard et al’s definition of public diplomacy presented earlier in this chapter²⁶.

In addition to these, with reference to the intra-EU public, we have already seen that citizens’ **participation** in the public dialogue regarding EU issues and in the decision-making process on EU level is considered as a key factor in addressing the EU’s democratic deficit²⁷. Another key factor is the **accountability** of the EU institutions while Leonard and Arbuthnott (2002) also identify the **matching of EU policies to public priorities** as another key area where the democratic deficit of the EU is clearly demonstrated²⁸.

The process through which these aims may be achieved (the “**how**” parameter of the public sphere) in terms of the EU public communication strategy, should, therefore, involve the following actions:

- a)** Promoting interaction within the public sphere.

b) Moving beyond propaganda: it is necessary to understand the target audience and demonstrate relevance to target audience.

c) Moving beyond intellectual forms of communication (adapted from Leonard, Stead, Smewing 2002 definition of areas where *public diplomacy*, in general, should aim to become more efficient²⁹).

Having defined the general theoretical framework of the concept of the public sphere and having determined the specific issues and problems linked with the European public sphere and the role that the EU public communication would be expected to play in this public sphere, there remains one final component to be discussed, one that is at the core of this thesis– the role of the Internet in the EU’s public communication strategy and its impact on the European public sphere. The following chapter presents the research question and its parameters, examines the theoretical links between the Internet and the concept of the public sphere and, more specifically, determines the function of the Internet in the theoretical model of the European public sphere established in the present chapter.

Notes

¹ Some of the most influential works on the public sphere have been those of Kant (1990); Hegel, (1999); Marx (1971, 1976); Arendt (1986) and, most recently, of Habermas (1989, 1996); Calhoun (1999); and Thompson (1999), to name but a few.

² The words “private” and “public” took a different meaning in the bourgeois public sphere than the one they had in the classical ancient Greek democracy: The public and the private were strongly separated then, with the “public” meaning the place of the “agora” where all the citizens could gather and discuss public matters, regardless of their social or economic status. On the other hand, the private was everything that involved the family and one’s house (oikos) and included all those who were excluded from the public life (women, children, slaves). In the bourgeois public sphere it is the private that constitutes the public sphere, in the sense that individual ownership was the precondition for becoming a member of the public sphere; and that public sphere consisting of individuals was also strongly separated from the state (Ober 1989; Hansen 1991).

³ Habermas uses the term “refeudalization of society” to describe how the separation of the public from the private eventually became blurred, therefore leading to “the process of the politically relevant exercise and equilibration of power taking place directly between the private bureaucracies, special-interest associations, parties and public administration” (Habermas 1989: 175-176).

⁴ The role of the media in the public sphere and the European public sphere in particular is further examined in Chapter 2.

⁵ These generic qualities were adapted from Holub's view of the Habermasian public sphere (Holub 1991) and of course, as Holub points out, they are subject to both the historical context within which a public sphere is examined and on the topics that are admitted for discussion (ibid.).

⁶ With regard to the institutionalisation of the European public sphere, a Constitutional Treaty was signed after lengthy negotiations (the process of elaborating the Constitutional Treaty for the EU began in 2000 in Nice, with the Declaration on the future of the Union (The European Union 2004). However, the ratification process which commenced right afterwards has left both the leaders and the public of the EU disillusioned as far as the political union of the Member states is concerned. So far, two national referenda in France and the Netherlands have rejected the Constitutional Treaty. This has created a negative state of affairs with reference to the process of political union of the Member states, or even more so, whether such a union is necessary at all, despite the fact that fourteen other Member states have already ratified the Treaty. There are nine remaining Member states that have yet to ratify the Treaty and the process was due to conclude, in principle, in 2006 but under the circumstances the possibility of an institutionalised European public sphere materialising is now less probable. For more information, national debates, links, fact sheets and the official EU position on this matter see EUROPA 2006a and 2006i.

⁷ As opposed to these strong publics, there are the "weak or general" publics, in which public opinion is formed. These are less institutionalised and operate in the "sphere of deliberation outside the political system" (Eriksen and Fossum 2002: 405). Eriksen and Fossum's approach of strong publics with decision-making power and weak, general publics which form opinions but not necessarily influence the decision-making process is very close to Habermas's sluice model, examined in Part 1.1, of elite publics within the decision-making mechanism and weak general publics which form opinions but cannot always influence the decision-making process.

⁸ In political theory, participatory democracy is seen as a concept of ideas of direct democracy, where direct democracy refers both to the referendum model and the classical city-state democracy of ancient Greece (Smismans 2004: 128). Participatory democracy emerged as a concept in order to re-introduce the element of direct participation in the decision-making process of the more complex societies of the second half of the 20th century (Korsten, Pateman, Barber quoted in Smismans 2004: 128). This concept extended the idea of participation beyond the political decision-making process, to include the workplace, education and local public administration. The main point of difference between direct democracy and participatory democracy lies in the fact that the latter refers to a "small-group model of democracy" (Sarton 1987 quoted in Smismans

2004: 128), where self-realisation and face-to-face deliberation are of central importance. On the other hand, the direct-democracy model initially focused on the referendum issue (ibid.). The EU Constitutional Treaty also clearly stated that the EU is based on both the principle of the representative and participatory democracy, but it did not provide a definition of the term “democracy”, nor did it explain how democracy, as a principle “on which the Union is founded”, is to be applied/ implemented (Smismans 2004: 122-123). On a theoretical level, Smismans points out that the whole debate regarding direct citizen participation in the decision-making process on an EU level (Weiler 1999; Verhoeven 1998a; Curtin 1997; Weiler 1997; Nentwich 1996 quoted in Smismans 2004: 128) has mainly focused on an alternative form of representation (i.e. representation via associations and interest groups) rather than direct participation (Smismans 2004: 129).

⁹ For a concise overview of the European Parliaments development and legislative role see Sarikakis 2002.

¹⁰ As far as the European Parliament is concerned, the “right to petition” for citizens has been introduced (citizens can contest European legislation through the Parliament). If a petition becomes admissible the relevant parliamentary committee can take action in any of the following forms:

- a)** Requests that the European Commission conducts a preliminary investigation and provide information regarding compliance with the relevant Community legislation;
- b)** Refers the petition to other European Parliament committees for information or further action (a committee might, for example, take account of a petition in its legislative activities);
- c)** In some exceptional cases submits a report to Parliament to be voted upon in plenary or conduct a fact-finding visit; or
- d)** Takes any other action considered appropriate to try to resolve an issue (European Parliament 2005).

A similar provision was made as far as the Commission is concerned, in the, of obscure future, Constitutional Treaty, according to which a minimum of one million citizens can invite the Commission to take a legislative initiative on a particular matter, although the Commission is not obliged to act on such an initiative (The European Union 2004: Article I-46).

¹¹ See also Euractiv.com PLC 2003; Weiler and Wind 2003; Wind 2001; Yataganas 2001 on the issue of comitology and EU governance.

¹² See also Koopmans, Neidhardt, Pfetsch 2002 on the same issue.

¹³ See also Meyer 2005; Koopmans, Statham, Kriesi, Della Porta, de Beus, Guiraudon, Medrano, Pfetsch 2004; Trenz 2004; Koopmans and Pfetsch 2003; Risse and van de Steeg 2003; Kantner 2002; Koopmans, Neidhardt, Pfetsch 2002; Rauer, Rivet, van de Steeg 2002; Waldenström 2002; De Vreese 2001; De Vreese, Peter, Semetko 2001; Kevin 2001; Kunelius and Sparks 2001; Semetko, De Vreese, Peter 2000; Trenz 2000;

Schlesinger 1999.

¹⁴ See note 6, above.

¹⁵ See Chapter 3, Part 3.1, Section 3.1.1 for more details on this.

¹⁶ Meyer's view was based on the analysis of the role of conventional media in the debate regarding EU issues during the turbulent period of the Commission's resignation in 1999.

¹⁷ For more information on the history of public diplomacy and its deployment by the U.S institutions see Murrow, Edward R. Center 2005; Publicdiplomacy.org 2005; DiploFoundation website 2005a.

¹⁸ From the Greek word "nous" which means mind, logic, thought. See also note 23 in Chapter 2.

¹⁹ The foundation has grown from a project to introduce information technology tools to the practice of diplomacy, initiated in 1993 at the Mediterranean Academy of Diplomatic Studies in Malta. Retaining the development of information and communications technologies for diplomatic activities at its core, Diplo was established as an independent foundation in November 2002 by the governments of Malta and Switzerland, to include other new and traditional aspects of the practice of diplomacy and international relations. Furthermore, the foundation is also part of a growing online and off-line network of governments, civil society groups, donor agencies, private sector companies and inter-governmental organisations, the Global Knowledge Partnership (GKP), which come together with the aim to "harness the potential of information and communication technologies (ICTs) for sustainable and equitable development" (Global Knowledge Partnership 2005). The aims of this network are very similar to the aims of ATTAC, the online network examined in Chapter 2, Part 2.2, although the aims here are wider and the members comprise organisations only and not individuals, although the contents of the website are available to anyone.

²⁰ See Part 1.1.

²¹ However, Fisher suggests that the responsibility of integrating community culture into community institutions lies within the culture itself i.e., if a culture fails to achieve a certain degree of integration and mutual consistency among its parts, it will not be able to serve adequately the group/community which practices the culture and will eventually come apart with contradictions and inconsistencies (Fisher 1972: 83).

²² Most Europeans (whether pro- or anti-EU) do not identify themselves as EU nationals yet (Eurobarometer 2006a; Eurobarometer 2006b).

²³ Part 1.3, Section 1.3.2.

²⁴ Part 1.2.

²⁵ Despite the fact that the boundaries between internal and external audiences are not always clear in the case of the EU a distinction is still necessary for practical/methodological purposes. Consequently, this thesis will use de Gouveia's term "intra-EU communication" (de Gouveia and Plumridge 2005) with reference to the EU's public

communication strategy towards EU audiences, whilst public communication towards third-country audiences will be referred to as “external public communication”, wherever necessary.

²⁶ Leonard, Stead, Smewing 2002 quoted in Part 1.3, Section 1.3.2.

²⁷ Part 1.2, Section 1.2.1.

²⁸ Leonard and Arbuthnott 2002 discussed in Part 1.2, Section 1.2.1.

²⁹ Leonard, Stead, Smewing 2002 quoted in Part 1.3, Section 1.3.2.

Chapter 2- Research questions, methodology and theoretical clarifications

The previous chapter presented the concept of the EU's public communication and identified its parameters, as far as content and aims are concerned, within the theoretical concept of the European public sphere. As has been argued, public communication is the term used in this thesis to indicate the top-down communication process between the EU institutions and the general public¹. What could the role of the Internet in this communication process be and why does the present study focus on this particular medium?

We have already seen in Chapter 1 that for Habermas the media have consistently had a crucial role in the public sphere: Initially, the media (primarily newspapers, books and journals) contributed to the rational-critical debate within the bourgeois public sphere and thus played a role in the establishment of what Poster describes as "a healthy representative democracy" (Poster 1995b). In time, though, the profit-driven monopolies that control the modern media (radio, television) contributed to the transformation of the rational-critical public sphere into a sphere of publicity, more concerned with the consumption of culture, and thus the generation of profit, than with the democratising rational-critical public debate (Habermas 1989).

Other scholars have also highlighted the role of the media in the public sphere not only as facilitating but also as shaping public debate. For example, Elliott's view on Britain's technological and economic developments in the 1980s- that they "were promoting a continuation of the shift away from involving people in societies as political citizens of nation states towards involving them as consumption units in a corporate world" (Elliott 1982: 243-244, quoted in Golding and Murdock 1991: 23)- is quite close to Habermas's view on the role of media in the public sphere. The media are characterized as the "fourth estate", which from "guardians of the public sphere become increasingly converted into industries, wholly oriented towards the profit motive, just another business held by some conglomerate" (ibid.).

Coming from a different perspective, the liberal and radical democratic approaches to the public sphere (Curran 1991) also agree that the media have a crucial role in the public debate, albeit a positive one. Both the liberal and the radical democratic approaches see the mass media as vital in restoring the balance in and encouraging further democratisation of the public sphere.

More specifically, for classical liberal theory, the public sphere is *“the space between government and society, in which private individuals exercise formal (election of governments) and informal (pressure of the public opinion) control over the state [...] The media are central to this process”* (Curran 1991: 29).

This approach does not delve deeper into the ways in which the media affect the democratic procedures in contemporary societies nor does it identify any types of conflict between the individuals and the state. It is important, though, to note that it recognises individuals' ability to control the actions of the state through a public sphere, and that it sees in the media not a state ideological apparatus but a space that improves democratic processes.

Similarly, the radical democratic approach sees in the public sphere *“a public space in which private individuals and organized interests seek to influence the allocation of resources and regulate the social relations”* (ibid.: 35). The media are not just seen as intermediaries between the individuals and the state but more in the context of a *“battleground between contending forces”* (ibid.: 29). According to this approach, the media broaden the access to the public domain thus restoring the balance of power in societies where elites initially had privileged access to the public domain (Curran 1991). John Hartley takes the argument a step further by arguing that the media **are** the contemporary public sphere, *“the public domain, the place where and the means by which the public is created and has its being”* (Hartley 1992: 1, quoted in Poster 1995a: 6).

It thus becomes apparent that regardless of the theoretical approach one adopts as far as the nature of the media's role in the public sphere is concerned the common denominator in all approaches is that the media have a significant role in the public debate, either as mediators or

as participants themselves. How does this affect the analysis of the European public sphere and EU public communication in particular, considering that there are no pan-European mass media, mediating and/or participating in a pan-European, unified public sphere?

The national media are perceived as key to the Europeanisation of the national public spheres (Kevin 2003: 52, quoted in Pfetsch 2004: 4), as they function both as an institutionalised forum of debate between the public and the institutions, and as actors of the public debate/ agenda-setters, i.e. they convey information regarding issues and actors according to their professional norms and values and their wider political and economic associations and interests. As has already been discussed in Chapter 1, the role of national media in the process of the horizontal Europeanisation (communicative linkages between member states) of the interrelated national public spheres has already been examined and analysed both empirically and theoretically by several scholars², although the results have been inconclusive with regard to the media's actual power to influence Europeanised public debates³.

In the case of the vertical Europeanisation (communicative linkages between EU institutions and the public), and more specifically of the EU's public communication strategy (top-down aspect of the vertical Europeanisation), which is the focus of the present thesis, this (the process of vertical Europeanisation) may also be observed within national public spheres and it may be mediated by national media/ national information gatekeepers. Meyer (1999) has highlighted the problems of this process, particularly with regard to the EU's public communication relying on the national media to convey its messages to the public.

However, vertical Europeanisation and the EU's public communication may also be direct; that is to say, the EU institutions may be responsible for producing *and* broadcasting their messages to the general public and any interaction between the general public and the institutions may be unmediated and managed directly by the institutions themselves. It is in this context that the Internet becomes important, as, in the absence of traditional (television, radio, newspapers) media on a pan-European level, it is the only medium offering the possibility for EU

institutions to establish unmediated communication with the general public.

Could the Internet become a new public sphere, in the way Habermas conceived the ideal public space? Can the Internet promote democracy and help promote an all-inclusive public sphere? Or will the Internet become the most powerful supporter of the contemporary political and social status quo? Will an alternative public sphere emerge from cyberspace? And what is the impact of the Internet on the European public sphere and the EU's public communication strategy?

2.1 Cyberspace and the public sphere: Who participates?

To begin with, we need to define the term "cyberspace". The phrase was first used by William Gibson to define a place "that collated all the information in the world and could be entered by disembodied consciousnesses" (Jordan 2000: 20). This place offers power to those who can access and/or manipulate the unlimited information that can be found in it. This definition underlines the problems that arise when we attempt to define cyberspace and the Internet as a new, alternative public sphere⁴: The power of cyberspace lies in the manipulation of information and also in knowledge (knowledge of how to access various parts of cyberspace; knowledge of how to bypass restrictions and censorship). Since not everyone can achieve that, we could be facing the formation of a public sphere dominated by elites, like the bourgeois public sphere of the 17th and 18th century.

More specifically, elites in cyberspace can appear in two forms: The first one consists of the people who have the privilege to use the new means of communication, and therefore can send and receive messages of political dissent and/ or participate in the political discourse. The statistics available so far all present the average Internet user as middle or upper-class white male, in his late twenties and thirties, with higher education, living in Western Europe or North America (ClickZ Network 2006a; ClickZ Stats 2006c; Chen and Wellman 2003; Greenspan 2003a; Nielsen/Net Ratings 2003; Castells 2000)⁵. From that point of view, the emerging electronic public sphere could not be considered inclusive.

However, according to the latest evidence, the gap between the rich and the poor (individuals as well as countries) and between the two sexes, as far as their representation online is concerned, is slowly being reduced (ClickZ Network 2006a; ClickZ Stats 2006c; Chen and Wellman 2003; Nielsen/Net Ratings 2003). The percentage of the world's population that has access to the Internet rose to 10% in 2003 from 2.4% in 2000 (Chen and Wellman 2003; Castells 2000). In 2004 the worldwide Internet population was calculated at 934 million while it is estimated to reach 1.35 billion by 2007 according to the Computer Industry Almanac (ClickZ Stats 2006c). The same applies to socio-economical status, gender and educational status, all factors which are still discriminating as far as Internet access is concerned, yet they are becoming less and less determining of the profile of the Internet users on a global and national level (ClickZ Network 2006a; Chen and Wellman 2003; Lucas and Sylla 2003)⁶. It is also important to note that although in most countries the majority of Internet users are higher-income individuals, in some countries age and/or education and not income are the definitive factors of accessing the Internet, as is the case, for example, in Mexico, China and South Korea (Chen and Wellman 2003)⁷.

What can be said about the electronic public sphere is that it generally reflects the social structure of the off-line societies (male-dominated societies, where the higher-educated and higher income members generally dominate the public sphere). The Internet also reflects the inequalities between the various ethnic groups in off-line societies. For example, the socio-economic inequalities between Hispanic/ black Americans and white/Asian Americans are reflected in the numbers of the Internet users from these ethnic groups (ClickZ Network 2006a; Chen and Wellman 2003). Similarly, the inequalities between developed and developing countries are also present online: Not only more Internet users come from developed countries, but the infrastructure required to access the Internet is also more readily available and cheaper in developed countries⁸.

The electronic public sphere also reflects the dynamic of the off-line societies, in the sense that any advances towards inclusion made in off-

line societies also appear online, and in a more obvious way than in off-line societies⁹. For example, the advances of off-line societies towards the equality of sexes can definitely be observed in the electronic public sphere (increase of female users) and in certain cases, i.e. in societies where women are still highly socially disadvantaged compared to men, the Internet even facilitates the struggle of women for equality, as in the case of Afghanistan¹⁰. Day and Schuler point out that there is enough evidence to illustrate how ICTs encourage the re-emergence of social movements, civil society and community networking (Day and Schuler 2004a: 6). As examples, the authors use the anti-Iraq war movement, the anti-globalisation and environmental movements, all of which have used ICTs for the production and sharing of information that sustains and helps expand their networks (Day and Schuler 2004a)¹¹.

One should not forget, of course, that these positive examples of online activism go hand-in-hand with censorship of various degrees. Chinese citizens, for example, are experiencing one of the most severe cases of online state censorship, while European governments, among which the French, German and Austrian ones, have managed to impose online censorship with regard to views concerning one particular issue (in this case Nazi ideology and negation of the Holocaust). Even online information corporations like GOOGLE.com, whose founders Larry Page and Sergey Brin built their online services on the Internet's fundamental characteristic of free and continuous flow of information, are now bowing to the pressure of the US and Chinese governments on the issue of censorship. This could potentially lead to what Orwell described as the Big Brother (Orwell 1987), a society where everyone is watched and all information is controlled to the point of distortion, or what is otherwise called the Superpanopticon, a place of absolute censorship and control (Jordan 2000).

However, one of the Internet's core characteristics is that it was designed to override any obstacle in communication, as discussed earlier in this chapter. Online censorship, therefore, regardless of its severity, is bound to be temporary, as the case of online music and video file-sharing has shown. Despite the music and movie industries' intense efforts, the

third generation of peer-to-peer (P2P) file-sharing protocols, such as Freenet (Free Network Project 2006), are not as dependent on a central server as first generation P2P protocols, like Napster¹², and because they use encryption to transfer the shared data, it is much harder to shut down these systems through court actions. In addition, certain P2P protocol providers, like KaZaA (Sharman Networks 2006), change the company's organization or country of origin so that it is impossible or pointless to prosecute them for breaching copyright laws¹³.

Besides the access-related online elite (the people who have access to the Internet as opposed to the people who do not), in the early days of the Internet another elite group had been identified by analysts: the "technopower" elite, i.e. people and/or organizations that "*have wider possibilities for taking action based on the ability to delve within layers of hardware and software*" (Jordan 2000: 135). This elite group included the hackers, the software and hardware international corporations as well as people who have a deep knowledge of software systems and develop new, more user-friendly programmes for access to cyberspace for non-profit reasons¹⁴. The technopower elite were seen as the ones that shaped the "environment" in which the actions of the rest of the Internet users take place (Jordan 2000)¹⁵.

Nevertheless, the validity of these claims regarding the existence of a technopower elite in cyberspace is questionable nowadays, as any average Internet user, without specialist software and hardware knowledge, can quite easily and cost-effectively create his/her own webpage, blog (online calendar), chat forum and/or mailing list, as well as access information about hacking¹⁶. Furthermore, a large proportion of software is available online for free, and even if it is not, there are ways to copy and distribute software for free, even without the manufacturer's consent. And although, as far as server software usage is concerned, the market is dominated by 2 corporations, namely Apache and Microsoft (Securityspace.com 2004; Netcraft 2003), there are several other operating systems available (often for free or for little cost) and most of them are nowadays compatible with most others¹⁷.

After looking at all the possible manifestations of elite groups online

in the above paragraphs, it is safe to conclude that these are temporary. Their power to access, control and/or shape the nature of the Internet is eventually surpassed by the capabilities that this medium offers.

Therefore, once we move beyond the demographic data regarding the off-line and online profile of Internet users, if we examine the potential power that cyberspace can offer to its users from the individuals' point of view, there is enough evidence to suggest that there can be an alternative public sphere in cyberspace, which could fulfil the Habermasian ideal. The users of the Internet can communicate without necessarily knowing each other, let alone having physical contact with each other¹⁸, which means that the users' offline identity, race or gender are irrelevant on the Internet. This is the first element that indicates the potential emergence of an all-inclusive public sphere, where everyone can participate as equals and are judged by what they say and not by who they are¹⁹.

Nevertheless, the ability of individuals to change online identities as often as they like or sustain multiple identities on cyberspace does not mean that identities are absent from cyberspace. Jordan summarises the counter-argument on the absence of identity from cyberspace by saying that

“cyberspace is not inherently free of gender or race or any other key constituents of offline identity, but these are recreated with different resources, in different ways and with variable connections to offline identity” (Jordan 2000: 66).

In other words, the power of the individuals in cyberspace lies in their ability to change their online identity in order to adjust to different “environments”. Individuals can have a more “fluid” identity online, and adapt their online “persona” according to the online environment they find themselves into every time (Poster 2003). This means that men can appear as women and vice versa and hardly ever can their true identity be revealed (Jordan 2000), but they still exist in cyberspace under a male or female identity.

Because of this identity fluidity, and because no central authority can have absolute control on the information flow [*“the Net treats censorship as damage and it routes around it”* (Gilmore 2006)], early

theorists argued that the Internet heralded a space of “anti-hierarchism” (Tsaliki 2000; Jones 1995) and “anti-authoritarianism” (Barlow 1996)²⁰. The fact that everyone exists in cyberspace only through his or her words prevents the formation of any type of hierarchy. Furthermore, everyone enters or leaves cyberspace on their own will and no individual can impose themselves upon the others. Even if they try to do so, their action is cancelled simply by removing their online identity from the chat room or bulletin board where the discussion is taking place.

However, while the online public sphere is decentred and allows for identity fluidity, information overload and the expertise required to navigate through this information overload have led to the emergence of a new type of hierarchy, one which is based on the power of knowledge. In other words, hierarchy and elites in cyberspace are not eliminated, but reinvented. Nevertheless, as we have already discussed in previous paragraphs, online elites are ephemeral, as the element that gives them their status in the first place (access; knowledge; power to control the online content or software) sooner or later becomes available to the majority of users and/or is surpassed by the technology of the medium itself.

It is also important to note here that lack of hierarchy does not mean absence of a sense of community or of a collective imagination in cyberspace. Communities are abstract constructs that depend on the subjective and emotional loyalties of the community members (Day and Schuler 2004a: 11). Community-building is based on creating effective communication linkages, which in turn lead to a common sense of purpose and solidarity (White 1999: 29). In that sense the Internet can enable a sense of community in cyberspace not thanks to the technology itself or the access to information, but thanks to “*the interactions and exchanges between people that it facilitates*” (Day and Schuler 2004b: 218).

This possibility of an anti-hierarchical, all-inclusive online community, a core characteristic of which is the facilitation of communication among its members, is very similar to the Habermasian model of the public sphere and is at the heart of this project’s argument regarding the role of the Internet in the EU’s public communication

strategy and the emerging European public sphere. Exactly how likely is such an online community to emerge and why is this relevant to the case of the European public sphere? These questions are addressed in the following two sections.

2.2 The democratising potential of the Internet

Besides the ephemeral nature of the elites in cyberspace, another important point that emerges from the previous paragraphs is that cyberspace does not exist in a social and political vacuum. Online elites are very much defined by their offline demographic profile as well as the political and economic agendas of the (offline) societies within which they operate. Technologies are created and diffused within societies and there is a constant interaction between online and offline life. If we examine more closely the claims that the Internet facilitates an all-inclusive, anti-hierarchical public sphere, is there enough evidence to confirm these? And what would be the role of such a public sphere in reinvigorating and/or further establishing democratic procedures in offline societies?

Looking at recent theories and empirical studies, it appears that scholars are divided on these issues. On the one hand, there are those scholars who find that although offline elites are very much willing to support the commercial and entertainment aspects of cyberspace, they are not as eager to support its political aspect, since the latter could put their interests and power at risk. For Tsagarousianou

“often behind the rhetoric of electronic democracy, what is initiated is a very particular version of publicness, arranged around ordered forms of dissemination of information in which official channels decide on the definition of the problem and the content of the message and thus strongly influence the direction of the outcome” (Tsagarousianou 1999: 202-203)²¹.

This is not promising as far as the fulfilment of the Habermasian model of an all-inclusive, democratic public sphere is concerned. In fact, it is more relevant to Habermas’s criticism of the bourgeois public sphere, which during its decline transformed into a public sphere of publicity (Habermas 1989).

Similarly, “cyber-pessimists” (Norris 2001) are keen to point out that the participation that message-boards and online debates facilitate has few if any tangible outcomes and, therefore, participation is illusory (Putnam 2000, quoted in Hibberd, McNair, Schlesinger 2003: 97). According to Norris, the Internet has so far failed to increase access to the policy-making elites or facilitate public participation in the decision-making process (Norris 2001: 113-114), whilst for Hill and Hughes “*the Net makes up a tool, a resource for those who are politically committed but it does not generally draw in important crowds of new citizens towards the public space*” (Hill and Hughes 1998: 177).

An online survey conducted for Channel 4 News in Britain confirms the Cyber-Pessimists view (Hibberd, McNair, Schlesinger 2003). The survey showed that the majority of respondents were active participants in the democratic process in offline life as well, which confirms what many analysts have already pointed out- that online political surveys tend to attract those already most committed to the democratic process. The conclusion of the survey will have left many of the Cyber-Pessimists feeling vindicated, as it expressed “*considerable doubt about the usefulness of the web for communication between politicians and the general public*” (ibid.: 104).

Another study, of the Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions for the aid of citizens (ATTAC), an online initiative, which started in France in June 1998, with the aim to help citizens understand tax issues, also provides rather pessimistic data regarding the online public sphere (le Grignou and Patou 2003). ATTAC’s influence quickly spread through French political life to other countries and there are now 35 separate movements around the world, in Europe, Brazil, Japan, Quebec and Senegal. ATTAC’s aim is to

“produce and diffuse information to work together, like the 18th century public sphere actors, to shed light on the secrecy of the decisions taken by international organisations and to fight against the opacity of many public policies” and

to promote education “*so as to regain control altogether over the future of our world*” like the 19th century pedagogics’ project (ibid.: 164-166). The

movement's aim is to produce counter-expertise and counter-experts (le Grignou and Patou 2003).

However, despite the optimistic declarations of ATTAC's founders, and despite ATTAC's members comprising a mix of individuals and corporate bodies, of actors from the intellectual and cultural fields and members of the trade unions and associations, Le Grignou and Patou found that the use of the Internet by the Association actually highlights the strain between two contradictory goals: "*The democratic aim of a social movement that seeks to spread knowledge as widely as possible and the unavoidably restrictive feature of expertise*" (ibid.: 168). Trautmann finds that the Internet failed to raise the level of democracy within the association despite the notions of increased representation associated with it (Trautmann 2001, quoted in le Grignou and Patou 2003: 168). Le Grignou and Patou (2003: 178) also support this view, as their study indicates that within ATTAC, the electronic tools are used both for the democratic promotion of expert actors and the selection of actors, thus maintaining and even enlarging the gap between "expert" and "non-expert" contributors. In other words, what started as a movement which would use the Internet to make expert knowledge available to the public and to encourage people to be active and defend their interests from international corporations, has evolved in a movement which, as a result of the ever-growing amount of expert information available to its members and the number of specialised debates carried out simultaneously, actually encourages "expertise" public debates, where the least informed take a more passive stance, and leave the debate to the "experts".

For Venkatesh, Nosovitch and Miner, lack of knowledge can eventually become a barrier to participation, even if the necessary infrastructure is made available to everyone, and as a result a gap may form between the resource/knowledge-rich and the resource/knowledge-poor (Venkatesh, Nosovitch, Miner 2004: 193-194). That coincides with the view expressed by many analysts, that what we are witnessing in cyberspace, is the emergence of a new elite, one that bases its power on knowledge, rather than money or military force.

However, Rheingold offers a different, more positive outlook on the

democratizing potential of the Internet. He argues that the Internet can be used to promote democracy, and thus political dissent, because the Internet, and computer-mediated communication (CMC), has the “*capacity to challenge the existing political hierarchy’s monopoly on powerful communications media, and perhaps thus revitalise citizen-based democracy*” (Rheingold 1994: 14).

Rheingold is not alone in his view of the Internet as a tool that can revitalise grass-roots democracy. Among the advocates of the Internet’s potential to strengthen participation and invigorate democracy is Coleman, who warns that if a crisis of democratic legitimacy and accountability is to be averted, new relationships between citizens and institutions of governance must emerge (Coleman and Gøtze 2001: 3). For “cyber-optimists” (Norris 2001), such as Dick Morris, the Internet offers precisely this- a new forum where such relationships can be established, particularly within the websites which encourage public debate of political issues (Hibberd, McNair, Schlesinger 2003: 96). For Wertheim (1999: 299) the Internet is a “relational” technology, an attribute which Smith considers important when trying to improve participation in public life, since close relationships are the best source of political information, and participation in public life depends on the amount and quality of political information available to the citizens (Smith 2004: 178). Of course, one could argue that close relationships may be indeed a great source of information, but that does not guarantee either the quality of the information circulated or that the information circulated is of a political nature.

Cyber-optimists base their positive view of the Internet as a tool that can encourage citizens’ participation in democratic processes on the notion that the Internet’s main characteristics, i.e. interactivity; relative cost-effective access; communication dissociated from such constraints as time and space; and inclusiveness, can benefit the political process immensely, when applied to civic engagement. By transcending time, online debates allow time for reflection and the development of arguments. By transcending place, participation in political debates becomes independent of geographical constraints, whilst the interactive nature of the Internet chat rooms can facilitate contacts between groups and

politicians and citizens (Coleman and Gøtze 2001: 44)²². Arquilla and Rondfeldt take the democratising potential of the Internet even further, by suggesting that a new type of politics is emerging in cyberspace:

“Noopolitik’ [...] emphasises the role of informational soft power in expressing ideas, values, norms and ethics through all manner of media [...] and makes sense because knowledge is fast becoming an even stronger source of power and strategy, in ways that classic realpolitik and internationalism cannot absorb” (Arquilla and Rondfeldt 1999: 9)²³.

Although both cyber-optimists and cyber-pessimists present valid arguments in support of their view regarding the democratising potential of the Internet, the fact is that the empirical evidence has so far been inconclusive. There is indeed a gap between the cyber-optimistic theories which heralded the coming of a new era in politics and communication upon the Internet’s arrival, and today’s online reality, regarding which all data suggests that it is mainly Western, male and young users who are benefiting from this new medium so far. Nevertheless, there is also evidence that this gap between theory and reality online is closing more quickly than anticipated and the fact remains that the Internet does offer the possibility of an all-inclusive, democratic public sphere²⁴.

In this respect, the Habermasian concept of the public sphere remains relevant: As discussed in Chapter 1, there are four elements in the Habermasian concept: democratic principles; openness; all-inclusiveness; no participants have an advantage over the others. The Internet offers the possibility to fulfil all of the criteria of such a public sphere. Even if one accepts that the Internet is a communication medium for the elites, an analogy can be drawn between the bourgeois public sphere of the late 18th century, the participants of which used to gather in their clubs and cafés to discuss current matters, and the fragmented online public fora of today (Dahlgren quoted in le Grignou and Patou 2003: 178). In both cases we have an elite group, which forms a dynamic and politically influential public space through public debate facilitated by a new and thriving form of media: The press/printed material in the case of the bourgeois public sphere, the Internet in the case of the online public sphere (ibid.).

Having established that the Internet offers the opportunity of a democratising, all-inclusive public sphere, even in the case that this public sphere is initially an elite one, the next section examines the possible ways in which the Internet could be deployed in the democratisation of the EU.

2.3 The Internet as a tool of democratisation of the EU

Given the nature of the European public sphere (interconnected national public spheres, multilingual community and geographical distance between members of the public) it is the contention of this thesis that the Internet can be deployed towards the formation of a democratic, strong European public sphere. As discussed earlier, the identity-fluidity and antihierarchical nature of the Internet allows for the publics of an online public sphere to be *“less visible and less bound to physical locations and thus more deterritorialized”* (Yang 2002) than in offline public spheres. In that sense, the Internet is the ideal space within which the multiple national publics of the EU could surpass their ethno-cultural/regional boundaries sufficiently to achieve the level of Europeanisation required before one can talk about a European public sphere, without at the same time losing their national identities.

Engström suggests that information and communication technologies are already influencing European politics in the sense that more information on decision making-processes is now available to the citizens, and political debates are now more accessible to the general public thanks to the media (TV and the Internet in particular) (Engström 2002). Therefore, the Internet poses an opportunity for deliberative democracy and broader citizens' participation in decision-making at a European level (Engström 2002; Leonard and Arbuthnott 2002).

More specifically, and in relation to the nature of the Internet and the specific elements of the European democratic deficit as these were described in Chapter 1, the Internet can be used to target the participation deficit currently undermining EU's democratic legitimacy. Leonard and Arbuthnott (2002) relate participation to e-democracy and identify three dimensions of the latter:

- a) Discussions about the private sphere (Internet polling, e-voting and other methods of collecting data online can develop new channels through which the public can express its preferences).
- b) E-governance (new technologies can help government communicate better with its public through transparency, availability of documents and interfaces for interaction).
- c) Governmental sphere (technology helps branches of government work together to deliver goals).

Applied to the case of the EU, the above dimensions of e-democracy can help overcome the main obstacles towards democratisation of the European public sphere. The Internet can allow for debates to flourish across national borders (thus eliminating the issue of geographical distance). Transnational debates regarding European issues can develop through cross-national e-polling; through exchange of best practice within and outside government; and through enhancing the ability of government and parties to develop constituencies outside national borders (Leonard and Arbuthnott 2002).

Weiler proposes the creation of “Lexcalibur-The European Public Square”, which would allow for the entire decision-making process of the EU, including the comitology process, to be placed online in order to enhance “*the potential of all actors to play a much more informed, critical and involved role in the primary Public Square*”, i.e. in the off-line public sphere (Weiler 1999: 351-352). For Weiler, the Internet is to play a key role in the emergence of a “*functioning, deliberative, political community*” within the EU (ibid.: 352). This is the prerequisite for the emergence of a European “*polity-cum-civic society*” (ibid.), which in turn is necessary if the democratisation of the EU is to succeed.

Engström refers to empirical evidence taken from European nation-states, where the Internet is being used in all of the above ways, in order to improve citizen participation and public debate (Engström 2002)²⁵. However, he points out that the Internet poses threats to deliberative democracy as well and that there needs to be a distinction between direct democracy (public opinion) and online public engagement in policy formation (ibid.).

Blumler and Coleman also find that the Internet's key characteristics (i.e. transcending time and place; enabling networking and participation; overriding hierarchy) are also the very benefits of online civic engagement and can enhance online deliberation (Blumler and Coleman 2001). However, they warn that the benefits of online civic engagement need to be carefully measured against the potential risks (ibid.). As an example, they point out that the public dialogue can be used by the state/government under false pretences, to create an illusion of democracy (ibid.).

Thus far, this and the previous chapter have examined the Habermasian concept of the public sphere; the concept of public communication; the Internet as a tool of public communication and a facilitator of a Habermasian public sphere; and the relation of these three concepts with the EU public sphere in particular. The main points that emerged from the discussion of these issues can now be summarised in the following figure.



Figure 2.1: Key components of the theoretical concept regarding the EU public sphere, Source: The author.

Despite the problems and risks, and without implying that the Internet can actually become an all-encompassing solution for the democratic deficit in the EU, it has become clear that the Internet offers significant possibilities for improving the lack of democratic legitimisation and public participation in the EU's decision-making. This theoretical assumption is already supported by some empirical evidence which shows that EU officials and members of the European Parliament are already turning to what the Internet offers (Engström 2002; Eriksen and Fossum 2000). This analysis aims to investigate the issue further and produce a more detailed account of how the Internet is deployed by the EU's public communication strategy. The following final section of this chapter outlines exactly what the issues under investigation are and how they will be examined in this thesis.

2.4 EU public communication and the Internet

As discussed in Chapter 1, the EU public communication is bi-dimensional: Not only does the EU need to communicate its ideals and positions to extra-EU peoples but it also needs to communicate its decisions and ideals to the EU audiences, winning over euro-sceptics and establishing the EU public's trust in the EU institutions. Of course, promoting shared European values to the EU public requires coordination and promotion on an EU level (Riordan 2003: 128). Furthermore, the role of the EU's public communication with regard to both external and intra-EU audiences has already been defined in Chapter 1 as aiming to:

- a) Increase people's familiarity with the EU;
- b) Increase people's appreciation of what the EU does; and
- c) Engage people with the EU/ in the debate of EU affairs.

In addition to these, with regard to the intra-EU public, we have already seen that citizens' **participation** in the public dialogue regarding EU issues and in the decision-making process on EU level is considered as key factor in addressing the EU's democratic deficit²⁶. Another key factor is the **accountability** of the EU institutions²⁷ while Leonard and Arbuthnott also identify the **matching of EU policies to public priorities** as another key area where the democratic deficit of the EU is clearly demonstrated (Leonard and Arbuthnott 2002).

We have also seen in the present chapter how the Internet could help address the EU's democratic deficit, with regard to **participation**, **accountability** and **matching EU policies to the public's priorities** through **online debate**, actively encouraged by the EU institutions, and **e-governance**, which will increase transparency of the policy-making process and enable a feedback process and participation of the EU citizens in the decision-making process through e-polling and e-voting.

If these aims (the "**how**" parameter of the public sphere) are to be achieved through the EU public communication strategy, the following actions are required²⁸:

- a) Promoting interaction within the public sphere.
- b) Moving beyond propaganda: It is necessary to understand the target

audience/ Proving relevance to target audience.

c) Moving beyond intellectual forms of communication.

What is the role of the Internet in the above issues? Are the above aims of the EU's public communication met online? If so, is there any evidence that the EU's online public communication is successfully contributing to the emerging European public sphere?

These questions are addressed in this thesis on four levels, namely

e) Policy-making level of the EU's online public communication strategy;

f) Policy-implementation;

g) Policy impact on key EU audiences; and

h) Interviews with key Commission communication officials.

In terms of policy-making (**a**), the present research project investigates the extent to which the EU is aware of the issues regarding the EU's democratic deficit, the European public sphere and the potential role of the Internet in addressing these issues on EU level. For this purpose, the main official documents regarding the EU's Information and Communication strategy are critically reviewed, in Chapter 3, in order to determine how the above issues are addressed on policy-making level and identify any further aims that the EU has set for its online Information and Communication strategy.

Following that, the ways in which these official policies are put into practice online (policy-implementation-**b**) are investigated in Chapter 4, through the analysis of three official EU websites. The aim is to juxtapose the messages and interaction opportunities provided on these three websites with the goals set out in the EU Information and Communication strategy documents, but also to evaluate how close this policy-implementation is to the normative role of the EU's public communication online, as this has been outlined in the present and previous chapter.

Finally, Chapter 5 investigates the impact that the online EU Information and Communication strategy has on key online audiences (**c**), through a qualitative EU websites' online user survey.

Interviews with senior EU officials in key policy-making and policy-implementation positions (**d**) are used on every stage of the EU's online public communication analysis, in order to put the findings of the policy-

making and policy-implementation evaluation into the wider context of the institutional culture, within which the EU's public communication strategy is formulated and implemented.

Notes

¹ Chapter 1, Part 1.3.

² See, for example, Risse and van de Steeg 2003; Koopmans and Pfetsch 2003; Trenz 2000; Koopmans, Statham, Kriesi, Della Porta, de Beus, Guiraudon, Medrano, Pfetsch 2004; Kantner 2002; Rauer, Rivet, van de Steeg 2002; De Vreese 2003a; Semetko, De Vreese, Peter 2000; Trenz 2004; Schlesinger 1999.

³ As Pfetsch points out, a lot of these studies fail to assess whether the presence or absence of Europeanisation in a national public sphere is the result of the media's own position or of the communication strategies of other political actors (Pfetsch 2004: 3).

⁴ It is important here to emphasise that the Internet is only part of what we call "cyberspace". This includes not only the Internet but also "the informational space of flows and also a number of other computer networks that may not be connected to the Internet and contains resources that are not part of the space of flows" (Jordan 2000: 170).

⁵ According to the data available in 2000, 88% of the Internet users came from the industrialized countries (which have just 15% of the world's population), while as an overall only 2.4% of the world's population had access to the Internet (Castells 2000: 375). In 2003, of all the Internet users, 68% are situated in the USA, the UK, Germany, Italy, Japan, Korea, China and Mexico (Chen and Wellman 2003). Age, gender, race, education level and economic status were also major factors that affected the inequality in the Internet access: 30% of all the Internet users had a University degree, while this percentage tended to increase in certain countries, such as Russia, Mexico and China. In the USA men accessed the Internet more than women by three percentage points while in China only 7% of the Internet users were women (Castells 2000: 377). When it came to financial status, high-income households were 20 times more likely to have the Internet access than those of lower levels of income (USA) (*ibid.*: 377). For women, in particular, and their relation to the Internet see Greenspan 2003a, Poster 1995a, Tsaliki 2000, Tsaliki 1998.

⁶ For example, the gap between men and women accessing the Internet is rapidly closing, not only in the so-called developed countries but also in less developed ones: In 2003 in the US, women were responsible for 51.4% of all Internet traffic (as opposed to 48.6% of men), while in Sweden, the UK, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Spain and France women represented 40-47% of the Internet users in these countries (Greenspan 2003a). More remarkable is the case of China, where in 2003 41% of the Internet users were women (Chen and Wellman 2003) compared to only 7% four years before (Castells 2000).

⁷ According to some of the most recent statistics available, in China 28% of the Internet

users are lower-income students accessing the Internet from university computer labs (Chen and Wellman 2003). In Korea, higher-education Internet users are 40% more than Internet users with a high-school diploma (ibid.).

⁸ While the average American, for example, can buy a computer with a month's salary, the average Bangladeshi would need 8 years of salaries to buy the same computer (Lucas and Sylla 2003). One prediction that has been made is that, although now there is a big gap in contemporary societies between the haves and the have-nots, as far as the access to the new communications' technologies is concerned, this gap will eventually disappear completely (Jordan 2000). This prediction is based on Moore's Law, according to which the processing power of the computers will double approximately every eighteen months and the prices of the computers will follow the opposite route; that is they will be reduced in half every eighteen months (ibid.). However, the evidence regarding Internet access worldwide indicates that this prediction is mainly realised in the developing world.

⁹ For more information on the digital divide and how the Internet is being used even in deprived and remote areas of the planet see the Digital Divide Network (Benton Foundation 2004).

¹⁰ There are several women's organisations fighting for women's rights in Afghanistan. The Internet has definitely facilitated their work and had allowed them to reach a broader audience and create a wider and stronger lobbying network. See Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (2006) and Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan (2006) to name just two organisations.

¹¹ However, Day accepts that "*the organisational cultures and practices of sponsoring organisations and funding agencies can have a detrimental effect on and stifle active community involvement*" (Day and Harris 1997, quoted in Day and Schuler 2004a: 11).

¹² Napster was the first widely-used peer-to-peer (P2P) music sharing service. After the music industry's accusations of copyright violation, Napster was ceased to operate by court order. Napster's brand and logo continue to be used by a pay service, after they were acquired by Roxio, a division and brand of the California-based digital media company Sonic Solutions (Wikipedia.org 2006e). Nevertheless, the original Napster service paved the way for the third-generation decentralized P2P file-sharing programs such as Kazaa (Sharman Networks 2006), Limewire (Gnutella network 2006) and eMule (eMule project 2006). For more information see Wikipedia.org 2006e.

¹³ For example, although it is illegal to use file sharing protocols in the US, where the Recording Industry Association of America initiated and eventually won the legal battle against file-sharing systems, in Canada the courts have ruled in favour of file sharing. For more information on file sharing and the technical and legal issues surrounding it see Wikipedia.org 2006f.

¹⁴ The difference between software corporations and organisations/individuals who develop software programmes/applications for non-profit purposes and hackers is that

hackers develop software programmes/applications to bypass the restrictions of the applications/software programmes developed by the corporations. Hackers, therefore, do not play an important role in shaping the online environment. Rather, they develop ways to make online environment less restrictive for the individual user (Jones 1998; Jordan 2000).

¹⁵According to Jordan (2000) it is not the powerful and up-to-date processors that allow people to gain power in cyberspace but the knowledge of how to make the most out of the available software and the Internet.

¹⁶ Although the US, China and other countries have established strict regulations and harsh sentences for hackers, hackers' websites are still easily accessed online, under different domain names. A lot of hackers' websites have German URLs. The English websites are less easy to find, and they tend to have a lot of hacking information encoded. However, it is still fairly easy for an average Internet user to obtain information from hackers' websites, by running a simple search on Google or another search engine.

¹⁷ Another point that has concerned analysts and serves as the basis for the argument of the "technopower elite" is the impact Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have had, and continue to have, on social policy development (for an overview of the development of ICTs and how they were incorporated in the agenda of the US and the EU, see Day and Schuler 2004a: 7-8). For Sclove, technology experts have been able to influence social policy development "*unchallenged by public scrutiny, in a way that would be unacceptable in other aspects of the public arena*" (Sclove 1995, quoted in Day and Schuler 2004a: 9). The development of ICT's and their consequent influence on the shaping of network society developments has taken place without the engagement or participation of civil society and this has led to an unquestioning public acceptance of the current techno-economic policies (ibid.). Freeman puts this into context, in relation to contemporary socio-technological policy planning and implementation, by reminding us that the criteria for the selection and adoption of new technologies in capitalist economies are profit driven (Freeman 1994). Similarly, Castells, in his "network of flows" (Castells 2000: 476), sees technology and information as two of the main sources of power in contemporary society, which are also used by "interconnected, global, capitalist networks" to organise (global) economic activity. Castells' "network of flows" is part of the network society, and its techno-economic agenda is powerful enough to influence, if not determine, the prevalent social processes and functions within the network society ("space of flows") (ibid.). Castells' view is similar to that of Wellman, who, in the context of the social network theory, speaks of "networked individualism", as opposed to local, geographic communities (Wellman and Haythornthwaite 2002: 10). From that point of view, the argument of the technopower elite is more valid, although it is more relevant to offline life than cyberspace and the Internet.

¹⁸ To put it another way, "*the physical exists in cyberspace but is reinvented*" perhaps in

what is called an “avatar”, meaning the online identity someone using cyberspace has created (Jordan 2000: 2 and 59).

¹⁹ For a thorough analysis of the early-years’ nature of politics on the Internet, see Loader 1997.

²⁰ John Perry Barlow, together with John Gilmore, Mitch Kapor and Steve Wozniak founded the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF) in 1990, a donor-funded non-profit organisation which aims to protect freedom of speech online and has so far won several court cases against big corporations and even the federal US government on freedom of speech issues. For example, in May 2006 a California state appeals’ court ruled in favour of EFF’s petition on behalf of three online journalists who were taken to court by APPLE in order to reveal their sources after “leaking” information about new Apple products to several online news sites. The court ruled that the online journalists have the same right to protect the confidentiality of their sources as offline reporters do. For more information on this case and the work of the EFF, see Electronic Frontier Foundation 2006.

²¹ Tsagarousianou’s view is based on the study of early computer-mediated communication (CMC) adopted by several cities in Europe and the USA, in an attempt to face the problem of political participation of their citizens. However, in those early days, evidence showed that in each of these initiatives the definition of the meaning and scope of electronic democracy was different, depending on whether the project was centrally designed by the local authorities (Berlin, Amsterdam) or more spontaneous, civil society-led (Neighbourhoods On Line) or even created in a virtual social and political vacuum (Network Pericles) (Tsagarousianou, Tambini, Bryan 1998). In the end, what was really improved was the access to information (e.g. the civic network in Bologna) (ibid.). There was no evidence to suggest, however, that citizens became more engaged into the decision-making process, or that the outcome of any public debates had a direct or indirect impact on policies and governance.

²² Of course, the Internet is not likely to replace other off-line fora of public debate, such as those provided by TV and radio. In fact, short- to medium-term electronic participation in public debates actually complements rather than substitutes conventional broadcasting, as most broadcasters are actively promoting online political debate and discussion as supplements to their broadcasts (Hibberd, McNair, Schlesinger 2003). In Britain, for example, all of the main TV channels (BBC, ITV1, C4, Channel 5) maintain websites with a wide range of information related to the programmes they broadcast. Furthermore, viewers are often asked to give their opinion on certain political issues by logging on to the channels’ websites and voting or by emailing the programme’s producers directly. Online chats with political analysts or reporters who have just presented a piece of political investigative journalism are often available after the end of a programme and viewers are always reminded and encouraged to go on online and share any views and/or questions that may have arisen from the issues presented. Similarly, all

the main radio stations (BBC, Radio 1, Virgin) have websites, which often facilitate real-time interaction with the producer/s who is/are on air, and listeners are regularly encouraged to go online, vote on “hot” political issues and/or email the producers with their thoughts.

²³ Arquilla and Rondfeldt’s term “noopolitik” stems from the Greek work “nous”, which means “the mind” or “the thought”. Their hypothesis is based on the idea that we are witnessing the emergence of a new social/political sphere (“noosphere”), one that “*will raise mankind to a high, new evolutionary plane, one driven by a collective devotion to moral and juridical principles*” (Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, 1925 quoted in Arquilla, Rondfeldt: 5).

²⁴ See also Freedman 2000, for extensive empirical data of the democratising influence of the Internet through several case studies.

²⁵ See also Tsagarousianou 1999 and Tsagarousianou, Tambini, Bryan 1998.

²⁶ See Chapter 1, Section 1.2.1.

²⁷ See Chapter 1, Section 1.2.1.

²⁸ See Chapter 1, Part 1.3.

Chapter 3- EU public communication: The policy

Has the EU's public communication strategy taken into account the debate regarding the EU's democratic deficit and the debate concerning the European public sphere? Is there any evidence that on a policy-making level, the EU's public communication strategy has been formulated in order to fulfil the criteria of successful public communication identified in the Chapter 1¹? What role has been reserved for the Internet in this public communication strategy? How close is this strategy to the theoretical model established in Chapters 1 and 2?

This chapter aims to answer the above questions by means of a critical review of the official Information and Communication strategy of the EU, as this emerges from Commission documents on the issue during the period 2000-2006 (**Parts 3.1 and 3.2**). The review of these documents is supplemented, where necessary, with interview material gathered during interviews with policy-making and policy-implementation EU officials, conducted over a period of approximately two years (October 2004- June 2006)². The main points of the documents regarding the official EU public communication strategy are juxtaposed with the key theoretical issues already identified in Chapters 1 and 2, regarding the European public sphere, the EU democratic deficit and the role of the EU public communication in these. In the final part of this chapter (**Part 3.3**), the theoretical model formulated in Chapter 2³ is updated in order to reflect the key points of the official EU public communication policy.

As the European Union's guardian of the Treaties, responsible for planning and implementing common policies and the sole institution with the right to initiate EU legislation, it is the European Commission that proposes and, with the approval of the European Parliament and the Council of the EU, implements the EU's Information and Communication strategy (EUROPA 2006b; EUROPA 2006c; EUROPA 2006f). Consequently, the documents reviewed in this chapter have all been produced by the European Commission, although related documentation produced by the European Parliament, the Council, the Committee of the

Regions and the Economic and Social Committee was also consulted and references to these documents are provided where necessary.

The overview of official documents starts in 2001, when the first, lengthy, jargon-loaded Commission communication paper on the EU's Information and Communication strategy was published, and ends with the White Paper on a European Communication Policy, published in February 2006 and produced under the supervision of Vice-President Margot Wallström, the first Commissioner to be solely responsible for the EU's Information and Communication Strategy.

Part 3.1 focuses on the documents from the period 2000-2004 and Part 3.2 on the documents from the period 2004- to date. This distinction was deemed necessary as significant differences occurred in the content, presentation and style of the documents after the appointment of Margot Wallström as Commissioner for the Communication of the EU in 2004.

All documents are reviewed with reference to the wider political context of the time of their publication, in the sections entitled “**Historical overview: 2000-2004**”⁴ and “**Historical overview: 2004-2006**”⁵. Following that, the documents are examined within the wider context of the theories regarding the EU's democratic deficit and the discussion regarding the existence and characteristics of the European public sphere (**Component A**⁶), which were discussed in Chapter 1. The aim is to establish whether the EU, on a decision-making level, is aware of these theoretical discussions and whether it intends to address the issues that arise from these discussions (i.e. the EU's democratic deficit, lack of accountability, openness and participation). The second aim (**Component B**⁷) when examining the documents is to identify the key points on which the Commission has chosen to base the Information and Communication strategy for the EU and compare these with the theoretical definition of public communication seen in Chapter 1. On a third level (**Component C**⁸), the aim of this policy review is to investigate what the role of the Internet within the EU public communication is, and if it is seen as a tool for encouraging the emerging European public sphere and for addressing the issues of participation, openness and accountability, as discussed in Chapter 2. The main points of the documents from each period are

summarised in Sections 3.1.5 and 3.2.5.

3.1 2000-2004: The “Pre-Wallström” era

The documents examined from this period are the following:

- a) Communication from the Commission to the Council, European Parliament, Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions on A New Framework for Co-operation on Activities Concerning the Information and Communication Policy of the European Union (COM(2001)354, final).
- b) European Governance- A White Paper (COM(2001)428, final).
- c) Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on an Information and Communication Strategy for the European Union (COM(2002)350, final/2).
- d) Report from the Commission on European Governance (COM(2002)705, final).
- e) Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on Implementing the Information and Communication Strategy for the European Union (COM(2004)196, final).

3.1.1 Historical overview: 2000-2004

In **2001** two documents were published, which were directly or indirectly relevant to the EU’s public communication strategy: A Commission **Communication paper on an Information and Communication policy for the EU** and a **White paper on European Governance**. These were the first documents of their kind and it is important here to consider why these documents were published at that specific point in time, in order to understand the reasons that spearheaded the Commission into action with regard to the Information and Communication policy for the EU⁹.

Two years before the publication of these two documents, in 1999, the Amsterdam Treaty (European Union 1997) had come into force, which,

amending the previous Treaty on European Union [Maastricht Treaty (European Union 1992)], put a greater emphasis on citizenship and the rights of individuals; increased the powers of the European Parliament; introduced a new title on employment; established a Community area of freedom, security and justice; set the beginnings of a common foreign and security policy (CFSP); and laid the reform of the institutions in the run-up to enlargement. However, that same year the entire body of the Commissioners of the European Communities, under the presidency of Jacques Santer, was forced to resign in early 1999 amidst allegations of corruption (EUROPA 2006h).

The Prodi Commission that took over in September 1999 (ibid.), after the brief interim Marin Commission (ibid.), was faced with an extended agenda: Not only were the aims of the Amsterdam Treaty still to be fully met but the trust of the public towards the EU institutions also needed to be restored. Furthermore, the Commission, and the other EU institutions, needed to start preparing for the largest EU enlargement in the Union's history, while the transition from the Euro-zone member-states' national currencies to the Euro was imminent. Aware of all these issues, the Prodi Commission included the reform of European governance and the establishment of the EU's voice in the world amongst its strategic priorities (COM(2000)154, final). However, two negative referenda, one held in Denmark in September 2000 with regard to that member-state joining the Euro-zone, and one held in Ireland in May 2001 with regard to the ratification of the Nice Treaty (EUROPA 2006h)¹⁰, made it clear that the Commission was also failing to reach its own peoples.

By that time, the need for reform in EU governance and public communication had clearly, if not with a sense of urgency, been recognised by the Commission, which had been receiving requests for reform of the EU's information and communication policy by the Council and the Parliament since 1998 (Council of the European Union 1999; European Parliament 1998)¹¹. In both the 2001 documents the Commission recognised that the information and communication policy that had been followed up until then had not been effective (Commission of the European Communities 2001a: 4) and that it was this

ineffectiveness that spurred the institution into action (COM(2001)354, final: 3; COM(2001)428, final: 3).

In **2002** the Commission published its second **Communication on an Information and Communication Strategy for the European Union** (COM(2002)350, final/2) and the **Report on European Governance** (COM(2002)705, final), a document presenting the results of the public consultation the Commission initiated in 2001 on its White Paper on European Governance. The same year saw the introduction of the Euro currency in twelve of the EU member-states¹² as well as the beginning of the proceedings of the Convention for the Future of Europe (European Convention 2003), which would later (in 2003) result in the draft Constitutional Treaty of the European Union.

The need for an effective public communication strategy was now even more pressing and these events clearly affected the aims of the EU public communication strategy as these appear in the 2002 documents examined here. However, there is no explicit reference to any political or economic developments on EU level in either of these documents: The 2002 Communication is presented by the Commission as merely the development of the inter-institutional dialogue that ensued after the 2001 Communication on an Information and Communication policy proposal¹³. Similarly, the Report on European Governance focuses solely on the results of the public consultation on the Commission's White Paper, without further reference to the reality of the Euro zone or the European Convention works on the Constitutional Treaty¹⁴.

With the Treaty of Nice having entered into force in February 2003 (European Union 2001) and the signing of the Treaty of Accession in Athens in April of the same year (European Union 2003a; European Union 2003b), the need for a coherent public communication strategy and a reformed governance model which would now encompass the publics of the ten accession states became even more apparent. Furthermore, the negative result of the Swedish referendum on joining the Euro-zone in September 2003 (EUROPA 2006h) served as a reminder of the EU public's scepticism towards certain aspects of the Union.

Although there was little activity on behalf of the Commission in that

year with reference to the EU's public communication strategy, the relevant issues were discussed in the European Parliament (Béguin, Guy-Quint, Elmar, Campo, Sacrédeus, Frassoni, Modrow, Martin 2003; Wenzel-Perillo 2003), which published a new resolution on the Commission's proposal for cooperation in the information and communication strategy (European Parliament 2003). The Committee of the Regions also published two further opinions on the Commission's 2002 proposal for an EU information and Communication strategy and on the Commission's White Paper on European Governance (Committee of the Regions 2003a; Committee of the Regions 2003b). Similarly, the Economic and Social Committee gave further feedback on the Commission's proposal for an information and communication policy of the EU (European Economic and Social Committee 2003).

Despite the Commission remaining largely "quiet" on the issue of the EU's public communication strategy during 2003, it participated in the relevant interinstitutional dialogue and commissioned some qualitative research analysis on the aims of the strategy. This becomes apparent in its **2004 Communication on implementing the information and communication strategy for the European Union** (COM(2004)196, final), the final document regarding the EU's public communication strategy from the period 2000-2004 to be examined in this part of the chapter and the last one concerning the EU's public communication strategy to be produced under the Prodi Commission¹⁵. Of course, the extent to which all this feedback was taken into consideration by the Commission is very difficult to determine, yet, by its own admission, the Commission considered the outcome of the interinstitutional dialogue fruitful (ibid.: 3) and its 2004 information and communication strategy proposal finally moved from abstract suggestions to more practical issues—the actions and cost required for the strategy's implementation.

Exactly how does the EU's public communication strategy emerge then, in April 2004, after more than four years of interinstitutional dialogue and Commission officials' deliberation? The following three sections examine the EU's public communication strategy through the three components identified earlier in this chapter, i.e. the position of the

strategy on the EU's democratic deficit; the main public communication aims of the strategy; and the role of the Internet in this strategy, all three of which also reflect the theoretical framework of this research project, as this was outlined in Chapters 1 and 2.

3.1.2 Component A: EU governance and the European public sphere

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, one of the key points common in all the documents examined in the period 2001-2004 is that they recognise the need for reform in EU governance and are aware that the public is suspicious towards the EU institutions and often also misinformed about their role and actions.

In its first public communication policy proposal, published in 2001, the Commission acknowledged that the EU citizens are isolated from the EU Institutions and attributed this largely to the inadequately designed Information and Communication strategy the EU had been deploying up to that point (COM(2001)354, final: 18). At the same time, the document recognized that the EU's citizens have "*increasing and legitimate expectations*" to have "*full and easy*" access to all information relevant to the EU, from issues on European affairs, to external relations and the development of the EU (ibid.: 7). In order for the EU citizens to come closer to the EU Institutions, the Communication called for **information** that would be "*clear, appropriate and in touch with the citizens' real concerns*" (ibid.: 4, emphasis added).

The Commission also acknowledged the need for more **participation** of the public in the EU governance, an issue which had initially been raised by the European Parliament (ibid.: 5). Linguistic, cultural, political or institutional barriers in communication needed not just to be addressed but overcome, according to this document, if the Information strategy was to succeed. At the same time, the Communication recommended that the differences between Member States had to be taken into full account, boldly stating that a homogeneous "*European Public does not exist today for most purposes*" (ibid., emphasis added).

Similarly, the White Paper on European Governance (COM(2001)428, final)¹⁶ recognised that the EU citizens have high expectations from the

European Union yet they show increasing distrust towards EU institutions and politics (ibid.: 3 and 7). Nevertheless, the Commission does not refer to the democratic deficit or the lack of democratic legitimisation which many citizens see in the EU.

The White Paper emphasised that the reform of the EU governance was one of Commission's main strategic targets for 2000-2005 (COM(2000)154, final quoted in COM(2001)428, final: 3) and called for:

- a) More coherence** in the EU institutions and policies;
- b) Opening-up of policy-making process;**
- c) Accountability and responsibility** for all parties involved in policy-making;
- d) Less top-down** approach in the Community method (COM(2001)428, final: 3, emphasis added).

The White Paper also added **participation** as one of the main "*principles of good governance*" (ibid.: 10), which should underpin the decision-making and policy-implementation of the EU.

Putting the proposals in practice, the Commission submitted the White Paper to public consultation, giving the opportunity to the public and EU and national institutions to submit their feedback on the issues raised either by post or online (ibid.: 9). The results of that consultation were presented in a Report, in 2002, a document which is examined later in this section.

Further to the points made regarding more participation and better involvement, the White Paper underlined the need for the EU to communicate more actively with the general public on European issues, thus helping to create a sense of belonging amongst the EU citizens and to encourage them to participate in what is a definition of the European public sphere very close to that of Pfetsch's and Guidry, Kennedy and Zald's definitions of transnational public spheres (Pfetsch 2004; Guidry, Kennedy, Zald 2000) already discussed in Chapter 1: "*A transnational space where citizens from various countries can discuss what they perceive as being important challenges for the European Union*" (COM(2001)428, final: 11-12).

Finally, the principles of openness, participation, accountability,

effectiveness and coherence should be reflected, according to the White Paper, on the EU's foreign policy and its relations with governmental and non-governmental stakeholders from other parts of the world. As with the other documents examined in this section, the White Paper underlines the importance of the EU speaking with a single voice in the international arena as well as the importance of leading by example, when it comes to democratic principles: *“Openness, accountability and participation need to be reinforced and practiced extensively first within the EU, if we are to convince third countries to adopt similar practices”* (ibid.: 26-27).

Following the White Paper on EU Governance, and more than a year since the Information and Communication Policy for the European Union had been published, the Commission produced a second Communication on the EU's Information and Communication strategy (COM(2002)350, final/2). Continuing on its previous proposals, the Commission was now aiming to create **a public forum for the European debate**, thus contributing to the resolution of the issues of “good governance” and “the democratic challenge” linked with the European Union (COM(2002)350, final/2: 4). More specifically, the Information and Communication Strategy would aim to *“complement the Institutions' role as interface with the public [...] to contribute to an overall dynamic and to ensure consistency”* (ibid.: 5). Although these aims are quite vague, it is made clear already from the introduction of this document that the Commission was firmly adhering to the aims set out in the Information and Communication Policy, published a year and a half earlier.

Furthermore, by aiming to create a public forum for the European debate, the Commission appears to be taking into consideration the academic debate regarding the need for a European public sphere. Nevertheless, the interviews with Commission officials revealed that this was probably a coincidence rather than the result of informed opinion. As one interviewee put it, referring to the White Paper on EU governance in particular, any similarities or seeming references to this academic debate were

“a result of a bunch of bureaucrats rewriting again and again the paper, hoping that they'd get enough reactions and feedback from

NGOs, experts, member-states etc”¹⁷.

On a different level, this document admits there is a lack of interest on behalf of the European public as far as the European Union is concerned and also goes on to attribute this lack of interest not only to the public’s “disaffection” with politics in general, but also to the “**unclear perception of the legitimacy of the European Institutions**” (COM(2002)350, final/2: 6, emphasis added)¹⁸. The debate regarding the EU’s democratic deficit is thus acknowledged but the deficit itself is not accepted here.

The Commission was forced to slightly change its stance on the issue, though, after obtaining the feedback from the public consultation on its 2001 White Paper on European Governance. The results of this consultation were published in the Report on European Governance in 2002 (COM(2002)705, final). Although the Commission’s proposals on the principles that should underline the European governance, namely openness, participation, accountability, effectiveness and coherence found support among the academics and officials who responded to the Commission’s consultation, respondents almost unanimously proposed that **democratic legitimacy and subsidiarity** be added in the principles of the European governance. Despite the poor response rate¹⁹, the Commission incorporated most of the feedback in its new proposal. More interestingly, the Commission declared in the report that the way the White Paper had been received had challenged the Commission to

“take into account the positions of the various players in the further development of the European governance, including delaying or abandoning actions which do not generate sufficient support” (COM(2002)705, final: 4, emphasis added).

Although it is encouraging that the Commission showed a willingness to incorporate the feedback it had received into its proposal, this declaration is problematic in two ways. Such wording tends to be popularistic and could be perceived as an attempt by the Commission to flatter the parties involved in policy making. If this declaration is put into practice, then there is a danger of the Commission entering a process where policies or decisions which are deemed necessary for the progress of the EU economy or of the EU as a polity, yet are bound to cause

upheaval and reactions of the established institutions and polities which form the EU, will be abandoned for fear of displeasing the latter. In any case declarations of that sort create a precedent, to which actors may refer when asked to contribute to future policies.

The 2002 Report on European Governance (COM(2002)705, final) also repeated the importance of communicating the EU's role in the international politics, emphasising the need for the EU to speak more often with a single voice (ibid.: 26) and to promote the dialogue with governmental and non-governmental actors of third countries (ibid.). The report also repeated the Commission's position that the EU will gain the credibility it needs in order to pursue political reform internationally, by successfully reforming its internal governance (ibid.: 25).

How is the Information and Communication strategy for the EU relevant to the Commission proposals examined above regarding the governance of the EU? The following section presents an outline of the main principles and aims of the proposed public communication strategy for the period 2000-2004.

3.1.3 Component B: EU public communication strategic aims

As seen in the previous section above, all the EU public communication strategy proposals of the period 2000-2004 (COM(2004)196, final; COM(2002)705, final; COM(2002)350, final/2; COM(2001)354, final; COM(2001)428, final) acknowledged the fact that the public is alienated from the EU institutions and that there needs to be more citizens' participation in the EU policy-making process, as well as more transparency and accountability of the EU institutions. These issues were identified as the main aims of the reform of the EU governance but were also proposed as aims for the Information and Communication strategy of the EU, together with the creation and encouragement of a public forum for debate on European matters.

More specifically, the 2001 Commission Communication on an Information and Communication policy for the EU (COM(2001)354, final), in the context of what the Commission characterized as "*a genuine overhaul of information policy*" (ibid.: 3), proposed to:

- a) Develop a **proper dialogue with the public**;
- b) Bridge the gap between the Union and the public;
- c) **Ensure that people have access to the right information**; and
- d) **Keep messages to the point** (ibid., emphasis added).

These aims exactly match the purpose and aims of the EU public communication theoretical model, as this was defined in Chapter 2²⁰. This becomes clearer by the Commission's proposal that the EU needs to "*be proactive rather than reactive and **create a Europe that is close to people, familiar to them and means something to them***" (COM(2001)354, final: 3, emphasis added).

In order to achieve the aims of the Communication, the Commission underlined the need for full use of partnerships at all levels, i.e. partnerships with Member States²¹, civil society and NGOs (COM(2001)354, final: 12), best use of new techniques and technologies of communication and the need for providing mechanisms for feedback from the citizens. Work with the press was also identified as "a high priority in today's world" and "key to the immediate presentation of new information, policies and opinions" (ibid.: 5). The implementation proposal concerning the role of the new technologies (i.e. the Internet) is further examined in the following section.

What is more important in this section is to look at the public on which the Commission proposed that the EU's public communication strategy should focus. Although general information was to be aimed at the public as a whole, the Commission identified **priority audiences** such as women and youths, who should receive more specialised information, as well as EU specialists' groups, who would require specialized in-depth information on some very particular aspects of EU policy (COM(2001)354, final). This indicates that a divide between elite and general public already exists on a policy-making level, as far as the EU's public communication strategy is concerned. Although the need for specialised information aimed at EU experts/specialists is understandable, the document does not explain on what the concept of priority audiences is based.

Most interestingly, the document suggests that any information provided by the EU institutions should be considered within a more

general communication strategy, which should be designed to stimulate an informed debate on European matters. The Information and Communication policy does not concern only the EU public/ citizens but also foreign audiences: According to the Communication, *“there is a particular role to be played by the DGs responsible for external relations in providing information to citizens of third countries including information for the general public in applicant states”* (ibid.: 15).

The 2002 Information and Communication strategy for the EU (COM(2002)350, final/2) moves along the same lines, as far as the aims of the strategy are concerned. A “genuine” Information and Communication policy is seen as the main tool to fight the public’s ignorance, which is considered the main reason for the apathy displayed by the public on European matters/ politics (ibid.: 7 and 10). Furthermore, the Commission explicitly states that the aim of the Information and Communication Strategy should ultimately be to assist in *“the development of better governance in Europe”* (ibid.: 7), which in turn translates in having democratic procedures and achieving democratic legitimisation. This view was also expressed by the senior Commission officials interviewed in the context of this study. According to one senior policy-making official, for example,

“the legitimacy of the European Union should be regarded from two angles: The subjective and objective perspective. The subjective legitimacy stems from the citizens’ perception of the EU as being legitimate, while the latter, the objective legitimacy, has more to do with the democratic nature of the European Project. Looking at the objective legitimacy aspect, it is clear that the certain areas could be strengthened in order to render the EU more legitimate [...] However, strengthening the democratic structure of the Union would not necessarily and automatically lead to greater subjective, public legitimacy [...] One of the reasons has to do with information. As long as the European citizenry lack information about the Union and its undertakings, it will be difficult for them to form a reasoned opinion about the Union. This brings us to the deliberative deficit in the Union [...] The lack of knowledge about the EU and its actions is problematic as it hinders free will-formation, vital to any democratic system. In

the light of this deliberative deficit, a Communication Strategy of the EU should address the very issues which hinder deliberation on European issues. The Communication Strategy of the EU should, in other words, focus on facilitating free will-formation in the Union²².

In this document, the Commission also reaffirms its intention to focus its efforts not only on the effective and efficient informing of the public but also on enabling the individuals to participate in the public debate (COM(2002)350, final/2). This indicates that the theoretical linkage between the EU's democratic deficit, the European public sphere and the role of public communication defined in Chapter 1 is also acknowledged by the EU policy-makers themselves, although, as mentioned in the previous section, it is likely that this occurred coincidentally rather than through established dialogue with the academic community²³.

The European public sphere/space thus takes a central place in this Information and Communication Strategy proposed by the Commission: For the first time, the European public sphere is not only mentioned but the Commission also acknowledges that the European Institutions need to be actively involved in supporting that public sphere. This is an interesting contradiction with the previous documents, according to which a European public does not exist (COM(2001)354, final; COM(2001)428, final). Apart from stating the obvious [that in order to exist, "*the European public sphere needs temporal, spatial and ideological points of reference and active public involvement*" (COM(2002)350, final/2: 8), in this 2002 Communication, the Commission also identifies specific areas of action that will strengthen the European public sphere: developing all forms of representation at European level; and building on all forms of cooperation, including journalists, media and national representations (ibid.).

As far as the Information and Communication strategy itself is concerned, the main aim again is to provide and achieve coherent and comprehensive information to and communication with the public (ibid.). The (rather controversial) concept of a voluntary working partnership with the Member States is reintroduced here: The aim is to enable the EU and the Member States to "*foster genuine synergy between their structures*

and know-how and the activities of the European Union" (ibid.: 9), although the more centrally organised and directed Information and Communication strategy will not rely or depend on the member states²⁴. The controversy lies in that the EU *is* the member states and quite how a central public communication policy can be implemented successfully without the cooperation of the member states is not made clear here²⁵.

On a different level, the Commission makes a commitment in this document to achieve the aims of its public communication strategy by introducing "genuine dialogue" with the public (COM(2002)350, final/2: 10) and following a "two-tier" information strategy (ibid.), which will be based on a "*genuine teaching function in relation to the EU's role and tasks*" (ibid.)²⁶. This "didactic stance" would be two-fold:

- a)** Provision of general information aiming to boost awareness of the EU's existence and legitimacy, polishing its image and highlighting its role.
- b)** Priority information topics (based on the EU's major projects and challenges) to be slotted into the PRINCE Programme (Programme of Information for the Citizen of Europe), in accordance with the new inter-institutional framework in place (ibid.: 10-11).

In keeping with one of the Commission's main aims (coherence), the concept of the "main thread" is introduced in this document (ibid.: 10-11). By this the Commission means a common reference framework upon which the Information and Communication Strategy will be based. The "central thread" will be in effect "*translating in simple and non-controversial communication terms the EU's main objectives as stemming from the Treaty of the European Union*" (ibid.: 12). These main objectives are identified in the document as follows:

- a)** The virtue of exchange (liberties, diversity, humanism)
- b)** Value added in terms of efficiency and solidarity
- c)** The concept of protection
- d)** The role of Europe in the world (ibid.)

The "central thread" of the EU's Information and Communication Strategy would also draw upon certain "essential" values, which the EU stands for, such as rapprochement and exchange; opportunity; equality; solidarity; prosperity; protection; security (ibid.: 13). These values were

identified after studies were carried out on behalf of the Commission (OPTEM study, May 2002 quoted in COM(2002)350, final/2: 13). The Commission emphasises that the values “*always need to be implicit in and closely connected to the practical objectives of the Community action and at the same time they must correspond to the generally accepted public perception of the EU*” (COM(2002)350, final/2: 12).

As far as the main topics and messages that the “central thread” would cover are concerned, these are identified as follows:

- a)** Enlargement: Legitimacy of accession; efforts of the accessing countries to adopt the EU law and practice; value added after enlargement.
- b)** The future of the EU: General information and explanation of how the EU works; explanation of the work of the Convention on the future of the EU.
- c)** The area of freedom, security and justice: Immigration; human rights; citizenship.
- d)** The EU in the world: Issues in multilateral trade negotiations; EU’s determination to be a force for equilibrium in the world; strength of a united Europe speaking with one voice (ibid.: 13-15).

With the exception of the last topic (the EU in the world), all the topics identified in the 2002 Communication as the ones that should form the central thread/ common reference framework of the EU’s Information and Communication Strategy were also proposed in previous documents as core issues of the EU’s Information and Communication strategy (for example, COM(2001)428, final). The proposed topics are also in keeping with the Commission’s strategic plan for 2000-2005 (COM(2000)154, final) and the wider political context at the time²⁷.

The Commission also emphasises the importance of communicating all messages in the public’s own language (COM(2002)350, final/2: 13) and proposes targeted communication with the public, not only with regard to the language but also with regard to the audience addressed each time. More specifically, the Commission proposes information flow on two levels:

- a)** Towards those who are interested and well-informed about the EU
- b)** Towards those who are apathetic and unfamiliar with the EU (ibid.: 16).

Although similar to the distinction between priority, specialised and general audiences introduced in the 2001 Communication in an Information and Communication policy for the EU (COM(2001)354, final) examined earlier in this section, this is the first time that a distinction is made between an informed and a *less informed/ignorant* public in a Communication regarding the EU's information and communication strategy. The issue is relevant to the theoretical discussion regarding the nature of the European public sphere, i.e. if it is a public sphere for elite groups and if so, what constitutes these groups elite. The following chapter investigates if this proposal is reflected in the information provided on the three EU official websites chosen to be examined. Chapter 5 investigates whether the divide between the EU citizens who are interested/well-informed about the EU and those who are not, is reflected in the websites' user profile, through an EU websites' user survey launched on 1 September 2005.

The 2004 Commission Communication (COM(2004)196, final) came to clarify all the previous Commission proposals concerning the EU's Information and Communication strategy, which had been rather vague, as the strategy for and progress in their implementation were not explicitly defined. By 2004, however, the Commission had solidified its main public communication concepts and now needed an action plan for their implementation. The main objectives of the EU's Information and Communication Strategy are repeated in this document, more clearly than before:

- a) To improve the perception of the EU and its institutions and their legitimacy by deepening the knowledge and understanding of its tasks, structure and achievements and by establishing a dialogue with its citizens.
- b) To raise the quality of the European public debate.
- c) To associate the public in European decision-making.
- d) To listen to the public and its concerns more attentively.
- e) To methodically and consistently rebuild the EU's image (ibid.: 3).

The Commission's aim for establishment of a voluntary working partnership with the Member States "*fostering synergy between their*

structures and know-how and the activities of the EU" (ibid.) continues to apply, with its inherent controversy not addressed²⁸. In addition, the Commission repeats the importance of inter-institutional cooperation and of improved and better organised internal dissemination of information/communication culture. The cooperation of both the Member States and the three EU institutions (Commission, Council and Parliament) is seen by the Commission as essential if the Information and Communication Strategy is to achieve its targets (ibid.: 5-6)²⁹.

The European Union's core values are ever-present in this document: Peace, freedom, solidarity and cultural diversity are defined as the EU's fundamental values, which should form the basis for the Information and Communication Strategy, as they provide a common frame of reference for all of the EU's policies (main thread) (ibid.: 6).

The document also repeats that the European public lacks basic information regarding the EU and finds the EU's core values rather vague and insufficiently discriminating from other democracies, quoting a 2004 study (ibid.: COM(2004)196, final). The Commission concludes that the EU citizens must be given specific examples of EU policies, referring back to those core values, if they are to understand and appreciate the EU's role and efforts (ibid.).

The Commission repeats here its earlier position that the main information topics must be selected not only on the basis of the EU's major policies for the years ahead but they should also **meet the public's needs** and concrete concerns (ibid.: 7). As far as the EU is concerned, the priority information topics should cover the following areas:

- a) Enlargement
- b) Future of the Union
- c) Area of freedom, security and justice
- d) The Euro
- e) The role of Europe in the world (ibid.)

Since this document has also received the approval of the European Parliament and of the European Council, it means that the above key areas of information topics are a priority for all three main EU institutions. This is a step forward towards the implementation of the Commission's

proposal for better inter-institutional cooperation and coordination as far as the Information and Communication Strategy is concerned.

3.1.4 Component C: The role of the Internet

All of the documents examined in the period 2000-2004 propose that the Internet be deployed in the implementation of the EU's Information and Communication strategy, particularly in the areas of transparency, citizens' participation and public debate of EU issues.

Starting with the 2001 Communication (COM(2001)354, final), EUROPA, the EU's official portal³⁰, is identified as one of the main tools for the deployment of the Information and Communication strategy. One of the Commission's objectives, as they are set out in this Communication, is that EUROPA should represent the most up-to-date practices of the new governance in Europe, symbolized by the terms "**e-Commission**", "**e-Europe**" and "**e-governance**" (ibid.: 26, emphasis added).

Key factors for selecting a website as one of the Commission's main Information and Communication channels were the **interactivity**, speed and **accessibility** that the website offers (ibid.). These attributes are not exclusive to the EUROPA website of course, but apply to the Internet as a whole and make it such an attractive means of communication. Interactivity in particular is one of the key factors for a successful public communication strategy, as well as a prerequisite for a public sphere to emerge, as already discussed in Chapter 2.

The White Paper on European Governance (COM(2001)428, final) moves along the same lines, as far as the role of the Internet in the EU's public communication strategy is concerned. The Commission underlines the importance of continuing to develop EUR-LEX, for example, as a single, online point in all languages (ibid.). Another area where the Internet is proposed to have a key role is that of transparency and openness of the consultation process followed during policy-making (ibid.). At the time when the White Paper was published, the Commission had already started developing online consultation in the form of the Commission's interactive policy-making initiative. As in the cases of governance and communication policy, dialogue with the public is seen as

a basic element of the consultation process and the White Paper strongly emphasises that “*all European Institutions must adopt a reinforced culture of consultation and dialogue and associate the European Parliament in the consultative process*” (ibid.: 15-16).

In 2002 the second Communication on an Information and Communication strategy for the EU (COM(2002)350, final/2) characterised the EUROPA website as an “*essential instrument for bringing the Institutions closer to ordinary people and facilitating contact between Europeans*” (ibid.: 19). However the wording of the sentence is different from previous documents and whilst the proposal that the portal should be used to “*facilitate contact between Europeans*” is neutral and inclusive in its expression, the use of the term “*ordinary people*” is presumptuous and denotes a normative approach to the issue of the European public sphere.

Nevertheless, the fact that EUROPA is given such a prominent role in the Information and Communication strategy of the EU is indicative of the Commission’s views on the possibilities offered by the Internet, as far as public communication is concerned. In particular, it is the interactive dimension of the Internet that is highlighted in this document, with the Internet seen as one of the main tools which can promote a “*genuine dialogue with the public*” (ibid.)³¹. This view coincides with the theoretical model of the European public sphere and the role of the Internet in it, which was discussed in Chapter 2.

Similarly, the 2002 Report on European Governance (COM(2002)705, final) emphasises the role of the Internet in establishing a public dialogue between the EU institutions and the public and promoting participation, openness and transparency of the EU decision-making process. According to the Report, since the publication of the White Paper on European Governance in 2001, the Commission continued improving its information services, by further developing EUR-LEX and committing to as multi-linguistic information an environment as possible.

The importance of electronic communication and interaction in implementing the Commission’s strategy for openness, participation, better involvement of the civil society in policy-making and more inter-institutional co-operation is evident also in the Commission’s statement that “*electronic*

communication is the most preferred tool” when it comes to inter-institutional communication (ibid.: 17) and also in the commencement of two other EU governance projects: the Interactive Policy-making and E-Europe 2005. The latter aims to “*ensure the inclusion of all citizens in the information society*” (ibid.: 18).

Furthermore, in the time following the publication of the 2001 White Paper and until the report was published, the Commission focused its actions on, amongst other things, the development of interactive services online, such as Dialogue with Citizens, Dialogue with Business, Europe Direct³², the FUTURUM webpage, the Convention website, Your Voice In Europe webpage, and the overall reform of the EUROPA portal (EUROPA “2nd generation”) and the EURLEX and CELEX websites (ibid.: 11 and 13). Nevertheless, there is no comprehensive report on the effectiveness of these projects or their impact in the overall Information and Communication strategy of the EU.

In 2004, with the Communication on the Implementation of the Information and Communication strategy for the EU (COM(2004)196, final), in accordance with all its previous proposals, the Commission gives the audiovisual and new communication technology tools a central position in the implementation of the Information and Communication Strategy (ibid.: 12 and 16-22).

More specifically, the audiovisual strategy continues to revolve primarily around the information tools intended for the media and information professionals (i.e. development of EbS, support for electronic media and the media library). The document also points out that these information tools are also being developed in digital format and the online services are being expanded as well (ibid.: 17). EuroNews (pan-European channel and its website) is also deemed as “*clearly relevant to the EU objectives*” (ibid.: 18)³³.

The other main tool of dissemination of EU information remains, of course, EUROPA, the official EU portal, which is now entering a new phase named “Second-generation EUROPA”. This Commission first proposed the services that EUROPA should be offering to Europe’s citizens in 2001, with its Communication entitled “Towards an E-

Commission, Second-generation EUROPA: Advanced Web services to citizens, businesses and other professional users” (Commission of the European Communities, Press and Communication Service 2001), as part of its eEurope programme. The aim of that communication was to develop the interactive side of EUROPA, to adapt it to EU-25 and to make it more accessible using a system of portals for different categories of users (COM(2004)196, final: 20).

In line with the communication issues identified in all of the documents examined here so far, as well as the values of the EU and the aims of the Information and Communication Strategy, the Commission explicitly states in this Communication that the material on EUROPA “*must be presented at the first two levels of access to the EUROPA sites in the 20 official languages*” (ibid.: 21).

The Commission further proposed the creation of a multimedia database which would provide basic information and would be supplemented and adapted locally to cater for public demand. The second-generation relays and networks could also evolve into Cyber-relays offering free access to the information and interactive services available on EUROPA (ibid.).

Also in line with the aims of the previous Information and Communication policy and EU Governance proposals, the Commission announces here the development of more specific portals aimed at specific target audiences, such as students, young people and job-seekers (ibid.: 22). This is in accordance with the Commission’s earlier admission that the EU public does not always relate to the EU’s aims and policies and that the Information and Communication Strategy should therefore aim to disseminate messages that are sufficiently specific for the public to identify with and at the same time present efficiently the EU’s work on various areas (ibid: 7).

3.1.5 Concluding remarks: 2000-2004

To sum up, with regard to the theoretical framework of this project, set out in Chapters 1 and 2, the documents of this period share some core characteristics:

Component A: In terms of the debate regarding the European public sphere and the EU's democratic deficit³⁴, they recognise the need for reform in EU governance and are aware of the public's distrust of EU institutions, yet do not recognise that the EU suffers from a democratic deficit. The Commission also appears to be willing to promote accountability and transparency, but, ironically, these documents are produced by anonymous EU bureaucrats.

Component B: As far as public communication and the specific aims that should form the EU public communication strategy are concerned³⁵, the documents of this period outline a general public communication strategy generally matching the theoretical framework set out in Chapter 1. However, the documents do not always present concrete proposals of action, nor do they provide the reader with specific data regarding the implementation progress of the public communication strategy.

Furthermore, despite acknowledging the need for interaction with the public and the importance of a European public sphere, the strategy proposed in these documents mainly focuses on one-way communication with the public. The documents themselves, despite advocating access of EU documentation for all and public-friendly format of official documentation, are rather lengthy and written in institutional jargon (i.e. their target audience is EU and national officials and/or communications' experts, not the general public).

In addition, the public communication strategy proposed has its basis on a two-tier audience, i.e. specialised EU audiences and the general public. The latter is in turn divided in target audiences (women, youths, jobseekers) and the wider general public and the proposed strategy recommends that all information disseminated should be audience-specific, in order for the public to be able to relate to the EU's aims and actions. This includes communicating with the various publics in their own language- another key priority of the proposed EU Information and Communication strategy of 2000-2004.

Component C: Finally, as far as the Internet is concerned, the strategy outlined in the documents of this period identifies an important

role for this medium in the EU's public communication strategy, particularly with regard to the issues of public debate, openness, transparency and citizens' participation in the EU policy-making process. EUROPA, the EU's official portal, is the main focus of the actions proposed. Nevertheless, the actions outlined with regard to the Internet's capability as a two-way communication tool with the public are few and rather abstract. With regard to the audiences, the documents examined from this period do not make clear which type/s of audiences will be targeted through the online/electronic version of the EU's public communication strategy. On the other hand, it is made clear that the first two levels of the EUROPA website should be available in all official EU languages and that the EU Delegations' websites should be available in the main language of the hosting country as well as in one or two of the EU's working languages (English, French or German).

3.2 2004-2006: Something is changing?

What changes took place in the period 2004-2006 as far as the EU's public communication strategy is concerned? Are these changes significant enough to allow us to discuss a change in the EU's public communication strategy? This section examines the political context within which the 2004-2006 EU public communication strategy was developed as well as the Commission's new proposals with regard to the three components of this project's theoretical model (component A: EU governance and the European public sphere; component B: EU public communication; component C: The role of the Internet).

The documents under examination from this period are the following:

- a)** Action Plan to Improve Communicating Europe by the Commission (Commission of the European Communities 2005a).
- b)** Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions- The Commission's contribution to the period of reflection and beyond: Plan-D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate (COM(2005)494, final).

c) White Paper on a European Communication Policy, presented by the Commission (COM(2006)35).

Before the main points of the above documents are presented in relation to the theoretical model of this research project, a historical overview of the period 2004-2006 is necessary, in order to outline the political developments which have influenced the content of these documents.

3.2.1 Historical overview: 2004-2006

As we have already seen in section 3.1.1, the 2004 Commission Communication on implementing the Information and Communication strategy for the EU (COM(2004)196, final) was the last document of its kind to be produced under the Prodi Commission. In late 2004 the Barroso Commission was finally approved by the European Parliament and took office in November 2004 (Wallström 2006) (EUROPA 2006h), after Commission President, José Manuel Barroso, had been forced to withdraw his original proposal for the body of Commissioners because of the controversy some of his initial choices of Commissioners had caused.

However, 2004 is not considered here a key year for the EU's public communication strategy solely because of the change in the Commission's composition³⁶: In May of that year the Accession Treaty came into force, and ten new member-states joined the EU³⁷. With an intra-EU audience of now over 400 million people and several new official languages added, the EU was facing new communication challenges and the poor turnout at the European Parliament elections in June 2004 confirmed this³⁸. Furthermore, on 29 October of that year, the Heads of State and Foreign Ministers of the EU member-states signed the Treaty establishing a Constitution for the EU (European Union 2004), after a lengthy period of negotiations³⁹. The Treaty needs to be ratified by all member-states by parliamentary vote, national referendum or other procedure determined by each member-state's laws and constitution yet not all national publics are ready to accept an EU Constitutional Treaty, as we shall see in the following paragraphs. Understandably, the issue of the ratification of the Constitutional Treaty has been a major factor in shaping

the EU's public communication strategy in the period 2004-2006.

The communication gap between the EU institutions and the public became gradually more obvious and pressing for the institutions in 2004, leading Commission President Barroso to appoint Commission Vice-President, Margot Wallström, as Commissioner for Institutional Relations and Communication in August 2004, the first time that the communication with the public was made the sole subject of a Commission portfolio. Moving along the same lines, the Brussels European Council (4-5 November 2004) declared the communicating of the EU as one of its three focus-issues (Council of the European Union 2004).

In addition, an independent report was published in 2004 by Friends of Europe, Euractiv and Gallup Europe, entitled "Can the EU hear me?" and presenting the opinions of over 3,000 respondents, including political leaders and opinion makers from EU member-states (Davies and Readhead 2004). The data was collected partly through two opinion polls and partly through surveys and study group findings⁴⁰ and was used to formulate the following set of recommendations for the Commission with regard to the EU's public communication strategy:

- ***Vice President Margot Wallström should visit all Member States during the first six months of her term to listen to citizens' views of the EU, find local supporters and beneficiaries of EU integration and meet national media representatives and leading politicians;***
- ***The Commission should promote the benefits of EU membership by researching and professionally communicating the advantages for citizens of their country belonging to the EU. Popular 'good-will ambassadors' should be employed to promote the benefits of Europe.***
- ***The message should be kept simple by cutting back on boring detail: stick to three key points.***
- ***The media should be encouraged to report on political differences at EU level and react more quickly to events by setting up an EU newsroom to feed international media with up-to-date footage on EU developments. Journalists should be invited to Brussels for intensive training courses on EU reporting. Better contacts need to be established with national***

and regional media.

- *The EU's communication and reporting structure should be streamlined by getting institutions to co-operate more closely and cutting down on administrative hurdles.*
- *A decentralized approach needs to be adopted by making national governments responsible for communicating EU policies and setting up 'Communications Task Forces' at member state level (ibid.: 8-9).*

Although no public communication strategy documents were published by the Commission until July 2005, the impact of this report and of the political developments during 2004 is evident in all official documents published in this second period examined here (2004-2006), as we shall see in more detail in the following paragraphs.

Another event that helped shape the “Wallström” era of the EU’s public communication strategy was the rejection, by referendum, of the Constitutional Treaty by the publics of France and the Netherlands (on 29 May and 1 June 2005 respectively). Despite the fact that several other member-states had already ratified the Treaty by then⁴¹, or perhaps because of that and the sense of security it evoked among EU officials as far as the public’s trust is concerned⁴², the “No” of the French and the Dutch people created “shockwaves” in the EU institutions⁴³. This, in turn, affected the content of all Commission documents regarding the EU’s public communication strategy published in 2005 and 2006⁴⁴, as can be seen in the following sections, which present the proposals of the Commission concerning the EU’s public communication strategy in 2004-2006 with reference to the three components of the theoretical model of the European public sphere established in the previous two chapters and outlined briefly in the beginning of the present chapter.

3.2.2 Component A: EU governance and the European public sphere

The first public communication document to be published in the period 2004-2006, immediately after the negative referenda in France and the Netherlands, the Action Plan to Improve Communicating Europe (Commission of the European Communities 2005a), focuses solely on the

information and communication strategy that the EU needs to follow if it is to regain its citizens' trust. Therefore, no extended references are made to the EU governance and/or its relation to the European public sphere.

It is with the Communication on the Commission's contribution to the period of reflection and beyond: Plan-D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate (Plan D) later in 2005 (COM(2005)494, final) that the Commission returns to the issues of EU governance and citizens' participation in the decision-making process as parameters of the establishing of a European public sphere. In particular, Plan D identifies the promotion of citizens' participation in the democratic process as one of the four broad areas of action required to help regain the EU citizens' trust towards the EU institutions and address issues of democratic legitimation, accountability and openness within the EU (ibid.: 18)⁴⁵.

Of particular importance are the actions proposed with regard to the EU's democratic deficit and the emerging European public sphere. Although the Commission acknowledges that further citizen participation in EU matters and greater openness of the decision-making process are necessary to restore the public's trust in the EU institutions, it still does not acknowledge the democratic deficit attributed to the EU institutions as real, and refers to it as a "perceived" deficit (ibid.: 9). This is made clearer by its proposal for actions in the area of citizen participation in the "democratic process" in general (ibid.: 18-19), as opposed to the "decision-making process" in particular, on which most of the criticism regarding the EU's democratic deficit is focused on⁴⁶. By persistently avoiding reference to the citizens' participation in the decision-making process the Commission also makes an oxymoronic statement: A decision-making process is not democratic unless the citizens (i.e. the demos) participate in it. If citizens' participation in the democratic process needs to be enhanced or encouraged, then this process has not become democratic yet, or is not democratic enough. Once again, the Commission is sending confusing messages to the public.

Finally, the Commission refers to the European Citizens' Panels as a means to "*make citizens feel more involved*" in the democratic process⁴⁷. The oxymoron is, thus, repeated: Feeling more involved in a decision-

making process, as opposed to actually being more involved, does not make that process democratic. Such wording allows for this proposal on the EU's public communication strategy to be interpreted as mainly intending to create a better impression of the EU institutions rather than to actually achieve more openness and accountability.

Nevertheless, Plan D also underlines the importance of matching the main messages of the EU public communication strategy, i.e. matching the policy, to the EU public's priorities (ibid.: 5-6). This is a crucial prerequisite, according to Leonard and Arbuthnott (2002), if the EU's institutions are to become more democratic, as already discussed in Chapter 1⁴⁸, and it is an issue on which the White Paper on a European Communication Policy, published in 2006, also focuses (COM(2006)35).

3.2.3 Component B: EU public communication strategic aims

The first public communication document of the period 2004-2006 was the Action Plan to Improve Communicating Europe by the Commission (Commission of the European Communities 2005), published online on July 20th, 2005, only a month after the negative referenda in France and the Netherlands⁴⁹.

As it is not a Communication or a White Paper, it is significantly shorter in length, and consequently clearer and more accessible. It continues in the mode set in the Communication for Implementing the Information and Communication strategy for the EU (COM(2004)196, final), in that it acknowledges the need for a more effective communication strategy on the part of the EU and for the EU institutions to listen more to rather than just project their messages to the European public. It also goes a step further, in that it criticises the previous Communications regarding the EU's Information and Communication strategy for failing to achieve some of the main targets set- coherent and streamlined information strategy; addressing the public's interests, needs and preoccupations; and focusing on dialogue and proactive communication (Commission of the European Communities 2005a: 3).

The Action Plan identifies three strategic principles, which will aim to earn people's interest and trust:

- a) Listening to the public;
- b) Communicating with the public (not just the elites); and
- c) Connecting with citizens by “going local” (ibid.: 3-4).

Furthermore, it focuses on the training and recruitment of communication specialists, so that a “modern, professional” approach of communicating with the public is achieved (ibid.: 2). The importance of more efficient and professional communication between the different departments and institutions is also recognised, as it can significantly affect the coherence of the messages projected to the public (ibid.).

Whilst the documents of the pre-Wallström period were not clear on whether the focus of the Information and Communication strategy should be on the elites of the EU or on the European masses, this Action Plan clearly shifts the focus on the EU mass audience and criticises the previous strategy for putting too much emphasis on the communication with the elite audiences and forgetting the rest of the citizens (Commission of the European Communities 2005a). The Action Plan also prioritises local Representations, as key for conveying the Commission’s message to the public, in simple terms and in the native language. Although it is not the first time that the role of Representations is identified as important in the communication process with the public, it is the first time that so much emphasis is put on working to communicate the EU’s aims and achievements locally/ nationally: “*The relationship of EU-member-states needs to be rebalanced and this is why the action plan talks about ‘going local’*”⁵⁰.

The influence of the “Can the EU hear me?” report on the Commission’s Action Plan is evident here, although the report itself is not mentioned in the document. Most of the Commission’s proposals with regard to the EU Information and Communication strategy are indirect references to the aforementioned report’s recommendations, in particular the recommendations concerning the deployment of communication professionals, communication with the public on local level and inter-institutional cooperation on the issue of the EU’s Information and Communication strategy (Davies and Readhead 2004)⁵¹.

When Plan D was published in late 2005 (COM(2005)494, final),

the Commission elaborated on several of the proposals it had put forward with its Action Plan. It is a very ambitious plan that aims to involve national Parliaments, local and regional authorities, civil society and citizens (particularly target groups of specific importance, such as young people, women and ethnic minorities) in a pan-European public debate regarding the achievements and future aims of the EU (ibid.: 2-3). Furthermore, the proposed plan aims to be an on-going template for action in the field of public communication, and not just a short-term public communication scheme aiming to overcome the resistance of EU citizens towards the Constitutional Treaty. It is also the first time that an Information and Communication-related document clearly states as its aim the contribution to the establishment of a European public sphere (ibid.: 2-3).

The Commission has identified four broad areas in which Plan D will be implemented in order to help regain the EU citizens' trust towards the EU institutions and address issues of democratic legitimation, accountability and openness within the EU: "**assisting national debates on the future of the EU**"; "**stimulating a wider public debate that will be driven forward by the EU institutions themselves**"; "**promoting citizens' participation in the democratic process**"; and "**generating a real dialogue on European policies**" (COM(2005)494, final: 4-10, emphasis added)⁵².

Plan D has also evidently been influenced by the 2004 "Can the EU hear me?" report (Davies and Readhead 2004)⁵³, borrowing even exact phrases from it, as it has incorporated most of the report's proposals concerning the Commissioner's visits to all EU member-states within the first six months of taking on her duties; the introduction of European Goodwill Ambassadors to carry the EU messages in the member-states' audiences; the promotion of consultation; better collaboration with the national media and almost all other proposed actions made by the Friends of Europe, Gallup and Euractiv joint report (Compare Davies and Readhead 2004: 8-10 with COM(2005)494, final: 4-10). Nevertheless, the Commission does not mention this report at all in this document, but instead generally speaks of a "period of reflection" (COM(2005)494, final: 3-7, 10, 12 and 14), during which the Plan D proposals were composed.

Despite the positive steps towards a more communication-oriented strategy, rather than an information-oriented one, Plan D has some weak points. To begin with, it is not always clear if the Commission is referring to EU member-states and citizens only, or to the wider European community. Although it makes sense to want to expand the debate on the EU to neighbouring countries, or candidate countries, the fact that the EU and Europe are often used as synonyms within the Commission's official document is a step in the wrong direction as far as the EU's Information and Communication strategy is concerned. Before even beginning to implement that strategy, the Commission is already sending confusing messages to the public (intra-EU and foreign alike).

Furthermore, the Commission is still reluctant to take the lead in the EU's Information and Communication strategy and leaves most responsibility to the member-states. It is also unclear if the Commission is genuinely seeking to improve the level of the public's participation in the EU's decision-making process or just improve the public's impression of the degree of democratic legitimation of the EU institutions.

When these issues were presented to the interviewees, one senior Commission official took the position that

“the Commission (is reluctant) to take the lead from the member-states in the implementation of the EU's Information and Communication strategy for fear that the Commission will be accused of propaganda and of attempting to countermand national sovereignty altogether”⁵⁴.

With regard to the second issue, one Commission official involved in the implementation of the EU's Information and Communication strategy expressed the view that

“The primary aim is to show people that the policy-making process is open and encourage people to participate and we do spend a lot of time processing feedback [...] But there is another issue: The elected representatives of the EU citizens are in the EP and the national parliaments and the expression of these are the executives, i.e. the governments etc. So [...] we shouldn't think that we (the Commission) could somehow bypass the whole parliamentary process by consulting directly the NGOs or individuals (the public) [...]”⁵⁵.

Following the style of the Action Plan and Plan D, i.e. being more concise, easier to read and written in a more every-day language compared to the official documents published before 2005, the White Paper on a European Communication Policy is the most recent document on the EU's public communication strategy to have been published in the period 2004-2006 (COM(2006)35).

The White Paper is divided in two parts, the first being more like a manifesto of the Commission's vision of the EU Communication strategy, and the second identifying the ways in which this vision can be implemented. This is a document that, like the Action Plan and Plan D, focuses on communication rather than information. True to its commitment for more openness and public dialogue with the citizens of the EU, the Commission has launched a six-month-long online and offline public consultation on the actions proposed in this White Paper, during which all citizens and civil society bodies are invited to submit their views and suggestions regarding the EU's communication strategy⁵⁶. Furthermore, a more public-friendly version of the Commission's proposed public communication strategy was also published in 2006, in the form of a glossy pamphlet, which also includes a personal note from Vice-President Wallström (Commission of the European Communities 2006a).

In Part 1 of the White Paper, the Commission emphasises two points: a) The importance of an Information and Communication strategy on an EU level and the need to move beyond one-way communication to public dialogue with the EU citizens; and b) The need to encourage and support the emerging European public sphere, with the cooperation and involvement of national civil societies, national media, national public authorities and, of course, the other EU institution (COM(2006)35: 4-5).

Once more the Commission identifies the Member States as mainly responsible for informing the public about EU policies and encouraging public debate regarding EU issues (ibid.: 5). At the same time, the Commission gives us an idea of the EU public sphere it is envisaging, and that consists of interrelated Europeanised national public spheres (ibid.). The similarities of this proposal with the theoretical approaches of the European public sphere found in Kantner, Pfetsch, Koopmans, Weiler and

other scholars, who have suggested that we should be looking for a European public sphere in the national public spheres of the Member States⁵⁷, are evident- although, as discussed earlier these did not necessarily occur through established dialogue with the academic community⁵⁸.

Part 2 of the White Paper identifies key areas of action in order to implement the main principles of the EU's Communication strategy. The following figure summarises these areas of action, which are then further analysed in the following paragraphs, with the exception of the actions concerning the Internet, which are examined in the next section (Component C).

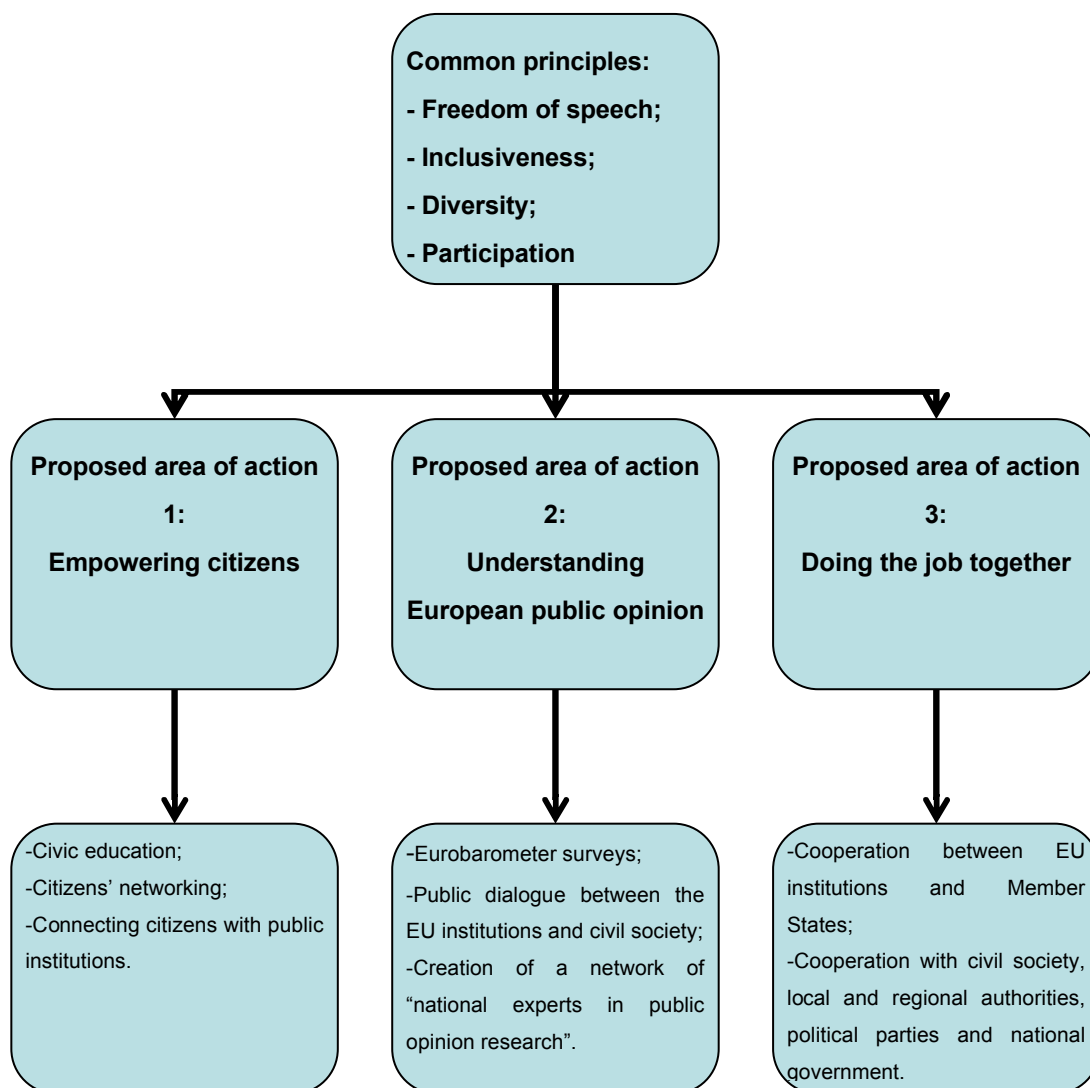


Figure 3.1: Proposed areas of action, White Paper on a European Communication Policy, Source: The author, adapted from the White Paper on a European

Communication Policy (COM(2006)35).

All proposed areas of action here are relying heavily on the cooperation of the member-states. However, the White Paper examined here attempts to achieve a balance in the cooperation with the member-states by giving the EU institutions the key role in taking openness and public dialogue further (COM(2006)35: 6-8). In this context, all EU institutions should enhance their visitors' programmes, complement their websites with online fora and hold joint open debates similar to the Parliamentary debates, where officials will accept comments and questions from the public and journalists (ibid.).

In order to better coordinate the public communication efforts of the EU institutions and the member-states, the Commission proposes that the four common principles be imprinted in a framework document (a Code of Conduct or Charter of EU Communication) which will serve as a reference point not only for EU institutions, but for civil society and local, regional and national governments and authorities too (COM(2006)35: 5-6).

The intention of the Commission to give the EU public a more central role in the EU's information and communication strategy is also ever more evident in this White Paper. For example, the document informs us that the Commission has launched an online consultation forum, where citizens can give feedback on the proposed Charter of Communication, either as individuals or as representatives of organisations of any type (ibid.). The Commission also proposes the establishment of an "Independent Observatory for European Public Opinion", whose aim would be to analyse trends in the EU's public opinion (ibid.: 11). Even more interestingly, the Commission acknowledges the importance of communicating with foreign audiences with one voice and the significant role that the EU public can play in enhancing the EU's image and voice in third countries (ibid.: 12).

3.2.4 Component C: The role of the Internet

The Internet is seen as a key tool of the EU's public communication strategy in the period 2004-2006. Starting with the 2005 Action Plan

(Commission of the European Communities 2005a), the Commission focuses on EUROPA as the main online public communication portal and also mentions the Representations' websites, which will focus on addressing more the needs of the local publics (ibid.). The document explicitly states that EUROPA is not focused enough on communication with the public and recognises that the portal still does not cater for the language needs of the EU's multilingual public and that navigating around its pages is often difficult/ problematic (ibid.: 12).

In addition, the Action Plan does, finally, clarify the view of the Commission on who should be the target audience of its online strategy and which tools should be used to address that audience. EUROPA is identified as the key online portal to address "key target" audiences, such as young people and women (ibid.). The task of communicating with the general public is left to the Representations and their websites, whilst for more specialised audiences special thematic webpages will be set up and linked to the EUROPA homepage (ibid.).

Despite the Commission's clarifications on the target audiences online, the interviews with Commission officials revealed a difference of opinion and approach on the issue of target audiences online, between policy-making and policy-implementation officials. On the one hand, policy-makers firmly support the concept of target audiences, and feel strongly about the need to approach "difficult" audiences, such as young people and women, who appear to be amongst the least interested in and/or approving of the EU's actions (Eurobarometer 2006a; Eurobarometer 2006b). They recognise that these audiences may also be more difficult to attract online (particularly women), yet they believe that it is crucial to engage the most "vulnerable", socially and politically, groups into a direct public dialogue with the EU institutions. As one interviewee put it

"That is exactly why we would like to address some specific (web) pages to young people and women – because they are not key users already and because they have fewer professional incentives to visit the site and we believe they have the democratic right to be included and participate as well"⁵⁹.

On the other hand, policy-implementation officials are convinced that

the Internet is only a tool of communication with EU specialists and individuals and/or institutions with an interest in the EU and its actions. They are, therefore, not convinced that the so-called “vulnerable” target audiences can be successfully approached online:

“We have found that women are the most sceptical when it comes to politics and the EU in particular, in opinion polls in Central Europe, also the more “blue-collar” are (more sceptical) [...] so [...] we try to structure our communication around this. (But) we have to make a choice: Do we try to be defensive, or do we go to people who we think will react favourably? This is a debate that is going on at the moment”⁶⁰.

The issue of target audiences and its diverse approach by policy-making and policy-implementation Commission officials will be taken into consideration in the following chapter, when analysing the contents of the three EU websites that were chosen for this research project (EUROPA, EU@UN, EURUNION). On one level, the issue of audiences is important in relation to the theories regarding the European public sphere, and the Habermasian ideal of the all-inclusive public sphere: It is now becoming obvious that the Commission not only identifies two types of audiences (elite and mass) but also intends to continue to address them separately and with different communication tools. What is not clear is whether it is the Commission’s intention to eventually bridge the gap between the two types of European audience, or merely assist in establishing what in effect will be two parallel public spheres- one for the European elites, and one for the European general public. On a second level, a question that needs to be answered is whether the difference of opinion between policy-making and policy-implementation officials is affecting the actual implementation of the proposed information and communication strategy online.

Plan D (COM(2005)494, final) also gives the Internet a central role in facilitating the public dialogue regarding the EU, which indicates the Commission’s determination to encourage a European public sphere online. In that sense, the proposed strategy re-affirms the Internet’s theoretical importance in facilitating such a public sphere. The action plan regarding the deployment of the Internet is also more specific than previously (ibid.: 3, 4, 10, 14 and 19) and the Commission also proposes

to monitor the effectiveness of the online public communication actions through the monitoring of the website visits and capacity of its systems (ibid.: 19, Table 4.4), which is a first for a Commission document regarding the EU's public communication strategy.

Similarly, the 2006 White Paper on a European Communication policy (COM(2006)35) emphasises once more the need to bridge the digital divide within the EU. Yet the proposed action in this field is limited to the recommendation that the "European Round Table for Democracy", whose establishment was proposed in Plan D, should compose a report on the issue at some point in the future (ibid.: 10). The document mentions that there are other activities currently taking place that aim to close the digital divide, but these are not clearly identified in the document.

Nevertheless, it is possible to identify some of them by visiting the Commission's website, EUROPA or Margot Wallström's official webpage. Beginning with the latter, Vice-President Wallström has established her own weblog, which is updated frequently and is open to contributions from and criticism by the public. Furthermore, there is a new webpage on the EUROPA portal dedicated to the public debate about the future of the EU and of Europe (Commission of the European Communities 2006b), as well as a separate webpage devoted to the public dialogue and consultation on the EU's communication strategy (Directorate General Communication/Commission of the European Communities 2006). Finally, on 7 April 2006 the ".eu" top-level domain opened for all residents within the EU providing a new Internet space and "*promoting an EU identity*" (EUROPA 2006h, emphasis added).

3.2.5 Concluding remarks: 2004-2006

The documents regarding the EU's public communication strategy in 2004-2006 share some similarities with the documents of the previous period, yet differ from them in several crucial points:

Component A: As far as the issues of the EU governance and the European public sphere are concerned, the 2004-2006 documents continue to put emphasis on the issues of citizens' participation in the public dialogue and the decision-making process of the EU as well as on

transparency. Unfortunately, the wording of the documents is often confusing with regard to the Commission's true intentions: Is the aim to achieve democratic legitimation of the EU decision-making process by enabling citizens' participation to a greater degree than today, or is the Commission's goal to change the public's perception regarding the EU's democratic deficit (i.e. that there is no such deficit)?

Component B: While the public communication strategy documents of the previous period were written by "faceless" Commission officials, this time it is possible to put some faces to the documents, as there is a Commissioner responsible solely for the EU's Information and Communication strategy of the EU. This in turn means that there is also a Cabinet of EU officials working under the leadership of Vice-President Wallström and all their details are available on the relevant webpage of the Commission, including their photographs (Wallström 2006).

Moreover, the Commission documents on the EU's Information and Communication strategy are short, more to the point, and clearly written with a wider audience in mind, unlike those of the pre-Wallström period. Although still not making a clear distinction between intra-EU communication and external public communication, the public communication strategy of the EU in 2004-2006 appears mainly focused towards **communication** with the EU citizens, rather than information. The influence of the 2004 report, produced by Friends of Europe, Euractiv and Gallup Europe (Davies and Readhead 2004), is evident throughout the 2004-2006 documents examined here, and most of its recommendations have been adopted with only minor alterations in the wording of the sentences, although the report is not referenced in any of the official documents examined here.

Component C: The Internet's key role in the EU's public communication strategy is recognised and the medium is given an even more central role in the implementation of the strategy. The Commission identifies specific audiences that should be targeted by its online public communication strategy, consistent with the strategy outlined also during the period 2000-2004. In relation to the theoretical model of this research project, it is of particular interest that the Internet's role in these policy

documents is linked with the European public sphere and the enhancement of democratic procedures, i.e. citizens' participation in the decision-making process, transparency and openness. In this respect, the EU's public communication aims coincide with the theoretical model established in Chapters 1 and 2.

3.3 Conclusion

It becomes evident from the documents reviewed above that the Commission is aware of the issues regarding the emerging European public sphere and the openness, accountability and democratic legitimization of the EU institutions, particularly after 2005. In this context the Commission is willing to establish a two-way communication process with the European public, in order to offer more opportunities for citizens' participation in the decision-making process and to gain the trust of the public towards the EU institutions. Furthermore, the Commission is eager to create a more homogeneous communication amongst the EU institutions, which, in turn, will reflect a more coherent image of what the EU stands for and help communicate more clearly the EU's goals and achievements to the European public.

However, it is not always clear if the Commission is referring to EU member-states and citizens only, or to the wider European community. Although it makes sense to want to expand the debate on the EU to neighbouring countries, or candidate countries etc, the fact that the EU and Europe are often used as synonyms within the Commission's official documents is step towards the wrong direction as far as the EU's Information and Communication strategy is concerned. Before even beginning to implement that strategy, the Commission is already sending confusing messages to the public (intra-EU and foreign alike).

When this issue was presented to the Commission officials interviewed for this research project, their responses all pointed to the same direction- the EU is a very complex polity, the distinction between EU citizens and EU residents is not straightforward, nor are the boundaries between intra-EU and European audiences (*"there is the question of where Europe ends and who can be an EU citizen"*⁶¹). This

admission of the Commission officials concerning the complexity of the EU/ European identity coincides with the theoretical argument presented in Chapter 1, which was used to support the choice of the term “public communication” instead of “public diplomacy” or “public affairs” in the case of the EU⁶². Nevertheless, a clearer distinction between intra-EU and external audiences is needed in order to avoid sending out confused messages to the public.

Despite that, there is coherence and consistency in the values that the Commission projects as core EU values. Figure 3.2 below illustrates the relation among these core values, as this transpires through the documents examined in this chapter.

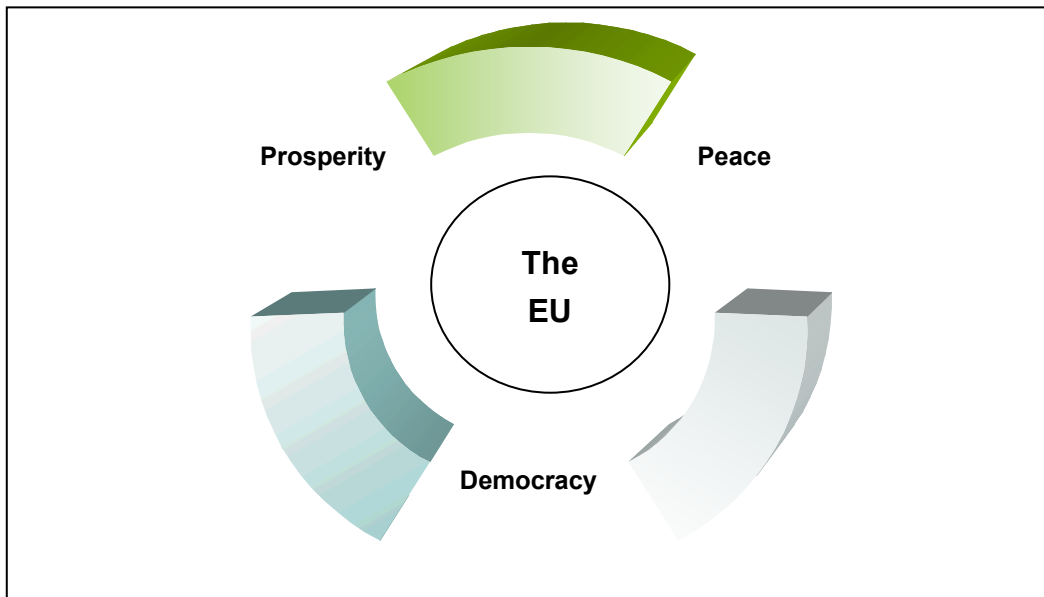


Figure 3.2: “The circle of prosperity”, the three key ideas underlining the EU’s Information and Communication strategy, Source: The author, based on Commission Information and Communication strategy documents 2000-2004 and 2004-2006, examined in Part 3.1.

These core values are further related to more specific ideas and areas of public debate, which have been summarised in Table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1: Key ideas and related terms in the EU's Information and Communication Strategy documents, Source: Commission Information and Communication strategy documents 2000-2004 and 2004-2006, examined in Part 3.1.

Peace	Democracy	Prosperity
<i>Europe's borders and its role in the world</i> 1. A Europe open to the world: EU Common Foreign and Security Policy 2. Enlargement 3. Safety and security/ Rule of law 4. A sense of belonging/ A European identity?	<i>Citizens' rights: A citizens' Europe</i> 1. Accountability 2. Openness 3. Participation	<i>Economic and social development:</i> 1. Creating new jobs 2. Social security 3. The Euro 4. Sustainable development/ environmental protection 5. Freedom of movement

Although these values are constant throughout all the documents examined here, the context within which they are mentioned differs between the two periods: The documents produced during 2000-2004 refer to these values more vaguely and mainly focus on what defines the EU and what it is that the public needs to be informed about, i.e. what the EU does and what it has achieved since it was founded. However, in the second period, 2004-2006, and after the realisation that the EU public has lost its trust in the EU institutions and the criticism that these core values were not specific enough to distinguish the EU from other democracies (Davies and Readhead 2004), these values were linked to specific issues concerning the European public, and not just to the EU's achievements so far. The Commission now focuses more on creating a public debate around these values and the related issues, so there has been a shift **from informing** the public what the EU is about **to communicating** with the public on how the latter perceives these values and the EU's role.

Of the three core EU values, democracy is of particular importance, since the debate regarding the EU and its emerging public sphere revolves around the issue of the democratic legitimation of the EU institutions and of the decision-making process on EU level⁶³. Throughout the documents examined here, democracy is recognised as one of the EU's central values, while at the same time the Commission recognises that the EU

public is questioning the democratic legitimacy of the EU institutions. However, the Commission never really goes beyond merely acknowledging the existence of this argument⁶⁴.

This undermines the Commission's emphasis on citizens' participation in the decision-making process and on further openness of the EU institutions' procedures, as it raises questions about the sincerity of the Commission's intentions to provide more means (mainly online-based ones) of two-way interaction and communication with EU officials to civil society and individual citizens alike. In other words, is the Commission intending to actually address the EU's democratic deficit by introducing new possibilities for the citizens to give feedback and monitor the decision-making procedures on EU level, or are these measures aiming to create the impression that the EU's democratic deficit is being addressed? These questions are addressed in the following chapter which also uses the above table of core EU values as the basis for the coding variables of content in the analysis of the three EU websites selected for this research project. Chapter 5, which examines the reactions and views of Internet users on these three websites also addresses this question from a different angle.

As far as the Internet is concerned, what emerges from the documents reviewed here is that the Commission sees the Internet as an integral part of public communication, yet it is not always clear if it is the Commission's view that the Internet should be used to address a niche public, i.e. the European elites, more than it should be used to communicate with the general public. We have already seen that the views of Commission officials on this issue are divided. The following chapter, which analyses the data collected by coding the three EU websites, will aim to further investigate this issue.

At this stage, the figure mapping out the key theoretical issues in Chapters 1 and 2 needs to be revisited, in order to add the new elements that have emerged from the review of the official documents regarding the EU's Information and Communication strategy.

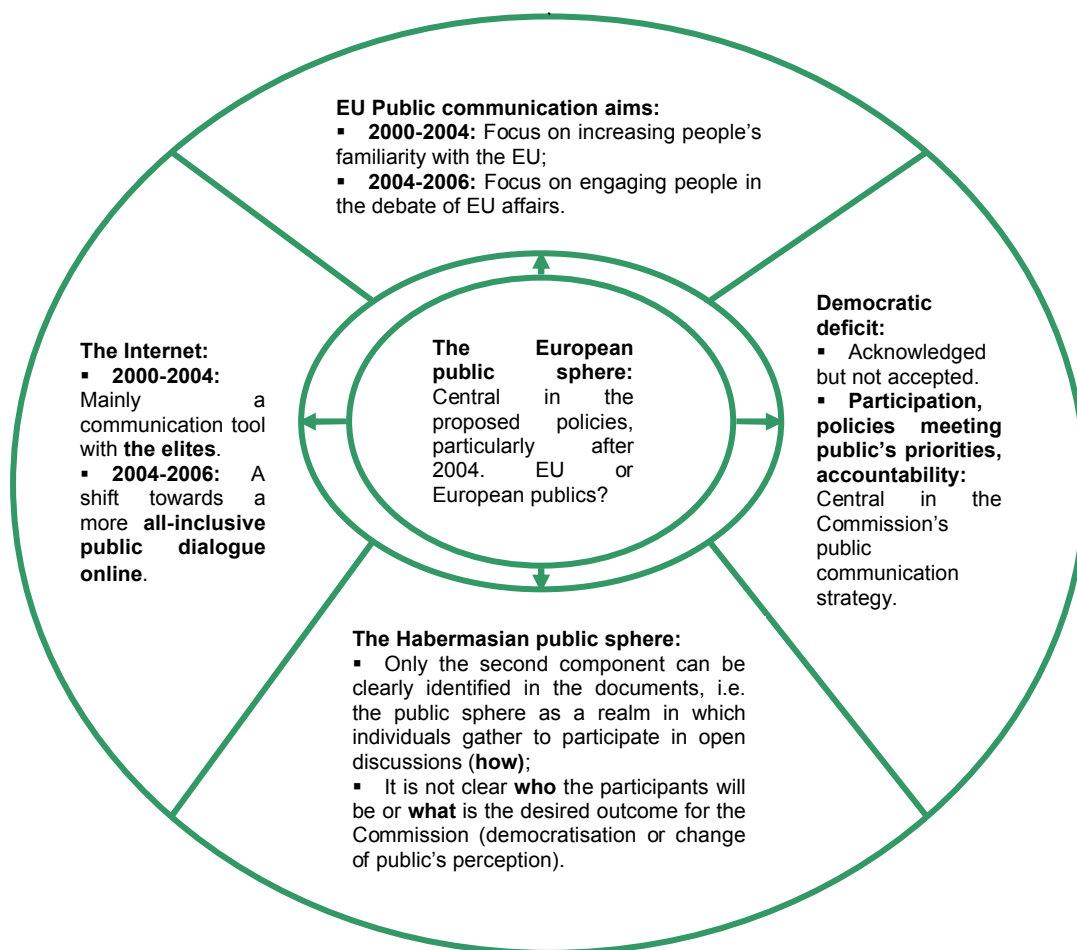


Figure 3.3: Key components of the theoretical concept regarding the EU public sphere: The EU public communication policy documents, adapted from Figure 2.1, Chapter 2 and the analysis of key EU Information and Communication documents.

The data that will emerge from the coding of three of the EU's official websites and the EU websites' online user survey will be juxtaposed against this figure in the following chapters, in order to establish the relationship between theory, official policy and practice.

Notes

¹ Chapter 1, Part 1.3.

² For the methodology of the interviews and a list of the interviewees see Annex 2.

³ Figure 2.1, Chapter 2, Part 2.4.

⁴ Section 3.1.1.

⁵ Section 3.2.1.

⁶ Sections 3.1.2 and 3.2.2.

⁷ Sections 3.1.3 and 3.2.3.

⁸ Sections 3.1.4 and 3.2.4.

⁹ For more detailed accounts and analysis of EU history and the way the Commission works, see Nugent 2000; 2003; 2004 and in Cram, Dinan, Nugent 1999. Dinan's work on the development of the EU institutions and the history of the EU is also extensive (Dinan 2006; Cowles and Dinan 2004; Dinan 2004; Dinan 1999).

¹⁰ Ireland held a second referendum on the issue on 19 October 2002, and this time the public voted in favour. As Ireland was the last member-state to ratify the Treaty of Nice, the second referendum in that country allowed for the Treaty to finally enter into force on 1 February 2003.

¹¹ It is interesting to note here that at the time that this Communication was published the Council had a different information and communication policy from that of the European Parliament and the European Commission (COM(2001)354, final: 11). It operated its own relations with the press and media and shared some means of communication with the other Institutions. However the Helsinki European Council asked that the Council be associated with the effort of providing general coherent information on the European Union. The European Council also called on the Commission to improve co-ordination between the Representations in the Member States and the National Information Authorities. At the time, the Council participated in the EUROPA web-site and in "Europe by Satellite" alongside the other Institutions. The Council was also represented on the editorial and managerial committees but did not otherwise take part in the formulation of the Information and Communication policy.

The Council was not at that time a member of the IGI but the Communication stated that future developments could include information and communication from the Council on second and third pillar issues. At the time when the Communication was published the Council had not put forward a comprehensive strategy regarding its role on the Information and Communication policy of the EU. Nevertheless, the Communication identified, as possible developments, the establishment of a joint Visitors' or Information Centre in Brussels and closer co-operation on libraries, as well as co-operation among the two Institutions in the joint production of press cuttings and reviews (COM(2001)354, final).

¹²The Euro notes and coins entered into circulation in Austria, Belgium, Luxemburg, Greece, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands, Portugal, Ireland and Finland on 1 January 2002, in parallel with the national currencies. On 28 February of the same year, the national currencies were withdrawn from circulation and the Euro became the sole currency in those twelve member-states. Slovenia will become the 13th member-state to join the Euro-zone on 1 January 2007. Denmark and the UK have a special status allowing them to decide when, and if, they will join the euro area. The remaining countries (Czech Republic, Estonia, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Sweden) are member-states with a derogation, i.e. they will join the euro area as

soon as they fulfil the necessary conditions on the basis of the Maastricht convergence criteria following the established procedure (Commission of the European Communities 2006g).

¹³ By 2002 the Commission had in its hands the European Parliament's endorsement of the first Communication (European Parliament 2003, first published in the Official Journal on 13 March 2002) and its proposals on further developing the partnership of the two institutions on the information-campaign sector (European Parliament 2001b). The Belgian (second half of 2001, see Belgian Presidency of the Council of the European Union 2001) and Spanish (first half of 2002) Presidencies of the Council of the European Union had also approved of the Communication, while the Committee of the Regions and the Economic and Social Committee had given their opinion and further proposals on the matter (European Economic and Social Committee, Subcommittee (98), Engelen-Kefer 2002; Committee of the Regions 2002).

¹⁴ There had been an ongoing interinstitutional dialogue on the White Paper on European Governance since its publication in 2001: The Commission published an additional Communication regarding its White Paper on European Governance in 2001 (COM(2001)0727, final) while in the same year the Economic and Social Committee gave its opinion on matters of civil society and European governance (European Economic and Social Committee, Subcommittee (98), Rapporteur-General (98), Rodriguez-Garcia-Caro 2001). At the same time, the White paper was discussed in the European Parliament (Kinnock 2001a; Kinnock 2001b) and a resolution on the matter was published that same year (European Parliament 2001a). The Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions published further opinions on the Commission's proposal in 2002 (Committee of the Regions 2002; European Economic and Social Committee, Subcommittee (98), Engelen-Kefer 2002).

¹⁵ In November 2004 the new Barroso Commission was approved by the European Parliament to take on its duties for the period 2005-2009.

¹⁶ For more information on the inter-institutional debate that led to the publication of this document, as well as on how the Commission's proposed measures were received by the other EU institutions, see: Committee of the Regions 2002; European Economic and Social Committee, Subcommittee (98), Engelen-Kefer 2002; COM(2001)0727, final; European Parliament 2001a; European Parliament and European Council Regulation (EC) 30 May 2001; European Economic and Social Committee, Subcommittee (98), Rapporteur-General (98), Rodriguez-Garcia-Caro 2001; Kinnock 2001b; Kinnock 2001a.

¹⁷ Interviewee 1, Annex 2.

¹⁸ However, unlike the previous Information and Communication Policy communication, where similar statements were made without providing the necessary evidence to back them up, this time the Commission calls upon the results of a study regarding the public's perception of the European Union, of its role and of the challenges facing the Union in the

future (OPTEM Study 2002 quoted in COM(2002)350, final/2).

¹⁹ Although the Commission tried to put a positive spin on the quantity of the feedback it had received, the fact remains that the number of responses was quite disappointing. Considering that the EU consists of 450 million citizens, a return of 260 contributions cannot be considered just “modest”, which is how the Commission described it (COM(2002)705, final: 7). Even more disappointing was the fact that several Member-states did not send any feedback, while the responses from EU institutions varied, with certain institutions not sending any feedback at all.

²⁰ See Chapter 2, Part 2.4.

²¹ The options for joint actions with government agencies in the Member States include joint information activities co-financed and co-managed through a signed agreement (convention). Examples of co-operation concern mutual references and links to Internet sites and similar cross-referencing (COM(2001)354, final: 13).

²² Interviewee 2, Annex 2.

²³ See Section 3.1.2.

²⁴ The Commission also proposes here the introduction of the Memorandum of Understanding and also agreements on information topics prioritised by the Interinstitutional Group on Information (IGI), both of which proposals would need to be signed by Member States, as part of their cooperation with the Commission in implementing the Information and Communication Strategy (COM(2002)350, final/2: 24). The developments with regard to the Memorandum of Understanding are followed up in other documents examined later in this chapter.

²⁵ Similarly, the Report on European Governance, also published in 2002 (COM(2002)705, final), emphasised the importance of the Member States getting more actively involved in promoting public debate on EU affairs, without actually mentioning whether there had been any progress made on that aspect since the 2001 White Paper had been published (ibid.: 7).

²⁶ The Commission also acknowledges the importance of education in raising awareness regarding the EU and its main tasks and achievements, but it does not elaborate on this aspect of informing the public, and defers the issue to future discussions, after the Member States have studied the issue and come up with proposals (COM(2002)350, final/2: 10)- most certainly because education is a sensitive matter, where the Member States have almost absolute autonomy from the EU decision-making bodies.

²⁷ See Section 3.1.1.

²⁸ See also Section 3.1.3 and notes 24 and 25 above. At the time that the Communication on the Implementation of the Information and Communication strategy examined here was published, 6 Member States had signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on cooperation in EU information and communication matters (Greece, Italy, Spain, Portugal, France and Luxembourg) and 4 were in the process of concluding (Austria, Belgium,

Netherlands and Finland) (COM(2004)196, final: 9). The Commission suggested again that the Memorandum would be a “purely political” instrument “*resting on a voluntary basis*” which would “*meet the need for adaptability and flexibility expressed by most of the national public authorities concerning the implementation of a joint communication plan*” with the European Commission (ibid.). The Memorandum would be offered to the New Member States after 1 May 2004, once it had been validated by the then 15 EU Member States.

²⁹ It should be noted here that since the publication of the first Information and Communication Policy, the European Council started participating fully in the development of the information and communication strategy, particularly within the Interinstitutional Group on Information (IGI) while the European Parliament with its vote in April 2003 approved of the Commission’s efforts in creating and implementing an Information and Communication Strategy (COM(2004)196, final: 5). The Parliament also emphasised the importance of cultural and linguistic diversities among the European public and stressed that these need to be taken into consideration when implementing priority information campaigns (ibid.).

³⁰ EUROPA was initially launched on the Commission’s initiative in 1995. Following a suggestion from the European Parliament, the Secretaries-General of all institutions set up a Task Force in 1997 which subsequently developed into the Inter-institutional Internet Editorial Committee, with the Commission providing the chair.

³¹ The other two tools are EuropeDirect, which provides direct contact with the EU institutions, and TV and radio, in particular Europe by Satellite. Interestingly, despite the emphasis on EUROPA, television and radio have been found to be the preferred means of information for the majority of the European public (COM(2002)350, final/2: 19-20). According to the Commission, 66% of Europeans use radio and television as their main source of information on the European Union (ibid.: 20). However, the source of this data is not provided in the document.

³² Europe Direct is a service which is available to all EU citizens in the form of a generic email address or a generic telephone number, both serving as a contact point for the public, providing information and help regarding European issues.

³³ The Commission called for an ad hoc evaluation of EuroNews on 9 July 2003 and Deloitte and Touche carried out the project. The Commission’s view of EuroNews here is based on Deloitte and Touche’s report (COM(2004)196, final). Despite the fact that its effectiveness “*is limited by financial constraints*” (ibid.: 18) the Commission concludes that EuroNews is a very effective medium for disseminating information regarding the EU, as it is cost effective compared to other tools of informing the public and can broadcast the equivalent of 4 hours of information viewed every day by over 7.1 million viewers (ibid.: 19). EuroNews website also has over 500,000 hits a month with 4 million pages visited and 3000 hours of video information downloaded (ibid.). On that basis, it was decided that

the EU would co-finance EuroNews new programmes and more hours of broadcasting of European programmes.

³⁴ See Chapter 1, Section 1.2.1.

³⁵ See Chapter 1, Part 1.3.

³⁶ Before the Prodi Commission completed its 5-year mandate and handed over to the Barroso Commission, ten new Commissioners from the 10 new member-states were added to its body in May 2005 (EUROPA 2006h).

³⁷ For more information and analysis of the 2004 enlargement process see Nugent 2004 and Commission of the European Communities 2006f. The latter also offers information on the developments regarding future EU enlargements.

³⁸ The overall turnout in all EU member-states averaged a poor 45.6% (European Parliament 2004a). Amongst the new member states, with the exception of Cyprus and Malta, the turnout was also low (ibid.).

³⁹ For more information on the deliberation and negotiation process that led to the agreed text of the Constitutional Treaty see EUROPA 2006a and 2006i. For further analysis of the theoretical issues related to the Constitutional Treaty see Smismans 2004; Weiler and Wind 2003; Habermas 2004; Weiler 1999.

⁴⁰ More specifically, the data was drawn from four principal sources:

- a)** The input into a working group that met regularly at the Brussels' offices of *Friends of Europe* and Gallup Europe as a forum for senior EU information officials, MEPs, national governments' communications specialists, consultants and journalists. The group's activities culminated in a major brainstorming session in Brussels on September 2, 2004;
- b)** The results of an extensive Gallup Europe opinion poll in the spring of 2004. Over 2,000 people replied to 25 questions that had in large part been shaped by the Working Group;
- c)** The anecdotal evidence drawn from the opinions expressed by 20 top politicians, journalists and opinion formers who were extensively interviewed by *Friends of Europe* during the summer of 2004; and
- d)** The results of an autumn 2004 opinion poll, conducted by Gallup Europe, working in partnership with the EurActiv.com web portal. This online survey put forward 30 questions arising from the Working Group's discussion, and was answered by 1,500 people (Davies and Readhead 2004: 7).

⁴¹ Besides France and the Netherlands, no other EU member-states have rejected the Constitutional Treaty through their ratification procedures. 15 member-states have already ratified the Treaty, either by referendum or parliamentary vote or other procedure, namely Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxemburg, Malta, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain. The remaining member-states have postponed the ratification of the Treaty, either for the near future or indefinitely, following the negative referendums in France and the Netherlands (EUROPA

2006a; EUROPA 2006i).

⁴² *“There is an element of naivety within the EU institutional culture, as far as communication with the public and the public’s perception of the EU is concerned. Most EU officials, particularly those who work on a policy-implementation level, find it difficult to understand that the public views the EU institutions in different, negative even, light because they are emotionally attached to the issues that they need to communicate to the public”*, Interviewee 1, Annex 2.

⁴³ Interviewee 1, Annex 2.

Although the Commission on several occasions expressed its strong support for the ratification of the Constitutional Treaty by the member-states, an Information note from Vice-President Wallström to the College of Commissioners in March 2005, just two months before the first negative referendum in France, clarified that the Commission would under no circumstances *“produce propaganda on the Constitution, campaign during election periods or breach national rules on referenda or distribution of information”* (Wallström 2005: 2). Despite that, the Commissioner declared the institution’s commitment to assist any member states requiring support with their Constitution campaigns and to ensure that the EU citizens received all necessary information on the issue in an unbiased manner (ibid.).

⁴⁴ See also the 2006 Commission Communications to the Council on the developments on Plan D and the EU’s Communication strategy (COM(2006)212, provisional version; COM(2006)211, final).

⁴⁵ See Annex 1 for a list of the specific actions that the Commission proposed under the area of citizens’ participation in the democratic process.

⁴⁶ See Chapter 1, Section 1.2.1.

⁴⁷ See Annex 1, Table I.

⁴⁸ See Chapter 1, Section 1.3.4.

⁴⁹ See also Commission of the European Communities 2005b; Commission of the European Communities 2005d.

⁵⁰ Interviewee 1, Annex 2.

⁵¹ See also Section 3.2.1.

⁵² See Annex 1, Tables II-IV for the Commission’s proposed aims and expected results of Plan D in each of these four areas of action.

⁵³ See also Section 3.2.1.

⁵⁴ Interviewee 1, Annex 2.

⁵⁵ Interviewee 5, Annex 2.

⁵⁶ For more information see the website *“White Paper on a European Communication policy: Have your say!”* (Directorate General Communication/Commission of the European Communities 2006).

⁵⁷ See Chapter 1, Part 1.2.

⁵⁸ See Part 3.2.1.

⁵⁹ Interviewee 2, Annex 2.

⁶⁰ Interviewee 5, Annex 2.

⁶¹ Interviewee 1, Annex 2.

⁶² See Chapter 1, Part 1.3.

⁶³ See Chapter 1, Part 1.2.

⁶⁴ While most of the documents examined here rather tactfully dismiss the claims that the EU has a democratic deficit, its main public communication document, *Europe in 12 Lessons* (Fontaine 2003), first published in 2003, blatantly rejects such an argument, a trend which is reflected in online official webpages, such as the Glossary on key EU terms, found on the EUROPA website, and Eurojargon, also found on the EUROPA website (EUROPA 2006b; EUROPA 2006d).

Chapter 4- EU public communication: Online policy implementation

The previous chapters have provided the theoretical and analytical framework, within which three of the EU's official websites will be examined in this chapter. The aim here is to investigate how the EU's Information and Communication strategy is implemented online, particularly with reference to the process of vertical Europeanisation of the European public sphere. The focus of this chapter is, therefore, on the "how" component of the theoretical model regarding the public sphere, i.e. on the *process* of the online public dialogue between EU officials and the general public.

As discussed in Chapter 2, from a theoretical point of view, the role of the Internet is seen as key in the implementation of the EU's public communication strategy because it offers the possibility of citizens' participation in the EU decision-making process and in contributing to the establishment of non-mediated public debate between the EU institutions and the public (vertical Europeanisation of the public sphere). In addition, because of the nature of the European public sphere (i.e. fragmented public, no common language or collective identity, vertical public dialogue between EU institutions and the public mediated by national media) the **Internet** is considered here as a **key medium** that could enable direct public dialogue to develop between EU institutions and the public, because of its core characteristic of facilitating interaction regardless of identity, censorship and geographical boundaries.

These theoretical hypotheses were then compared, in Chapter 3, to the EU's official Information and Communication strategy of the periods 2000-2004 and 2004-2006, in order to establish if any elements of the theoretical model appear in the policy-making level of the EU's public communication strategy. The findings indicated that, overall, the proposed Information and Communication strategy focuses on improving the public's perception of the EU, on facilitating public dialogue and supporting the emerging European public sphere. Furthermore, the Internet is given a central role in the implementation of the proposed strategy, particularly in

the period 2004-2006.

In addition, the review of the documents also provided a set of values and ideas, which the Commission has proposed as the conceptual “thread” that should connect all EU public communication messages and actions. The core of the proposed EU Information and Communication strategy revolves around the ideas of peace, prosperity and democracy¹, under which several more specific issues and topics have been identified².

Finally, the Information and Communication documents and interviews with Commission officials involved in the policy-making and/or policy-implementation of the EU’s public communication strategy revealed a difference of perception between the policy-makers and the policy-implementing officials pertaining to who the target audiences of the strategy should be online. The Commission also appears reluctant to assume a leading, proactive role in communicating with the public, leaving this role to the member-states, despite their disappointing efforts in this area so far.

The issues, then, that the coding and analysis of the homepage contents of three of the EU’s official websites will aim to address are the following:

- a)** How close is the EU’s online public communication to the normative model of public communication identified in Chapters 1 and 2? Are the criteria for successful public communication met online? Is the Internet used to promote openness, participation in the decision-making process and public debate on EU/European issues? Is there any evidence of the vertical aspect of the European public sphere being facilitated by the EU’s official websites?
- b)** Are the goals of the EU Information and Communication strategy, as set out in the documents examined in Chapter 3, met by the EU’s official websites and to what extent? Are the core values of the EU Information and Communication strategy covered by the EU’s official websites?

4.1 Methodology

4.1.1 The websites

The data used in this analysis includes all the links found on the homepages of three official EU websites, namely the websites EUROPA (Commission of the European Communities 2006bb), European Union @ United Nations (Commission of the European Communities 2006d), which from now on will be referred to as EU@UN, and European Union- The Delegation of the European Union to the USA (Delegation of the European Commission to the USA 2006), henceforth referred to as EURUNION.

EUROPA is the EU's official portal, linking the websites of all its institutions, delegations, committees and so on, as well as providing access to legal documentation, general information on the EU and specialised information targeting specific groups (for example, young people and women). The European Commission has overall supervision of the portal³ but is in close collaboration with the other European institutions with regard to the published material⁴. The website was therefore chosen for this study as it is the EU's main online public communication tool.

On the other hand, EURUNION is a website targeted at a non-EU audience, i.e. the US public, and was therefore chosen as a sample of the EU's external public communication strategy online. It is managed by the Commission's Washington DC Delegation in the US⁵ and is therefore subject to the Guidelines for the European Commission's Delegation websites (RELEX 1/5- Information and Communication/Directorate-General for External Relations/Commission of the European Communities 2006). However, the Commission is not directly involved in the management or editorial process of the Delegations' websites. The specific website chosen here, EURUNION, is of particular interest not only because it is addressed to the public of one of the EU's biggest and most influential allies, but also because until 2005 it did not even comply with the general Guidelines for the Delegation websites.

Finally the EU@UN website is a sample of targeted online communication, aimed at a specialised audience (UN diplomats, state

representatives etc) and it was chosen as a control website. It is part of the EUROPA portal and is, therefore, under the supervision of the Commission, with the collaboration of the other EU institutions.

Links have been monitored for 24 weeks, 12 weeks in 2004 (13/03/2004 to 10/06/2004) and 12 weeks in 2005 (03/05/2005-20/07/2005). The coding took place once a week. The dates were chosen to coincide with the period leading up to and right after the accession of the ten new Member-States on 1 May 2004 as well as the negotiations leading to the opening of the accession negotiations with Turkey in October 2005.

The coding period also coincided with the commencement of the ratification process of the Constitutional Treaty as well as the appointment of a new Commission of the European Union in 2005. As we have already seen in Chapter 3, the Barroso Commission for the first time appointed a Commissioner (Vice-President Margot Wallström) solely to oversee the EU's Information and Communication Strategy and there has been a significant shift in the EU's policy-making with regard to the EU's public communication strategy since the new Commission took office in late 2004⁶. Although the policy documents of the period 2004-2005 were not produced until after July 2005, when the second coding period of the three websites had already been completed, traces of the changes that these documents introduced can already be detected in the coded data.

4.1.2 Coding values

The coding process included all the links found on the homepages of the three selected EU websites, with certain exceptions, which are outlined in the following paragraphs. The content of the webpages linked to the homepage of EUROPA, EU@UN and EURUNION was coded according to the type of public communication covered on each webpage, the text and the communication available on each webpage⁷.

More specifically, the main text of the links found on the homepages of the three EU websites was coded, at first instance, according to the type of public communication conducted through it, i.e. according to whether the text was written:

- a) As a reaction to an event/incident that had already taken place (**re-active public communication**; taking place hours/days after an incident has occurred);
- b) With the aim to inform the public about forthcoming EU actions/ events and to create awareness and/or engage the public in EU issues currently on the EU institutions' agenda (**pro-active public communication**; strategy aiming to get results within weeks/months); or
- c) With the aim to build a relationship of trust with the public, by highlighting and providing information on EU actions directly linked to the EU's core values and aims (**relationship-building public communication**; long-term strategy that shows results after years).

This time-based approach of public communication has already been discussed in Chapter 1⁸. This approach allows for one of main aspects of the EU's online public communication strategy to be observed and quantified, i.e. is the Commission's aim to build/reinstate the public's trust towards the EU institutions (proactive/relationship-building public communication) being implemented online? We have already seen that the Commission recognises the lack of the public's trust towards EU institutions as one of the key factors that need to be addressed if the issue of the EU institutions' legitimacy is to be successfully resolved, although it will not recognise that there is an actual democratic deficit in the EU institutions⁹. Furthermore, as discussed in Chapter 1, building the audiences' trust towards an institution is a first step towards establishing that institution in the collective consciousness of these audiences, and thus achieving their recognition of the institution's legitimacy¹⁰. For these reasons, relationship-building, and to a lesser extent proactive, public communication is crucial in the case of the EU. The question is whether this type of public communication is deployed on the three EU websites under examination here.

The criteria for classifying a webpage as conducting reactive, proactive or relationship-building public communication were two: firstly, to establish whether the webpage was permanent or temporary. In order for a webpage to qualify as permanent, it would have to be linked to the website's homepage throughout the entire period that the coding took

place. Links that were updated on a daily/weekly basis were considered temporary. Secondly, the information contained in the *main text/body* of the webpage was analysed, according to whether it was general information aiming to present a positive image of the EU and/or relate its actions to everyday issues of its citizens; whether the contents of the webpage aimed to inform/ create awareness regarding a specific issue/ area of EU action within the next few months; or, finally, whether it was information released in response to a recent internal/international development/incident.

For example, the webpage “The EU at a glance” (EUROPA 2006g) found on the EUROPA website, was classified under relationship-building communication, because it is permanently linked to EUROPA’s homepage and contains information about the EU in general (e.g. information about the Treaties of the EU, the Member-States, the EU symbols etc). This information aims to create a positive image of the EU, highlight its strengths, relate its achievements to day-to-day improvement of living standards and increase the public’s trust to its institutions.

Similarly, the webpage of the Luxembourg Presidency 2005 (Luxembourg Government 2006) aimed to increase awareness regarding the Luxembourg presidency of the Council of the European Union, its aims, and achievements, whilst aiming to contribute to the construction of a positive image of the EU at the same time. However, it was linked to all three websites’ homepages for only six months, i.e. only for the duration of the presidency by that member state. It was therefore classified under proactive, instead of relationship-building, public communication.

An example of reactive public communication can be found in the “EU day-by-day” links found on the EUROPA homepage, which are updated usually on a daily basis. These links mostly contained official responses/ information with regard to a specific recent event/ development, be it internal or concerning third countries. They were therefore coded as reactive public communication webpages.

It is important to clarify here that it has not always been clear at first glance whether a webpage could be classified as solely reactive, proactive or relationship-building public communication. For example, a webpage

containing the EU's official congratulatory message to the new elected leader of a third country (reactive) would often contain further information regarding recent political developments in that country (proactive) and the EU's general relations, political or financial, with that state, as well as information regarding the different sectors of EU activity in the wider geographical area (relationship building). In these cases, a webpage was coded under all the applicable public communication categories.

The second issue under investigation in this chapter is if the core EU values ("main thread"), which the Commission has identified in all its proposed Information and Communication strategy documents, consistently and continuously underpin the content of the three EU websites' pages, regardless of whether these webpages are of reactive, proactive or relationship-building nature. In other words, is there coherence in the messages the EU chooses to communicate to the public online, or does it deviate from its main public communication "thread" in cases of crises, for example?

In order to answer this question, after breaking down the online messages found on the three selected EU websites' homepages into the categories of reactive, proactive and relationship-building public communication, the areas/issues addressed through each type of public communication were determined. The coding values used for this purpose were defined initially using the ideas and the issues comprising the Commission's proposed EU Information and Communication strategy, as these were identified in Chapter 3, namely peace, democracy and prosperity. However, these three ideas are very broad and when a trial coding was carried out based only on these three values, it became obvious that these did not cover all the material that was available on the websites' homepages. Therefore, further categorisation was necessary.

By examining more closely the more concrete and specific issues identified in the Commission's documents proposing an EU Information and Communication strategy as related to these core values¹¹, it became possible to regroup these in three further categories, i.e. politics, economy and society, as shown in Table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1: Phase 1 of defining Coding values for the content found in EUROPA, EU@UN and EURUNION homepages, adapted from Table 3.1, Chapter 3.

Peace	Democracy	Prosperity	
1. A Europe open to the world: EU Common Foreign and Security Policy 2. Safety and security/ Rule of law	1. Accountability, openness and participation 2. Enlargement		Politics
		1. Environmental protection and sustainable development	Economy
	1. A sense of belonging/ a European identity 2. Freedom of movement	1. Creating new jobs 2. Social security issues	Society

A repeat trial coding of the three EU websites' homepages indicated that these areas of action specified in EU Information and Communication strategy documents were not enough, in order to allow for the content of all webpages to be coded appropriately. For that reason, two other key public communication sources were used, one printed and one electronic: The European Union in 12 lessons (Fontaine 2003) and The EU at a Glance (EUROPA 2006g). Unlike the documents examined in Chapter 3, these are not policy-making documents but policy-implementation material. Their purpose is to summarise the main values for which the EU stands, the way the EU works and the benefits that the EU has brought and continues to bring to its citizens.

Despite the fact that both sources verge on the edge of propaganda, particularly The EU in 12 Lessons¹², they nevertheless follow the concept of the "main thread" of core values proposed in the documents examined in Chapter 3, and go on to provide concrete examples of areas where the EU has been or will be proactive in relation to these three core values. After reviewing these sources and juxtaposing their content to the topics identified during the trial coding of the websites' homepages, it became possible to compose a more comprehensive list of areas of

action, under the categories of politics, economy and society, which allowed for accurate classification of all the content found on the EUROPA, EU@UN and EURUNION homepages. These are presented in the table below.

Table 4.2: Phase 2 of defining Coding values for the content found in EUROPA, EU@UN and EURUNION homepages, adapted from Table 3.1, Chapter 3.

Peace	Democracy	Prosperity	
1. The EU's role in the world: EU Common Foreign and Security Policy/ Safety and security/ Rule of law- EU external	2. Main ideas the EU stands for, including democracy and the rule of law 3. How the EU works/ Internal politics/ Relations among member-states/ Enlargement		Politics: 3 thematic areas
1. Trade/ development- EU external 2. Environment- EU external 3. Financial aid- EU external		4. The Euro 5. Transport issues within the EU 6. Trade/ development- EU internal 7. Environment- EU internal 8. Financial aid- EU internal	Economy: 8 thematic areas
	1. Freedom of movement/ Travelling in the EU 2. Volunteering/ Social solidarity 3. Language issues	4. Employment issues, including creating new jobs/fighting unemployment and social security issues 5. Health 6. Education 7. Culture/ A sense of belonging/ A European identity 8. Science-Research	Society: 8 thematic areas

The final list of the combined public communication and content coding values is presented in Tables VI, VII and VIII in Annex 2. When the main text of a webpage fell under more than one of the thematic areas defined above, it was coded several times under all the relevant public communication-content values¹³.

Further coding values were needed in order to determine whether another of the criteria for successful public communication (that of moving beyond intellectual/ specialised forms of communication and reaching a wider audience) was being met. For this reason, the main text found on each webpage was classified as using either “formal” or “informal/everyday” language¹⁴. All official documentation, including all legal documents, official press releases and announcements, was coded as “formal”. Similarly, any texts containing institutional jargon, without further explanatory phrases/notes, were classified as “formal”. Texts written for publication on the specific websites, without containing legal or institutional jargon, were coded as “informal/everyday language” texts. In addition to that, in line with the aim of the EU Information and Communication documents examined in the Chapter 3, to explain to the public what the EU is and what it does, text was coded according to whether it provided only information on an issue without any accompanying explanatory text or notes (informational content); or it focused primarily on analysis of a topic (analytical content); or both¹⁵.

The third main issue under investigation is the facilitation of public dialogue through these websites. In order to assess the degree to which interaction between the public and EU officials is facilitated on the three EU websites, all webpages linked to the websites’ homepage here were further coded according to the communication opportunities they offer to the visitors. Three main types of online communication were identified, namely email, online discussion/forum and online real-time communication with officials. Webpages were thus classified under eight categories, according to whether they provided links to one, several, all or none of the above types of communication¹⁶. Additionally, the webpages which provided the users with links to an online discussion/forum were further analysed, in order to identify the types of discussion topics covered on that forum. The coding also aimed to provide an insight of the actual participation of European citizens in debates regarding European issues, with regard to the numbers of participants other than EU officials, and degree of interaction amongst them¹⁷.

4.1.3 Descriptive statistical analysis

For the coding and processing of the data, the software applications SPSS and Microsoft Excel were used. The resulting coded data and the statistical analysis performed were divided in two data sets.

Data Set 1 covers the variables 1-64 presented on Tables V-IX in Annex 3. These variables include the website on which each link was found, the date that the coding took place and the different types of public communication, topics, text and content that were found on each of the webpages linked to the three websites' homepages. In order to identify any correlation between these variables, the following descriptive statistical tests were carried out:

a) Cross-tabulation and chi-square test of the website and type of public communication and topics variables, aiming to determine which type of public communication and topics occurred on each website as well as whether the variables of website and type of public communication are independent;

b) Cross-tabulation and chi-square test of the website and interactive communication variables, aiming to identify possible relation between the websites under examination and the interactive communication provided on each website;

c) Cross-tabulation and chi-square test of the text and the public communication occurring on each website, intending to determine the extent to which language is dependent on the type of public communication conducted and the website where the text appears; and

d) Cross-tabulation and chi-square test of the type of interactive communication and the type of public communication per website. These tests were carried out in order to investigate the relationship between the types of interactive communication and public communication and the website on which they appear.

Data Set 2 covers the variables 1A-8A presented on Table X in Annex 3. These variables were used to map the process of online interactive communication taking place in the fora found on the three EU websites during the coding period. The variables include the topics

covered in the online discussions, the number of participants per topic and day, as well as the official input. The data was analysed in the following ways:

a) Frequency tables of topics and number of participants per discussion topic, which gave an overview of the topics favoured by each website. Cross-tabulation and chi-square tests of topics and number of participants per website was also carried out in order to identify a possible relation between these variables;

b) Cross-tabulation and chi-square test of the topic and official input per website, aiming to identify a possible relation between the topic/s of the online discussion/forum and the official contribution to that discussion; and

c) Descriptive statistics of the number of participants on each online discussion/forum, the number of comments per topic and the number of responses aimed at other participants of the online discussion.

4.2 Findings

The results indicate that all the three selected websites aim mainly towards a relationship-building public communication, although there are significant differences amongst them, regarding the types of topics covered on each website. In general, though, all contents adhered to the main thread of “peace-prosperity-democracy” outlined in the EU Information and Communication strategy documents. With reference to the theoretical model established in Chapters 1 and 2, the analysis of the websites produced no surprising results as far as the language used is concerned as, in the majority, the webpages analysed tended to move beyond intellectual forms of communication.

The surprise, both from a theoretical and policy-making point of view, came from the analysis of the interaction opportunities available on the three websites. The results show that while interactive communication in the form of email is almost always provided by all three websites, online discussions/ fora were scarcely available during the coding period. The figures are equally disappointing as far as the continuity of the online discussions is concerned. The few opportunities for online public dialogue available on EUROPA and EURUNION in 2004, disappeared altogether in

2005. Nevertheless, the constant increase on the number of participants in the websites' online fora in 2004 can be interpreted as encouraging, as far as the emerging European public sphere is concerned. The findings are presented below in two sections according to the two periods that the coding took place (2004 and 2005).

4.2.1 Coding period March-June 2004

During the period 13/03/2004 to 10/06/2004, **442** links were coded on the EUROPA homepage, **609** links on the EU@UN homepage and **979** links on the EURUNION homepage. Table 4.1 summarises the frequency with which each type of time-related public communication and category of topics was recorded on each website¹⁸.

As far as the type of public communication most frequently occurring on all three websites is concerned, the analysis of the data shows that relationship-building communication is favoured by all three websites. Looking at the three categories of content (politics, economy, society), a first difference in the issues covered on each of the three websites emerges: While most links classified under relationship-building public communication on the EU@UN and EURUNION homepages covered political issues, in the case of the EUROPA homepage, most links coded under the same type of public communication covered social issues.

At first glance, this is positive, as the overall predominance of social issues on the website's permanent links indicates that the Commission's proposed strategy of matching the messages to the public's priorities is being implemented on EUROPA. Social issues, and in particular employment and national pension schemes, always feature highly in Eurobarometer public opinion surveys, and are identified as sectors where the EU is perceived to have poor performance (Commission of the European Communities 2006e; Eurobarometer 2006b).

Table 4.3: Frequency of occurrence for type of public communication and category of topics per website in Year 1 (2004), Source: The author, Source of data: EUROPA, EU@UN, EURUNION.

Politics	Type of public communication								
	EUROPA			EU@UN			EURUNION		
	Reactive	Proactive	Relation-building	Reactive	Proactive	Relation-building	Reactive	Proactive	Relation-building
Political ideals the EU stands for	24	75	159	23	96	212	90	57	350
Relations between member states/ How the EU works	35	123	296	65	118	198	177	321	358
External relations/ Foreign policy of the EU	51	73	119	137	288	434	243	408	635
Totals	110	271	574	225	502	844	510	786	1343
Economy	EUROPA			EU@UN			EURUNION		
	Reactive	Proactive	Relation-building	Reactive	Proactive	Relation-building	Reactive	Proactive	Relation-building
	Euro	4	61	130	12	14	24	14	33
Transport/ Internal	18	53	83	12	25	43	24	91	150
Trade/ Development/ Internal	30	91	180	14	28	24	81	122	231
Environment/ Internal	17	68	119	15	29	50	13	97	150
Financial Aid/Internal	5	29	101	12	13	12	0	42	32
Trade/ Development/ External	8	46	91	17	85	122	98	153	196
Environment/ External	3	30	66	16	71	99	1	55	91
Financial Aid/ External	17	51	130	35	140	174	27	85	123
Totals	102	429	900	133	405	648	278	678	1079
Society	EUROPA			EU@UN			EURUNION		
	Reactive	Proactive	Relation-building	Reactive	Proactive	Relation-building	Reactive	Proactive	Relation-building
	Work-related issues	0	47	200	13	16	24	1	28
Health-related issues	19	56	173	18	39	58	33	151	173
Volunteering/ Solidarity issues	2	35	113	14	51	45	2	26	22
Education	1	32	163	12	18	24	0	13	53
Culture	2	38	119	12	29	36	1	24	79
Science/ Research	0	7	139	12	13	12	1	63	94
Language-related issues	0	37	83	12	12	12	3	0	23
Travelling in EU	0	22	71	12	12	12	0	2	31
Totals	24	274	1061	105	190	223	41	307	549

Yellow highlight: Highlights the sub-category covered most per category of topics and type of public communication

Green highlight: Highlights the category of topics (politics, economy or society) covered most per type of public communication

However, when looking across all the sub-categories of content under relationship-building public communication, the single most frequently covered sub-category of topics on EUROPA is that of relations between member-states/how the EU works (**Politics** category), and not a sub-category of social issues, as would be expected. This also distinguishes the EUROPA website from the other two websites under scrutiny, where there is consistency between the single most frequently covered sub-category (External relations and foreign policy of the EU) and overall thematic category (Politics) under relationship-building public communication.

This would not be a problem for EUROPA (on the contrary, it could even be considered as an indication of a more balanced content) if it was not for the fact that the thematic category of Politics or one of its sub-categories predominate on this website across all three types of public communication. More specifically, politics, and in particular external relations/ foreign policy of the EU, is the most frequently occurring category on EUROPA under reactive public communication. Similarly, although most proactive public communication links found on the EUROPA homepage fall under the category of **Economy**, the single most frequently occurring sub-category of content under this category of public communication is that of political relations between Member-States/ how the EU works, with internal trade and development (Economy) coming second across all sub-categories of content.

As a consequence, despite the high number of social issues recorded under relationship-building public communication (42.5% of all relationship-building links), EUROPA focuses mainly on internal political issues and institutional procedures etc, since out of a total of 442 links recorded on the homepage in Year 1, 296 were classified under that particular content category. Likewise, in the case of proactive public communication, while the overall emphasis is given on Economy, a category with direct connotations to the concept of prosperity, the message is somewhat lost, since the sub-category with the greater presence on the homepage is again that of internal EU politics and institutional procedures. In other words, political issues prevail on the

EUROPA website, even if its homepage appears to have a balanced content.

With regard to the other two websites, Politics is also the most frequently covered category when it comes to reactive and proactive public communication, with the two websites consistently offering more coverage on issues regarding the EU's external relations/ foreign policy. Economy topics come second in frequency of occurrence across all three types of public communication. However, the focus is on different sub-categories of topics: EU@UN hosts links mainly regarding financial aid that the EU provides to third countries while the EURUNION homepage covers mainly issues regarding EU trade policies towards and agreements with third countries.

When it comes to social issues, although it is the category least favoured by EU@UN and EURUNION, we find that there is one sub-category of topics, that regarding health issues, which receives by far the most coverage of all social issues on these two websites. Health issues are also the most frequently recorded social issues on the EUROPA homepage, in terms of reactive and proactive public communication.

As far as the EURUNION website is concerned, the data from Year 1 confirms the expectations that this is one of the EU's external public communication websites. As such, the EURUNION website should aim to reach as wide an American audience as possible and create a positive image of the EU amongst the American public. It would therefore be expected to have a balanced content but also cater for the interests of the public in that particular country. This could explain why the website puts most of its emphasis on issues regarding external relations/ foreign policy of the EU, with a particular focus on issues that affect the US directly or indirectly, but at the same time topics regarding the EU's trade with third countries, and in particular the US, receive high coverage too. Even in cases where health matters are covered, there is almost always reference to financial implications or repercussions that the EU's actions regarding those health issues may have on the US economy/businesses.

Nevertheless, it was not possible to confirm that the focus on these specific topics was a direct result of the Delegation responding to the

public's needs or even a specialised niche audience. The EU officials interviewed on this matter admitted that a relevant public survey had not taken place on a large scale¹⁹. They did stress, though, that the feedback they received from individual users of the website was positive²⁰. Furthermore, it was confirmed through the interviews that monthly and quarterly statistical measurements on the numbers of visitors and webpage hits are carried out, although the interviewees declined to divulge any of that data.

On the other hand, the control website used in this study, EU@UN, confirmed its role as a specialised website, aimed at a niche audience (UN diplomats, third-country representatives and/or member-states' diplomats) since most of the links found on its homepage concern the EU's relations with third countries. At the same time, the website underlines the EU's importance as an international guarantor of welfare, by favouring coverage of issues regarding the EU's financial aid towards third countries and its role in addressing international health crises such the AIDS and SARS epidemics.

As far as the text (i.e. the language) used by the three websites is concerned, the analysis of the data indicates that all three websites favour informal/every-day language and have most of their contents written in a way that can appeal to as broad an audience as possible, as Figure 4.10 illustrates. The highest percentage of every-day/informal language on all three websites is recorded in links that fall under the category of relationship-building public communication, as would be expected.

So far, the data shows that, overall, the three EU websites under examination comply with two of the criteria for successful public communication identified in Chapter 1, i.e. they are trying to increase awareness of what the EU is and what it does as well as to move beyond intellectual forms of communication and appeal to a wider public, even in the case of a specialised website such the EU@UN. Yet fulfilling these criteria alone does not address the wider issue of vertical Europeanisation of the public sphere. In other words, telling the public how good the EU is in simple every-day language is not sufficient to initiate and maintain a direct public dialogue between the European public and the EU

institutions. Furthermore, one of the core advantages of online public communication is that it can deploy the Internet's key characteristic of unmediated interaction, bypassing national media and overcoming geographical boundaries. So, the question that follows is whether or not interaction and online public dialogue between EU officials/institutions and the public are facilitated on these three websites.

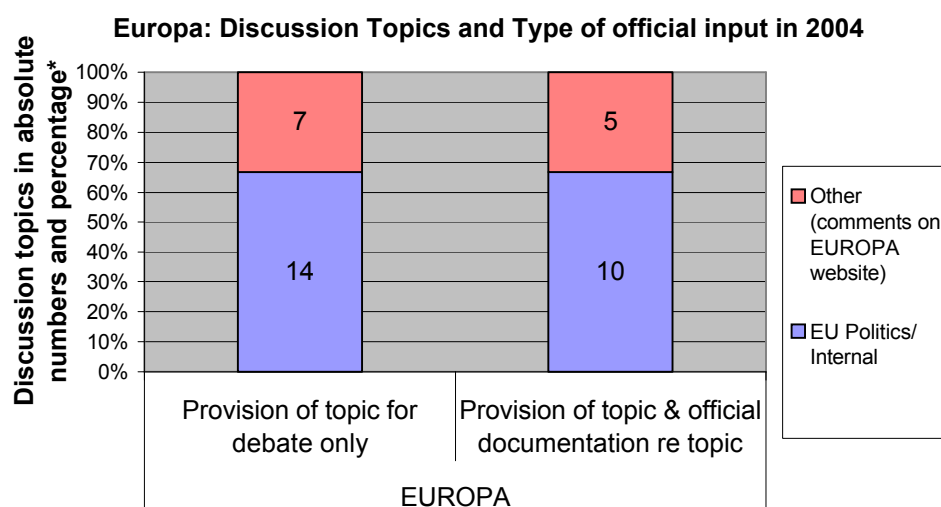
Unfortunately, the answer to this is negative. When it comes to interactive communication, the analysis of the data shows that all three websites provided email addresses in almost all the webpages linked to their homepage. However, online discussions/ fora, which would provide the basis for an emerging European public sphere, are scarce. The topics covered in those few online discussions/ fora were classified under the umbrella of relationship-building public communication. The fora themselves have also been classified as relationship-building tools, as they encourage people to discuss the long-term effects that the European Union may have on the lives of the European citizens.

Of the three websites only EUROPA provided a permanent forum for discussion, which was also combined with real-time online communication with EU officials occasionally. EURUNION briefly provided a link to an online discussion regarding various topics, but that only amounted to 1% of all the webpages linked to its homepage coded throughout the entire 2004 period. The EU@UN website initially appeared to have had the highest percentage of discussion/ fora and real-time online communication with EU officials linked to its homepage. However, a closer look at the data revealed that this was only because this website provides a permanent link to the EUROPA homepage, where this category of interactive communication can be found. For this reason, the EU@UN website was excluded from the further analysis of the data concerning official EU online fora.

This brings us to the findings from the analysis of Data Set 2, which maps the type of discussion available on the EUROPA and EURUNION websites: This second data set revealed a significant difference between not only the discussion topics found on the two websites, but also the official input and the number of participants in each discussion topic.

EUROPA's "Discussion Corner" was a permanent link on its homepage and the data analysis shows that throughout the monitoring period in 2004 the discussion topics remained the same. The areas covered by these online discussions regarded the European Union's internal politics (in particular the Constitutional Treaty) and the EUROPA website itself (where discussants were asked to comment on the quality of the website and/ or on the changes carried out on its webpages).

The discussion topics were always provided by the webpage (i.e. the EU officials) and in most cases there was sufficient official documentation and further links related to the discussion topic. There were also real-time debates occasionally taking place on the forum's webpage, but as these had taken place before the coding commenced, they were not included in the coded data. Finally, there were no EU officials found to be participating in any way in the ongoing debates.

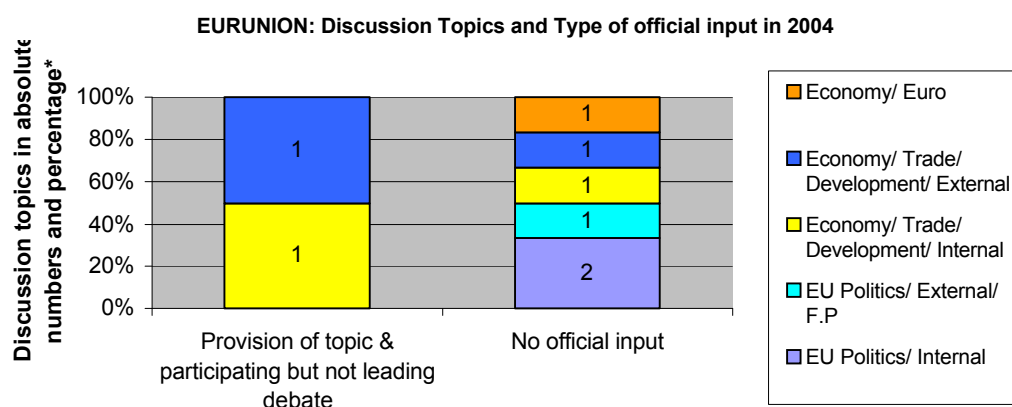


*percentage based on the total number of discussion topics found on the website

Figure 4.1: EUROPA Discussion topics and type of official input in 2004, Source: The author, Data Source: EUROPA.

In contrast to EUROPA, the links to online discussions/ fora found on EURUNION's homepage were sporadic and temporary, covering a wider variety of issues, namely the EU's internal and external politics, the Euro and trade and development issues both within the EU and between the EU and third countries, as Figure 4.2 illustrates below. The analysis of the data indicates that the emphasis of the fora linked to the EURUNION

homepage is on economy, with 33.3% of all the discussion topics covering Trade and Development within the EU and another 33.3% covering trade and development issues between the EU and third countries.



*percentage based on the total number of discussion topics found on the website

Figure 4.2: EURUNION Discussion topics and type of official input in 2004, Source: The author, Data source: EURUNION.

Furthermore, again contrary to the findings in the EUROPA website, the discussion topics linked to the EURUNION homepage were not determined by the EU officials but each participant could contribute to the discussion with a topic of their choice (although the overall framework of discussion was outlined by the EU officials responsible for the website). The discussions in this case had more the form of Q&A (question and answer) session, with EU officials providing a response/ an official point of view on 25% of the topics. However, there was no email provided on the discussion webpages linked to the EURUNION homepage, unlike the discussion webpages linked to the EUROPA website, where interactive communication in the form of email was permanently available.

The analysis of Data Set 2 indicates a further difference between the two websites with regard to the number of participants, as Figures 4.3, 4.4 and 4.5 illustrate. EUROPA reached a total of 2343 contributions to the political discussions regarding the EU Constitutional Treaty found on its designated webpage on week 12 of the monitoring, while the participants in the forum found on EURUNION website on the second week of the forum's operation amounted to only eleven.

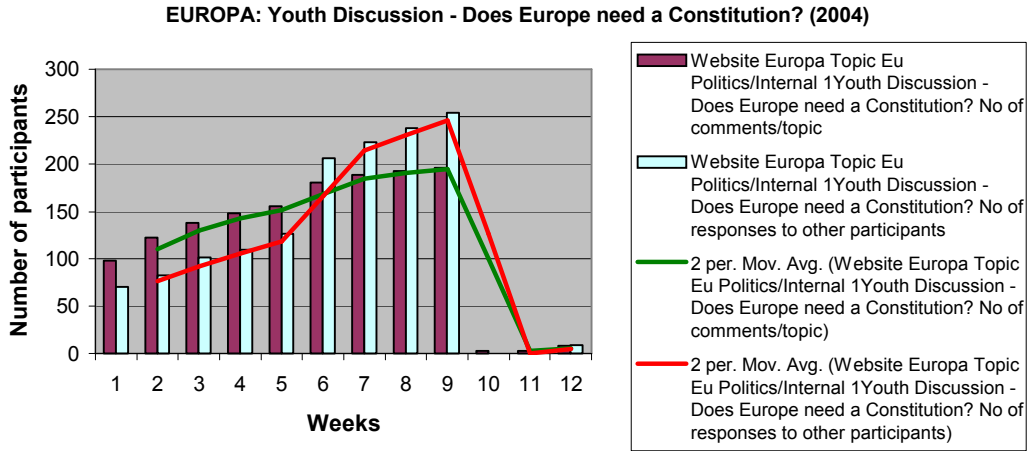


Figure 4.3: EUROPA Youth Discussion- Does Europe need a Constitution? (2004),
 Source: The author, Data source: EUROPA²¹.

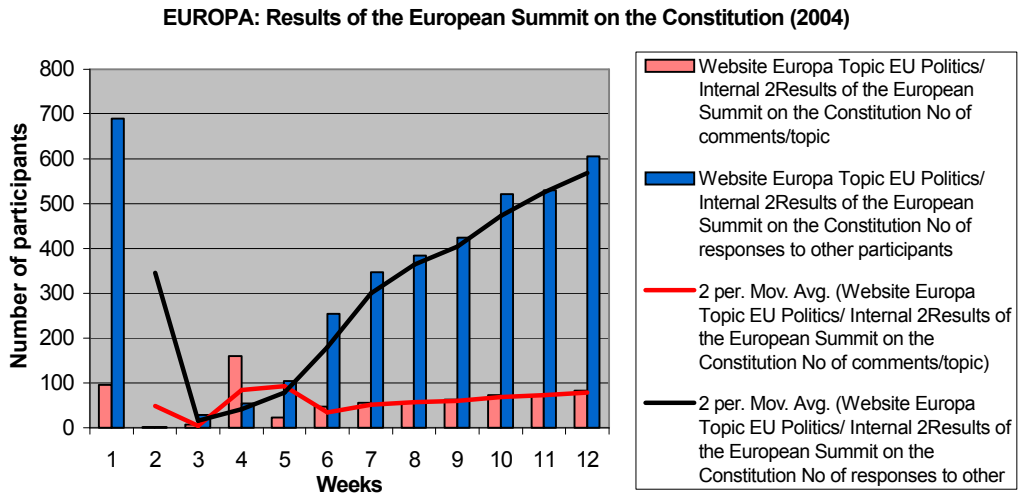


Figure 4.4: EUROPA- Results of the European Summit on the Constitution, Source:
 The author, Data source: EUROPA²².

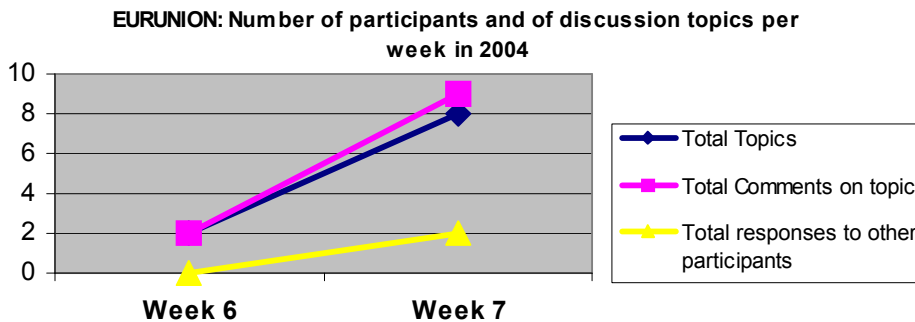


Figure 4.5: EURUNION- Number of participants and of discussion topics per week in 2004, Source: The author, Data source: EURUNION.

However disappointing the numbers of participants on both websites may be, the data analysis reveals an encouraging tendency, as far as the emerging European public sphere is concerned: The number of participants other than EU officials steadily increased over the 12-week period of the websites' monitoring. In the case of the EUROPA forum, there was a steady increase of approximately 3.7% in the number of comments found on the topic and 14% in the number of answers to other participants. The debate regarding the Constitution, in particular, generated a much higher number of participants' responses to comments already posted on the webpage than the number of original comments to the discussion topic, as Figure 4.3 shows. In other words, the data showed a genuine public dialogue process emerging among European citizens online. In the case of the EURUNION forum, despite it being available temporarily and therefore having only two days of data available on it, the increase in the number of participants was even more dramatic although the numbers can in no way be considered satisfactory, as Figure 4.5 illustrates.

On the whole, it is evident from the coded data that the interactive part of the EU's Information and Communication strategy was poorly implemented in 2004. This reflects the tendency observed in the 2001-2004 EU Information and Communication documents to put emphasis on the informational rather than the communicational aspect of the strategy. From a theoretical point of view, this means that in 2004 the EU's online public communication failed to fulfil a key aim of successful public communication, identified in the normative model discussed in Chapter 1- to engage people with the EU/ in the debate of EU affairs²³.

When asked about the disappointing number of opportunities for online public dialogue found on EUROPA and EURUNION, all Commission officials interviewed referred to the ongoing re-structuring process within the Commission and DG Communication as the main factor impeding the full deployment of the Internet in the EU's public communication strategy. The organisation of the Directorate-General for Press and Communication (nowadays known as Directorate-General Communication and under the authority of the Commission President

Barroso and Vice-President and Communication Commissioner Wallström) underwent four significant structural changes between 2001 and 2006 and at some point it was even functioning without a Head of DG, albeit for a short period of time. The interviews also revealed that the Commission officials have low expectations as far as the public's participation in the official EU online fora is concerned: The low numbers of participants in the FUTURUM forum in 2004 were seen as a result of the public's general indifference towards politics and as proof that the Internet is a public dialogue tool for the EU-informed elites only²⁴.

The following section presents the results from the second coding period (2005), during which the lack of consistency between the EU's Information and Communication policy and its online implementation became even more evident.

4.2.2 Coding period May- July 2005

During the period 03/05/2005-20/07/2005, there were **372** links found and coded on the EUROPA homepage, **658** on the EU@UN homepage and **1011** on the EURUNION one. The following table summarises the frequency with which each time-related type of public communication and thematic category (Politics, Economy and Society) occurred.

Table 4.4: Frequency of occurrence for type of public communication and category of topics per website in Year 2 (2005), Source: The author, Source of data: EUROPA, EU@UN, EURUNION.

Politics	Type of public communication								
	EUROPA			EU@UN			EURUNION		
	Reactive	Proactive	Relation-building	Reactive	Proactive	Relation-building	Reactive	Proactive	Relation-building
Political ideals the EU stands for	26	60	87	47	89	194	45	101	313
Relations between member states/ How the EU works	40	98	207	60	102	168	84	142	355
External relations/Foreign policy of the EU	36	73	72	188	247	388	200	332	400
Totals	102	231	366	295	438	750	329	575	1068
Economy	EUROPA			EU@UN			EURUNION		
	Reactive	Proactive	Relation-building	Reactive	Proactive	Relation-building	Reactive	Proactive	Relation-building
	Euro	5	32	85	12	24	12	11	13
Transport/ Internal	3	42	38	13	25	24	33	66	60
Trade/ Development/ Internal	16	50	122	19	14	12	44	54	104
Environment/ Internal	8	41	58	13	37	6	13	49	86
Financial Aid/ Internal	12	18	57	14	13	12	15	18	38
Trade/ Development/ External	6	35	45	33	90	133	116	150	217
Environment/ External	1	27	25	22	74	84	12	58	59
Financial Aid/ External	9	42	44	58	133	169	36	68	86
Totals	60	287	364	174	420	452	280	466	731
Society	EUROPA			EU@UN			EURUNION		
	Reactive	Proactive	Relation-building	Reactive	Proactive	Relation-building	Reactive	Proactive	Relation-building
	Work-related issues	0	22	147	15	14	13	11	25
Health-related issues	19	24	62	20	27	36	11	24	89
Volunteering/ Solidarity issues	2	19	48	14	48	49	17	24	23
Education	1	29	92	16	13	12	10	23	65
Culture	2	16	86	14	24	24	12	17	67
Science/ Research	0	36	80	14	13	12	19	54	78
Language-related issues	0	0	36	12	12	12	10	10	27
Travelling in EU	0	5	48	12	12	12	10	13	40
Totals	24	151	579	127	163	170	100	190	465

: Highlights the sub-category covered most per category of topics and type of public communication

: Highlights the category of topics (politics, economy or society) covered most per type of public communication

Similarly to the data collected in Year 1 (2004), the data in Year 2 (2005) shows that relationship-building communication is favoured by all three websites, as Figure 4.6 illustrates below.

The sub-categories of content covered mostly under the umbrella of relationship-building public communication remain different for each website, as Figure 4.7 illustrates: EUROPA favoured issues regarding internal EU politics and relations between Member-States with second in coverage work-related issues, such as employment, workers' mobility within the EU, pensions, insurance and development through work. In this respect, the inconsistency recorded in EUROPA's case in Year 1, when one single sub-category of politics (relations between Member-States/ how the EU works) received more coverage than any of the social or economic issues, continues in 2005. On the other hand, EU@UN and EURUNION continued to cover mainly topics related to the External relations and foreign policy of the EU, with second favourite category of issues being the EU's trade relations with third countries for EURUNION, and financial aid towards third countries for EU@UN.

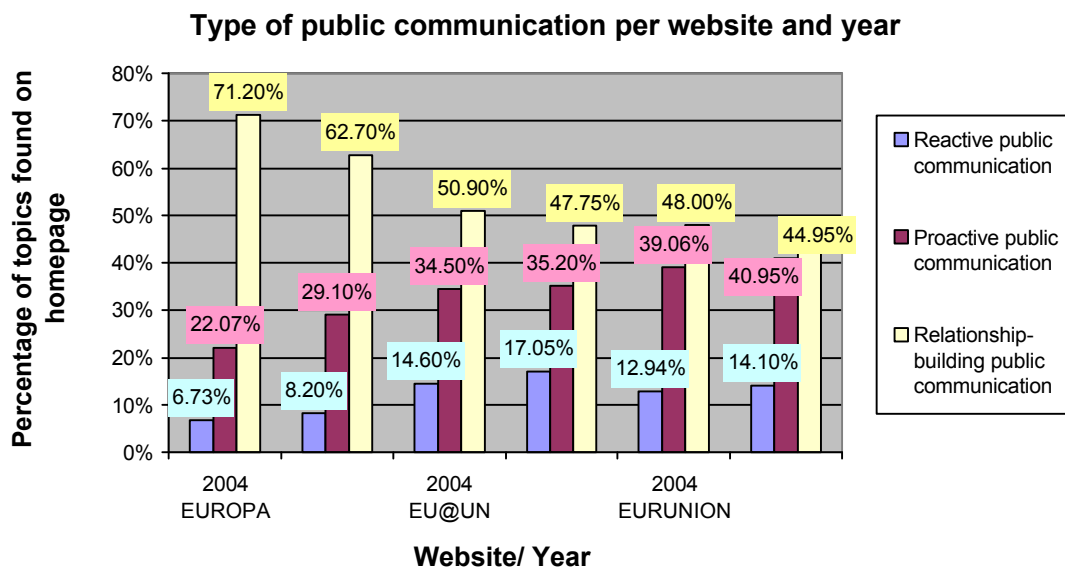


Figure 4.6: Public communication in 2004 and 2005 per website, Source: The author, Data Sources: EUROPA, EU@UN, EURUNION.

When it comes to the links where proactive public communication is conducted, EUROPA favours economic issues, while the other two

websites consistently favour political issues, as can be seen in Figure 4.8. In particular, the links covering economic issues on EUROPA mainly concern trade and development within the EU, with transport and environment second and third most covered topics in 2005. In contrast, the links regarding economic issues found on the EU@UN homepage primarily concerned financial aid to third countries, with second-favoured topics those concerning trade and development relations with third countries.

Trade and development relations between the EU and the US as well as other third countries were the most covered issues on EURUNION as well. Although the number of links found on EURUNION's homepage was significantly reduced in the second half of the monitoring period in 2005, as a result of changes in the structure of the website, trade and development relations between the EU and the US by far outnumbered any other economic issues, both in the case of proactive and reactive public communication, as illustrated in Figures 4.7 and 4.8. They were also most favoured topics for this website in 2005, as far as relationship-building public communication is concerned, while in 2004 this category was second-favourite only to trade and development issues within the EU, as Figure 4.7 illustrates.

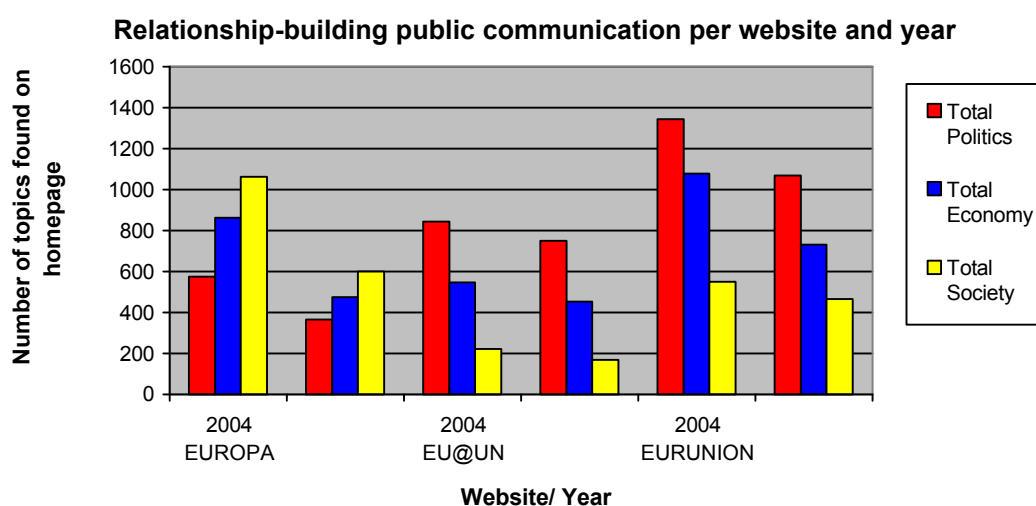


Figure 4.7: Relationship-building public communication per website and year,
Source: The author, Data Sources: EUROPA, EU@UN, EURUNION.

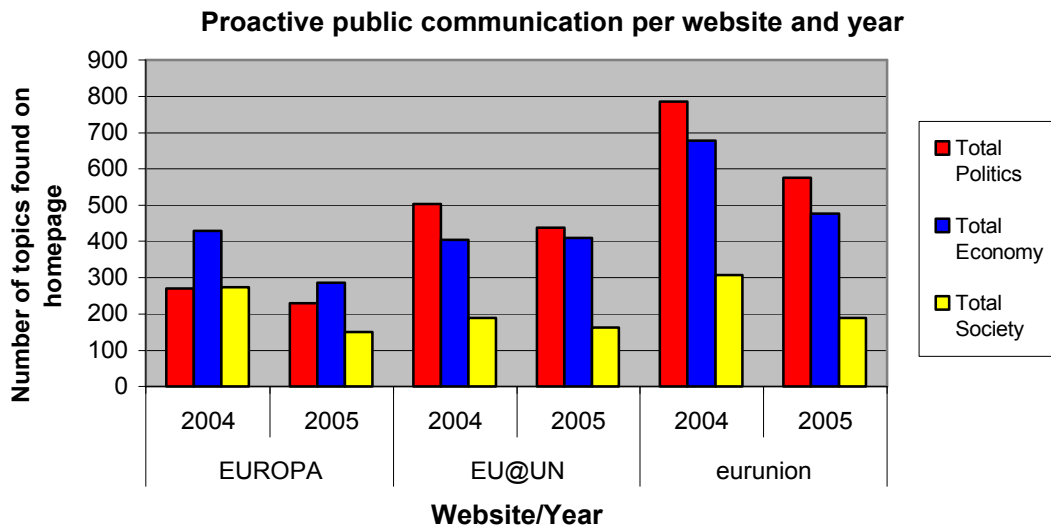


Figure 4.8: Proactive public communication per website and year, Source: The author, Data Sources: EUROPA, EU@UN, EURUNION.

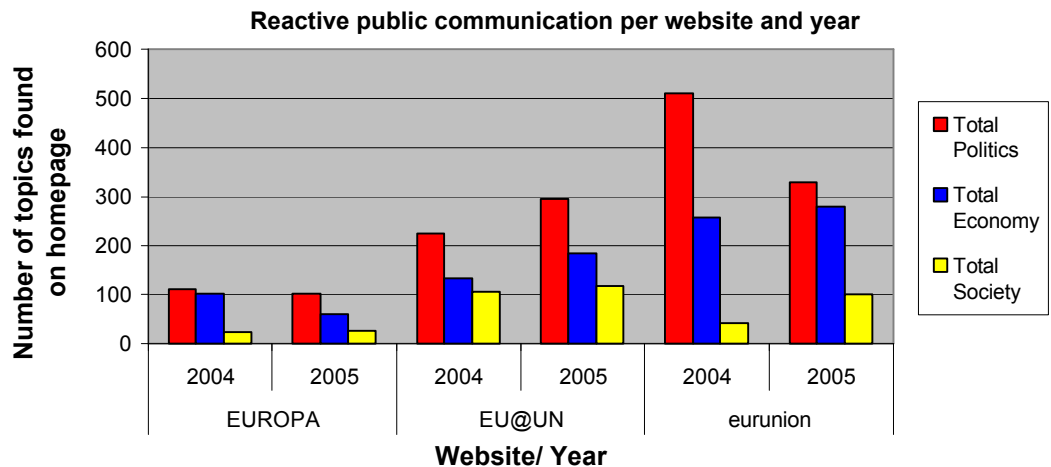


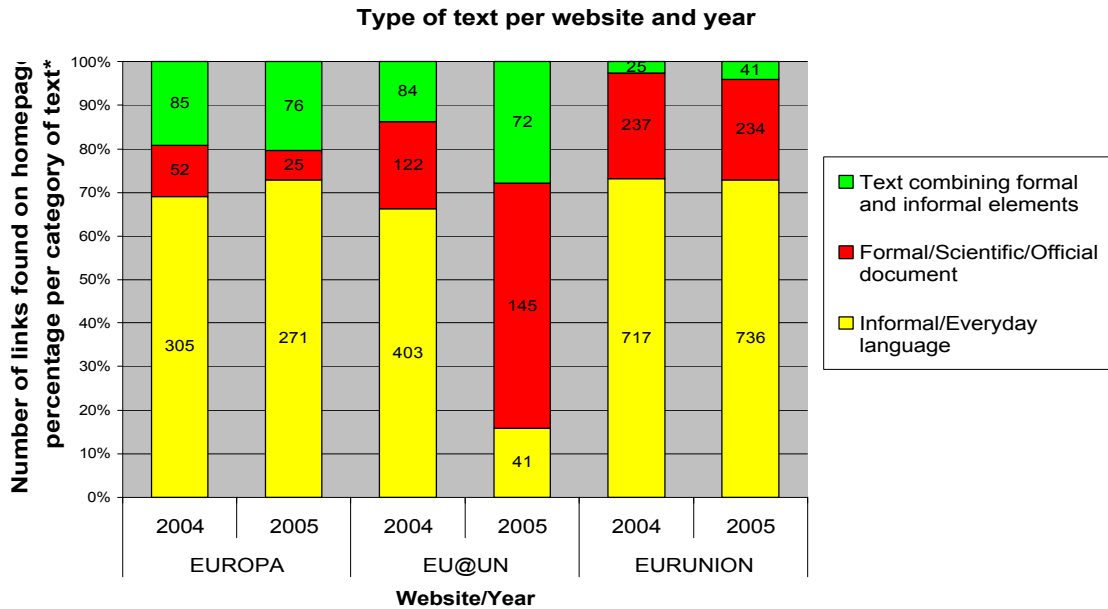
Figure 4.9: Reactive public communication per website and year, Source: The author, Data Sources: EUROPA, EU@UN, EURUNION.

The most notable shift in the choice of topics in 2005 concerns the thematic category of social issues. While in 2004 health topics were the social issues most favoured by EU@UN and EURUNION, in 2005 health issues are preferred by EUROPA and EU@UN, and only as issues of temporary coverage (reactive public communication). Instead, science and research-related links are those that appear more frequently on EUROPA and EURUNION, under the umbrella of proactive public communication for

the first, and reactive and proactive public communication for the latter²⁵.

On the EU@UN website, links to topics classified under the Volunteering/Solidarity category are the social issues most frequently recorded, under proactive and relationship-building public communication. On closer inspection, these links covered EU actions in relation to major natural disasters (earthquake and tsunami in South-East Asia in December 2004), political and humanitarian crises around the world and/or their aftermaths (i.e. in Sudan and Afghanistan), and the terrorist attacks in London on 7 July 2005. This indicates that EU@UN not only remained up-to-date with the international socio-political developments, but offered coverage on issues which featured highly in the agendas of conventional and electronic media worldwide.

As far as the text (i.e. the language) used by the three websites, the analysis of the data indicates that EUROPA and EURUNION continued to favour informal/every-day language and have most of their contents written in a way that can appeal to as broad an audience as possible, as Figure 4.10 illustrates. On the other hand, EU@UN favoured official documentation more in 2005, i.e. a lot of the links contained official declarations, reports and announcements, which had not been written specifically for that website and also did not contain adequate information or explanations regarding the issues concerned. Therefore, it was not always easy or possible even to put the official documents into context, unless further research was performed either on the EU@UN website or other sources. This shift in style of language, however, is not the result of a change in the aims of the communication policy of this website. A closer look reveals that the number of links containing formal/ technical text remained more or less the same compared to 2004. What changed was the number of links containing text with informal language, written with a wider audience in mind, which decreased dramatically in Year 2. This reflects an overall decrease in the number of links found on the homepage of the particular website.



*percentage is based on the actual total number of links found on each homepage per year

Figure 4.10: Type of text per website and year, Source: The author, Data Sources: EUROPA, EU@UN, EURUNION.

The highest percentage of every-day/informal language in all three websites was recorded in links that fall under the category of relationship-building public communication (65% for EUROPA, 54% for EU@UN, 81% for EURUNION).

So far, the results of the coding from Year 2 have remained consistent with the results from Year 1 overall, insofar as the types of public communication and thematic categories are concerned. The surprise in the Year 2 data lies elsewhere: When it comes to interactive communication, Figure 4.11 shows that there were no active online discussions/forums recorded in Year 2, although there were still links to online discussions/forums that had been available in the previous year. Of course all three websites continued to provide email addresses in almost all the webpages linked to their homepage.

This is particularly peculiar, as the coding in Year 2 took place during a period of rigorous public political debate in several EU Member-States with regard to the ratification of the Constitutional Treaty. The links leading to EUROPA's FUTURUM webpage and discussion forum featured permanently on its homepage and the FUTURUM website had been

updated in order to be in sync with the local/regional/national debates regarding the Constitutional Treaty. Nevertheless, the online debate coded in 2004 regarding the Treaty was no longer active. This was at a time when the interest of EU citizens regarding the issue would have been greater, and thus the conditions for a European public debate online to be established would have been more fertile.

When put to the EU officials who were interviewed for the purposes of this research project, the suspension of the FUTURUM debates was justified as “necessary” and “appropriate” as there were offline debates taking place in the Member-States²⁶ and the new webpage Debate Europe (Commission of the European Communities 2006ba) was being prepared²⁷. Moreover, the replies of the interviewees reflected the official Commission line of the time, according to which it would provide all necessary facts and information regarding the Treaty but could in no way be seen to be actively involved in the debates, for fear of being accused of trying to influence national ratification procedures and of conducting propaganda (Wallström 2005)²⁸.

However, Debate Europe was not launched until March 2006, as part of the Plan D strategy, which resulted from the rejection of the Constitutional Treaty by the Dutch and French publics. In other words, Debate Europe was a reactive move of public communication, rather than a proactive one. After it was re-launched, in March 2006, the Debate Europe online forum reached 1 million hits within 4 months, while the contributions to the three parallel debate topics were 12,040 at the beginning of October 2006, a figure never seen before on an official EU online forum. The contributions are written in various languages, and often participants will reply to postings written in a language different from the one they are using.

The numbers of participants on the Debate Europe forum demonstrate that there is a public sphere online, debating EU issues, and that it is possible to host part of this debate in official EU websites, without the mediation of national offline media or the need for a pan-European language. Nevertheless, the question remains of the extent to which the public’s feedback will be incorporated in the decision-making process in

the future.

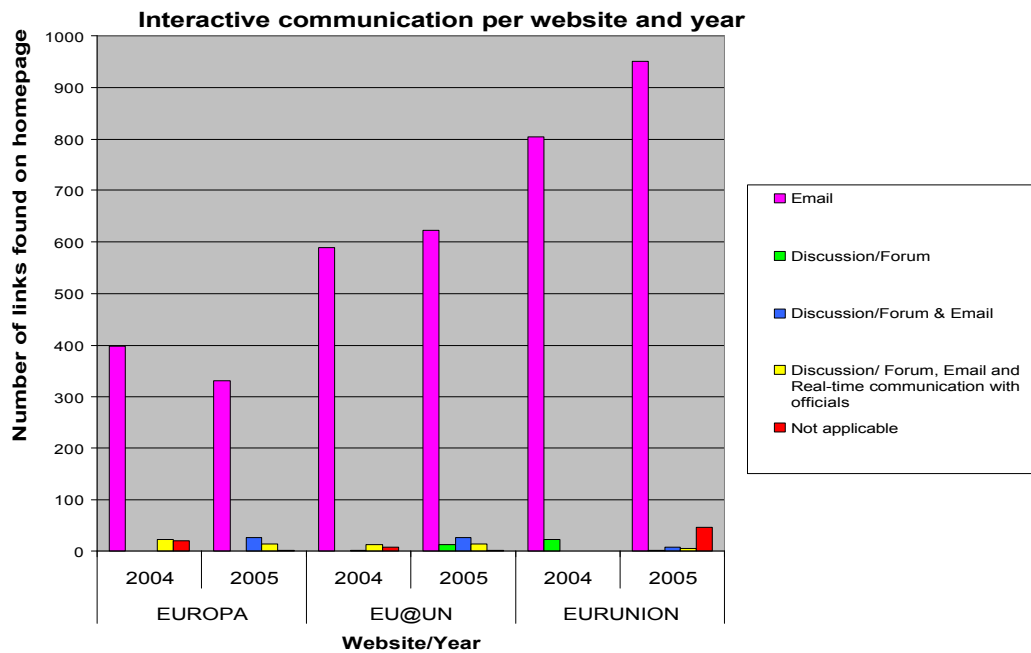


Figure 4.11: Interactive communication per website and year, Source: the author, Data Sources: EUROPA, EU@UN, EURUNION.

4.3 Conclusion

As far as the aims of the Commission’s EU Information and Communication strategy are concerned, the choice of topics and information provided on the three websites is not always in accordance with its recommendations. Revisiting the table used in Chapter 3 to define the coding values for the three EU websites²⁹, it becomes obvious that the topics pointing at peace and prosperity are generally more favoured by all the three websites’ homepages than those falling under the umbrella of democracy.

The following table is a reviewed version of Table 3.1, which summarises the main themes and values of the EU’s public communication strategy used to code the three EU websites’ content. The themes and topics that appear in bold received most coverage on the three websites examined in the present chapter.

Table 4.5: EU core values and related thematic areas as these appeared on EUROPA, EU@UN and EURUNION, adapted from Table 3.1, Chapter 3.

Peace	Democracy	Prosperity	
1. The EU's role in the world: EU Common Foreign and Security Policy/ Safety and security/ Rule of law- EU external	2. Main ideas the EU stands for, including democracy and the rule of law 3. How the EU works/ Internal politics/ Relations among member-states/ Enlargement		Politics: 3 thematic areas
1. Trade/ development- EU external 2. <i>Environment-</i> EU external 3. Financial aid- EU external		4. The Euro 5. Transport issues within the EU 6. Trade/ development- EU internal 7. <i>Environment-</i> EU internal 8. Financial aid- EU internal	Economy: 8 thematic areas
	1. <i>Freedom of movement/</i> Travelling in the EU 2. Volunteering/ Social solidarity 3. Language issues	4. Employment issues, including creating new jobs/fighting unemployment and social security issues 5. Health 6. Education 7. <i>Culture/ A sense of belonging/ A European identity</i> 8. Science-Research	Society: 8 thematic areas

It is clear from the above that the concept of the core values of peace, prosperity and democracy, upon which the Commission has intended to base the EU's Information and Communication strategy, is being partially implemented. As a consequence, the figure used in Chapter 3³⁰ to illustrate the balanced concept of EU core values no longer reflects the EU's Information and Communication strategy, as this was implemented on the three websites examined here during the period 2004-2005. As shown below, peace and prosperity appear to be the main focus of the EU's online public communication strategy, whilst democracy, as a core EU value and a key issue, is more a point of reference rather than a

driving factor of the EU's public communication strategy. This means that although a lot of the websites' material coded during the monitoring period contained references to the value of democracy and democratic procedures, no action was really taken to enhance these democratic procedures by enabling citizens' online participation in the decision-making process and/or consistently encouraging public debate regarding the EU online.

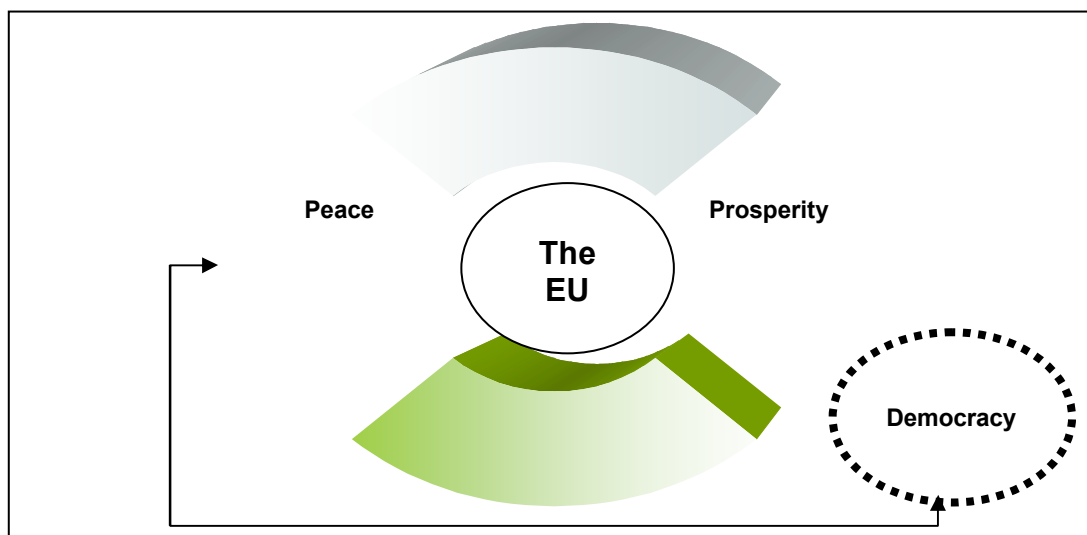


Figure 4.12: Online implementation of “The circle of prosperity”, the three key ideas underlining the EU’s Information and Communication strategy, adapted from Figure 3.2, Chapter 3.

On the other hand, the Commission’s aim to educate the European public with regard to the role and achievements of the EU was generally met by the three websites examined, as was (for the most part) the policy of using easily understood, everyday language, which does not alienate less interested or educated audiences.

Further differences which were recorded among the three websites in terms of type content and format/ presentation of the information can also be partly attributed to their targeting different types of audiences. Furthermore, they are an indication that the Commission’s Information and Communication policy is perceived slightly differently by the Commission and the EU Delegations: EUROPA, which is the responsibility of the Commission, reflects the aims of the Information and Communication strategy much more clearly than EURUNION, which is the responsibility of the EU Delegation in the US, or EU@UN, which is under the collective

responsibility of all the Member-States Delegations and the EU Delegation at the United Nations. Much as the Commission emphasises the importance of the EU “speaking with one voice” and of achieving maximum coherence in the Information and Communication policy of all the EU Institutions, it is clear that it allows for some freedom to be exercised by the Delegations, when it comes to managing their websites. This freedom was obvious in the case of EURUNION in particular, which only fully conformed to the Commission’s Guidelines for Delegations’ Websites in mid-2005 (RELEX 1/5- Information and Communication/Directorate-General for External Relations/Commission of the European Communities 2006).

From a theoretical point of view, the 24-week mapping of the three websites has shown that all three websites focus on relationship-building public communication, which is crucial for the long-term establishment of the EU and what it represents in the minds of the EU citizens and foreign audiences alike, as discussed in Chapter 1. However, with regard to the three criteria that determine the success of public communication (understanding the target audience and proving relevance to it; interaction; and non-intellectual forms of communication) examined in Chapter 1, the analysis of the three websites shows that only the third criterion (moving beyond intellectual forms of communication) is met in full by all three websites.

As far as understanding the target audience and relating to it are concerned, only the EU@UN website fully fulfils its role as an external public communication, specialised website. EUROPA, which is meant to be the first and main EU point of contact online, only partially meets its role as a wide ranging EU portal, as its attempt to offer a balanced content that would appeal to as wide an audience as possible is not clearly communicated. With regard to EURUNION, which in theory targets a broader foreign audience than EU@UN, it is difficult to assess whether its focus on mainly trade and EU-US political relations appeals to a wide regional audience or only a niche, already well-informed public, since there has been no survey profiling the average visitor of EURUNION.

The third criterion, interaction, particularly important not only in

achieving a successful public communication strategy, but also in encouraging the emergence of a Habermasian public dialogue, as discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, were not really a priority for any of these three websites during the coding period. There were certainly enough opportunities for limited interaction, in the form of generic email addresses and online inquiry forms. Yet, the possibility of substantial interaction in the form of online public debate between the public and EU officials or amongst the members of the public was barely present and only on one of the websites.

Nevertheless, the constant increase in the number of participants in the few online debates found on EUROPA in 2004 can be interpreted as encouraging, as far as the emerging European public sphere is concerned. This is not only because of the increase in the overall number of participants, but mainly because the number of responses to other participants is overall far higher than the number of original comments posted on the discussion forum. In other words, not only was there a quantitative increase in participants but a qualitative increase was recorded too, in the sense that there was more on-going communication among participants- a fact which in turn indicates that there can be a public dialogue between European citizens emerging online.

Interaction, therefore, and the encouragement (or lack of it) of EU citizens to engage in a public dialogue regarding the EU is the issue where the EU's Information and Communication strategy and its online implementation were found to be inadequate during the systematic mapping of the three EU websites. Although the European Commission has clearly recognised the lack of interest among most Europeans towards the EU and has identified the Internet as one of the most important means through which participation and transparency can be encouraged, the data analysis indicates that this aim is not met to the full.

As mentioned above, this inconsistency between the Commission's Information and Communication strategy documents and their implementation, as far as interaction with the EU citizens is concerned, was attributed by the Commission officials interviewed for this project to practical reasons, e.g. the continuous re-structuring of the DG

Communication. The data from the analysis of the EU's public communication strategy documents and of three official EU websites supports the officials' view that this constant re-structuring process has had an impact on both the EU's public communication policy-making and policy-implementation processes, as it has caused lack of continuity and consistency in the approach of the EU's public communication strategy.

However, the interviews highlighted further underlying reasons for this inconsistency between policy and implementation as far as the facilitation of online public dialogue is concerned. As we have already seen in Chapter 3³¹, the Commission officials interviewed appeared divided into those who believe that it is not really possible or likely that the EU will manage to reach out to the general public via its websites and that the official EU websites are mainly working tools for people who already have an interest and/or extensive knowledge of the EU and EU issues³²; and those who believe that the Internet is a medium which allows for communication with multiple target audiences, and most importantly enables the EU to communicate directly with the public, rather than rely on national/local media to act as intermediaries³³.

Besides this difference in opinions, the officials working on the EU's Information and Communication strategy are in their majority "*non-experts in the field of public communication*"³⁴. This could partly lie beneath the very slow embrace of new communication technologies and in particular the Internet in the implementation of the EU's public communication strategy, despite policy-makers constantly underlining in every EU Information and Communication document the importance of this medium in reaching target audiences. This lack of expertise could also be the reason why "*everyone wants to be transparent but not really know what they are to be transparent about*", as one senior EU official put it³⁵.

With reference to the components of the theoretical model of the European public sphere outlined in Chapter 2³⁶, these need to be re-examined here in order to incorporate the findings of the EU websites' analysis, which reflect the "**how**" process of the public dialogue within the vertical European public sphere. In this respect, the findings indicate that the actual online model of public communication deployed by the three EU

official websites examined here is not facilitating an online European public sphere based on the principles of the theoretical model outlined in Chapter 2.

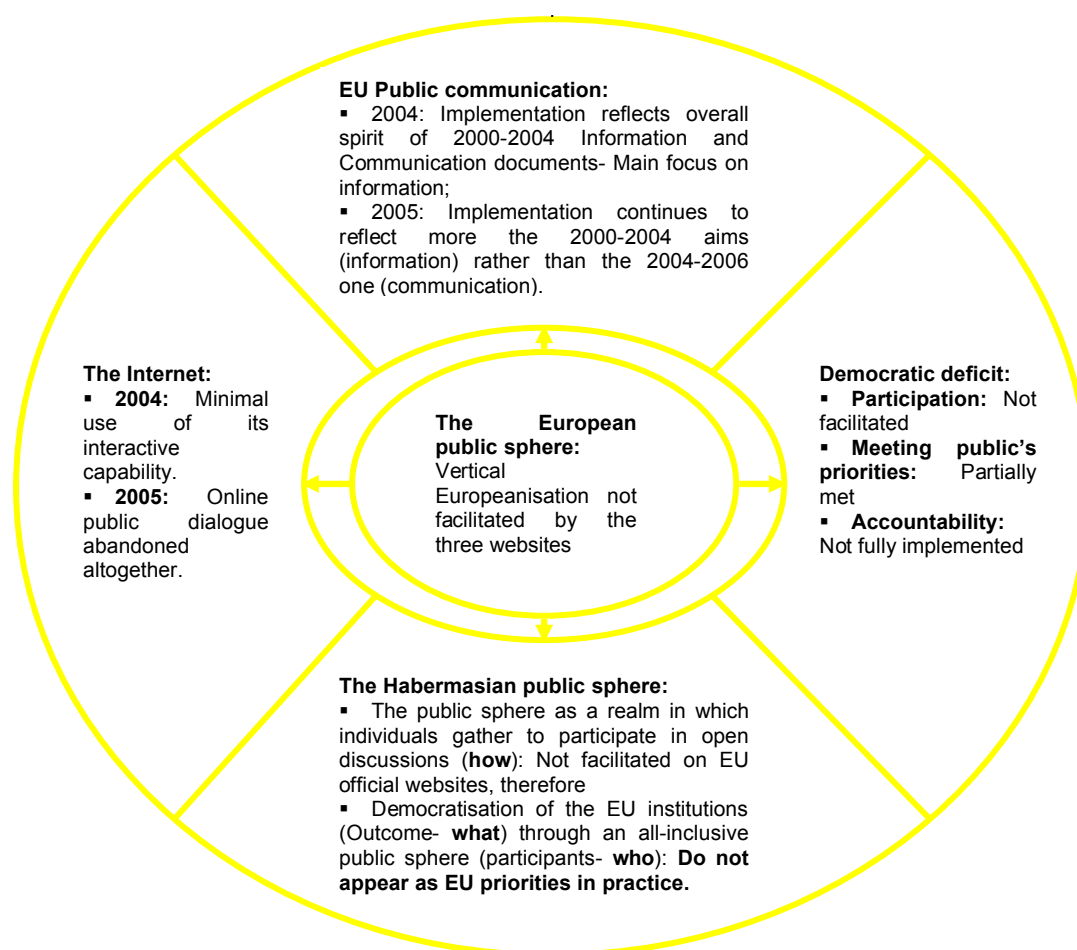


Figure 4.13: Key components of the theoretical concept regarding the EU public sphere: Online implementation, adapted from Figure 2.1, Chapter 2 and the analysis of the EU websites EUROPA, EU@UN and EURUNION.

Thus far, we have addressed the research questions identified in Chapter 2 from the perspectives of EU public communication policy-making (Chapter 3) and of its online policy-implementation (current chapter). There remains one more level of analysis- the impact of the EU's online public communication strategy on key EU audiences. This last component of this research project is discussed in the following chapter. More specifically, Chapter 5 presents the results of an EU websites' online user survey carried out by the author during the period October-December 2005, which aimed to map the views of Internet users on the three official EU websites examined here. The results of the survey are then juxtaposed

with the above findings in order to determine the degree to which these coincide with the users' perception of the key public communication messages of the EU presented on EUROPA, EU@UN and EURUNION.

Notes

¹ See also Figure 3.3, Chapter 3.

² See Table 3.1, Chapter 3.

³ Within the Commission, the general coordination, development and day-to-day running of EUROPA are handled by the Directorate-General for Communication, in collaboration with the Secretariat-General, the Informatics Directorate and the Publications Office.

⁴ An Inter-Institutional Editorial Committee is responsible for maintaining and monitoring the overall consistency of the material put out jointly on the Internet.

⁵ There is another Delegation in New York.

⁶ See Chapter 3, Part 3.2.1.

⁷ The full list of the variables, which were used in the coding process, is presented in Tables V-X, Annex 3.

⁸ See Chapter 1, Part 1.3, Section 1.3.4.

⁹ See Chapter 3, Part 3.3.

¹⁰ Chapter 1, Part 1.3.

¹¹ See Table 3.1, Chapter 3.

¹² This document clearly attempts to reverse the negative image that a lot of Europeans hold of the EU institutions and the Union as a whole. Within this context, it refers to the majority of Europeans several times, when explaining what the EU does, in an effort to add value to its argument regarding the democratic nature of the EU. At this point the reader is informed that the EU "*stands for the values the majority of the Europeans support*" (Fontaine 2003), i.e. democracy, rule of law and peace. The main message that the Commission puts across throughout this document is that the EU is the result of peace among the European countries, which in turn is based on the ideals and procedures of democracy. The EU is in a way the guarantor of the peace that the European countries have been enjoying for the last 50 years. And because of that peace, and the adherence to the ideals of democracy, the member-states of the EU have also been enjoying an era of steadily rising prosperity (ibid.).

The section regarding the way in which the EU works was clearly written with the EU public's scepticism and lack of trust towards the EU institutions and policy-making processes in mind. By emphasising the democratic nature of the EU institutions and of the decision-making process, the document manages to portray an image of a fully-functioning democratic institutional structure quite convincingly, provided the reader is not aware of the debate regarding the EU's democratic deficit, in particular the lack of openness and accountability within its institutions.

Although the document does not refer to the above three core ideas vaguely, these are

also core values which can be attributed to other democratic states as well and one could argue that most European member-states were democratic and upheld these exact same values even before the creation of the EU. So, despite the lengthy sections which give a detailed list of specific examples of everyday issues which the EU has improved/achieved or is aiming to improve/achieve within the next few years (e.g. the Euro, the common market, increased stability, “*community method of working together*” in resolving international differences etc), the arguments used to support the case for the EU are rather weak (ibid.).

With regard to future challenges, the document refers to some of the most publicly-debated issues in the last few years concerning the EU’s efforts to effectively address terrorism and organised crime, to achieve a common Foreign and Security Policy as well as to radically improve the member-states educational systems and to make the EU economy the “*most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world*” (ibid.: 49). Another “hot” issue is that of the EU’s enlargement and here “Europe in 12 Lessons” manages to address some of the main areas of the debate concerning the EU’s enlargement (e.g. definition of the EU’s geographical limits, cohesion, representation on the world stage, democratic governance, the EU Constitution) without at the same time, being critical of the Enlargement decisions taken so far. Rather, the document provides an overview of the questions and arguments that arise from the Enlargement process and smoothes out any concerns (i.e. Turkey’s potential membership) by repeating the importance of achieving a stable and prosperous Union (Fontaine 2003).

¹³ Any audiovisual material found in the main text of the webpages linked to the EUROPA, EU@UN and EURUNION homepages was coded in the same way as the text-only webpages.

¹⁴ See Annex 3, Table IX, Variable 62.

¹⁵ See Annex 3, Table IX, Variable 63.

¹⁶ See Annex 3, Table IX, Variable 64.

¹⁷ See Annex 3, Table X.

¹⁸ Note that if added up, the number of links that appears under each website on this table is higher than the actual number of links found on each website’s homepage. This is because some links contained information on more than one topic or covered a combination of issues and were, therefore, coded under more than one content variable.

¹⁹ “*We have never conducted a survey of users [...] I monitor the information requests that our Public Inquiries section receives and, given my professional background and training, try to provide the most requested information in the most user-friendly format possible [...] However, the Webtrend’s (the webhosting contractor of EURUNION) statistical reports provide some of this information monthly and quarterly*”, Interviewee 6, Annex 2.

²⁰ “*Most of the replies (feedback regarding content of websites) were positive, which*

surprised us”, Interviewee 3, Annex 2.

²¹ The drop in the number of participants on week 10 is not caused by the suspension of the debate but because the count of participants was disrupted (it started from zero on week 10, for no apparent reason).

²² The drop in the number of participants on week 2 is not caused by the suspension of the debate but because the count of participants was disrupted (it started from zero on week 2, as the topic of the debate was rephrased).

²³ Chapter 1, Part 1.3.

²⁴ *“We are supposed to reach over to everybody but we have to get people interested but there are other more interesting things for the public online”*, Interviewees 3 and 4, Annex 2.

“It is important, it is good to have a discussion like this, but these (the participants in the FUTURUM forum) are [...] the informed ‘classes’ [...] the public who participated in that debate (The FUTURUM debate on the Constitutional Treaty) was primarily organised NGOs, who are only half a mile away from this office [...] The only way to reach the (general) public is via the Internet but of course, although we provide a discussion corner for people to do what they want with it, we are under no illusion that everyone is going to start using it. It’s more about the symbolic gain, of how open we are [...] we are open to criticism, but we know that not everybody is going to criticize, because they have better things to do in their life”, Interviewee 5, *ibid.*

²⁵ Compare Tables 4.1 and 4.2. See also Figures 4.6–4.9 for further comparison of the data from Year 1 and Year 2.

²⁶ *“Our priority at the time was to familiarise European citizens with the complex constituents and provisions of the text that they or their parliaments had to vote on. Discussion fora were held in the Member States though, partly in cooperation with the Commission”*, Interviewee 2, Annex 2.

²⁷ Debate Europe was launched as part of the implementation of Plan D (see Chapter 3, Part 3.2 for more information on Plan D).

²⁸ See also Chapter 3, Part 3.2.3.

²⁹ See Table 3.1, Chapter 3.

³⁰ See Figure 3.2, Chapter 3.

³¹ Chapter 3, Section 3.1.5.

³² See Chapter 3, Section 3.2.4. This is a view closer to the “two-gear European public” perception prominent in the official Information and Communication documents before 2004, as discussed in Chapter 3, Part 3.1.

³³ This belief was mostly expressed by policy-making officials and coincided with the shift in the Commission’s Information and Communication strategy from information-focused to communication-focused after 2004. See Chapter 3, Section 3.2.4.

³⁴ Interviewee 1, Annex 2.

³⁵ Interviewee 1, Annex 2.

³⁶ Figure 2.1, Chapter 2.

Chapter 5- EU website's online user survey

The analysis of three official EU websites' homepages has shown that there is a gap between the EU's Information and Communication strategy as this is set out in formal documentation and its implementation online to date, particularly with regard to the opportunities for public dialogue provided to Internet users by these websites. The element of interaction is also fundamental to the concept of the public sphere examined in Chapter 1 and to the success of the EU's public communication. Furthermore, unrestricted interaction, in terms of gender, ethnicity, socio-economic or nationality background, is one of the Internet's core characteristics, and one of the reasons why the Internet has been heralded as the new Habermasian public sphere, as discussed in Chapter 2.

Having examined the research questions from a policy-making and policy-implementation perspective in previous chapters, the focus in the present chapter is on the impact that the EU's online public communication has on certain audiences- those which the Commission has identified as "key" and "target" audiences in its proposed Information and Communication strategy¹. Despite the data showing that the EU websites did not actively promote an all-inclusive online public dialogue during the period 2004-2005, it is important to have an idea of what the recipients of the EU's online public communication message think as well. Do Internet users rate interaction as highly as it would be expected according to the theoretical framework examined in Chapters 1 and 2? Do they think the Internet can play a role in addressing the EU's democratic deficit? More importantly, do they accept there is a democratic deficit on EU level that needs to be addressed?

This chapter presents the results of an online survey conducted amongst Internet users in order to obtain their feedback with regard to the three official EU websites analysed in Chapter 3 (EUROPA, EU@UN, EURUNION). The survey focused mainly on, but was not limited to, experienced Internet users who fit the profile of some of the Commission's priority communication target groups- that is, young and educated

individuals, who are also the most likely to be experienced Internet users, according to the latest Internet-user profile reports (ClickZ Network 2006a; ClickZ Network 2006b; ClickZ Stats 2006c).

More specifically, the online survey aimed to collect data regarding:

- a) The profile of the Internet users who accessed the three EU websites (demographic data).
- b) The frequency with which these users access the three EU websites (if applicable).
- c) Their overall evaluation of the three websites.
- d) Their evaluation of the interaction opportunities found on the three websites.
- e) Their opinion on the role of the Internet in addressing the EU's democratic deficit.

The results are discussed in the wider context of the Habermasian approach of the public sphere and the role of public communication and of the Internet in promoting an all-inclusive, democratic public sphere and in particular an EU public sphere. The findings are also juxtaposed with the aims of the EU's Information and Communication strategy, in order to assess whether the strategy corresponds with the users' needs and expectations of the EU's websites.

5.1 Methodology

This online survey took place over a period of four months (October 2005-January 2006). It comprised 27 questions, both closed-response and open-end, of which 12 questions (namely questions 1, 2, 5, 13, 14, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27 in Annex 4) were compulsory (i.e. the respondents had to fill these questions in, in order to be able to submit their questionnaire).

5.1.1 Sample

The sample chosen was a non-probability, "snowball" sample (Deacon, Pickering, Golding, Murdock 1999)². Ideally, the online survey sample would have been an all-inclusive one, aimed at non-frequent Internet users, as well as individuals who do not specifically fit the profile

of the Commission's priority target audiences. However, that was not feasible for practical reasons, not least the methodological problems of selecting a representative sample from the global Internet population that would also be representative of offline demographic groups and the enormity of the financial and time-related costs that would arise from pursuing an online survey on such a scale. Therefore, a small, specialised sample that would include individuals who would statistically be more likely to have visited EU official websites and/or online discussion fora (EU or non-EU alike) was deemed more appropriate.

For this reason, the individuals/organisations contacted regarding the survey were chosen on the basis of two criteria: As mentioned in the introduction, the respondents needed to fit both the EU Commission's profile for priority target audiences and the profile of the average Internet user. Young and educated Internet users are likely to be found in academia, so the majority of organisations/individuals initially contacted for this survey were from academic circles. The other main target group were the EU-related weblogs, which are important online fora of public debate.

However, in order to maintain balance and avoid receiving responses from EU-specialised young academics and keen online EU discussants only, think tanks, student societies and online media were also included in the sample. In addition, further selection criteria were introduced when compiling the sample for this survey. Individuals/organisations were chosen according to the following:

- a)** Whether they were EU specialists/with a professional interest in EU issues or non-EU specialists/with no professional interest in EU issues.
- b)** Whether they had Pro-EU, EU-neutral or anti-EU stance.

This distinction was necessary in order to obtain as balanced an outcome as possible. As noted in Chapter 3, the opinions of EU specialists have been measured in at least two surveys in the past four years, one survey conducted by the Commission in 2002 (COM(2002)705, final) and one by Friends of Europe in 2004 (Davies and Readhead 2004). However, no survey so far has aimed to identify the views of individuals who are non-EU experts, yet are keen Internet users and are likely to participate in online public discussions. Therefore, a survey measuring attitudes and

opinions regarding the EU's main communication tools online (i.e. its official websites) could not exclude or ignore the general public and focus solely on EU experts and officials. The need to approach external publics has also been identified in the official EU public communication documents but mainly by EU foreign policy experts (de Gouveia and Plumridge 2005; Lynch 2005; Moravcsik and Nikolaïdes 2006)³.

In addition to these criteria, an email address was a prerequisite for an individual/organisation to be included in the sample. The survey also sought to include individuals/organisations of as many nationalities as possible, although it was not always possible to identify the country of origin of a weblog or the nationality of an individual acting as a contact person on behalf of a non-religious, non-ethnic student society.

The questionnaire was initially emailed to 148 individuals/ generic email contacts with the request to further circulate it to as many people as they saw appropriate/ possible. If the respondents had not accessed the websites under examination (EUROPA, EU@UN and EURUNION) before, they were asked to take a few minutes to access one or more of them via the links provided on the survey's webpage and then to proceed to fill in the questionnaire.

The 148 initial contacts comprised the following:

a) 80 individuals/generic contact points in academic/academic-related institutions (i.e. university departments of various disciplines, research centres, EU research centres, postgraduate academic support networks) in 26 countries as follows⁴:

Table 5.1: List of initial academic/academic-related contacts per country, Source: The author

Australia	1 contact	Hungary	2 contacts
Austria	1 contact	Ireland	4 contacts
Belgium	4 contacts	Italy	4 contacts
Bulgaria	1 contact	Lithuania	1 contact
Canada	1 contact	Netherlands, the	4 contacts
Croatia	1 contact	Norway	2 contacts
Cyprus	1 contact	Poland	3 contacts
Czech Republic, the	1 contact	Portugal	2 contacts
Denmark	2 contacts	Slovakia	1 contact
Finland	4 contacts	Spain	3 contacts
France	3 contacts	Sweden	3 contacts
Germany	5 contacts	UK, the	20 contacts
Greece	3 contacts	USA, the	3 contacts

Of the educational institutes chosen, 23 were EU research centres or Jean Monnet European centres of excellence; 30 were university departments of social sciences (including politics, international relations, communication, sociology, psychology and language/literature studies); and 27 were university departments under the faculties of engineering and science⁵;

b) 24 weblogs (11 anti-EU, 11 EU-neutral and 2 pro-EU)⁶;

c) 4 online newspapers/magazines (1 British, 3 multi-lingual/multi-national);

d) 17 public policy networks/ think tanks (10 EU-neutral; 3 Eurosceptic/anti-EU; and 4 pro-EU)⁷; and

e) 23 young people's/students' societies in the UK (all identified as EU-neutral and chosen solely on the basis of contact email availability)⁸.

A distinctive feature of the survey is that, whereas previous studies have incorporated the electronic version of the EU's Information and Communication strategy, none have as yet solicited opinions on sites other than EUROPA. Nevertheless, the sample chosen for this survey can still be considered an elite sample, in the sense that excludes people without Internet access. Such an audience though, is not within the target audiences of the EU's online Information and Communication strategy in

the first place, and there are other communication policies identified to reach out to those EU citizens who do not have access to the electronic public sphere (currently the majority)⁹. These policies are out of the scope of this study.

5.1.2 Questions and data processing methodology

The issues that the present study set out to address were the following:

- a)** The frequency with which respondents normally access the three EU websites. Considering the emphasis placed on new communications' technologies and in particular the Internet by all the Information and Communication strategy documents examined in Chapter 3, the question that arises is how highly the official EU websites rank (at least the three chosen here: EUROPA, EU@UN and EURUNION) with Internet users.
- b)** The users' overall evaluation of the three websites, in terms of accessibility, quality of information and credibility.
- c)** The users' evaluation of the interaction opportunities found on the three websites.
- d)** The users' opinion on the role of the Internet in addressing the EU's democratic deficit.
- e)** The profile of the Internet users who accessed the three EU websites (demographic data and overall Internet habits).

The data was initially processed using the Loughborough University's online survey software programme Learn, and the results on certain questions were further categorised and analysed using Microsoft's Excel programme. Annex 4 presents the results of the survey per question, before the data under certain questions were submitted to further categorisation, and further explains the way in which that data was then regrouped under fewer categories. Apart from descriptive statistics used to determine the demographic profile of the respondents, cross-tabulations and chi-square tests were used to determine the relationship between the demographic profile of the respondents and their views on the official EU websites as well as the EU in general and their overall Internet habits.

5.2 Findings

5.2.1 Demographic data

The initial 148 contacts generated 221 responses. The response rate to the compulsory questions was an average of 92.8%, thus allowing for conclusions to be drawn from these questions. The aim to attract mainly respondents that would fit into the EU's target audience groups and represent the average Internet user's profile was achieved. Recent demographic statistics for Internet users worldwide continue to show that the average Internet user is a 25-35 year-old, middle-class, educated male (ClickZ Network 2006a; ClickZ Stats 2006c). In the present survey, over 70% of the respondents were 20-34 years old as Table 5.2 below shows; while over 40% were university students and 28% in professional/managerial positions, as can be seen in Tables 5.3, 5.4 and 5.5. Approximately two thirds of the respondents were male.

Nevertheless, as discussed in Chapter 2¹⁰, the fact that the respondents were predominantly young, educated males can be attributed more to the socioeconomic inequalities of contemporary societies, rather than to the medium itself. Further analysis of the data showed that gender, education and age were not definitive factors with regard to the users' overall Internet habits and their attitude towards the EU websites and online fora.

Table 5.2: Number of respondents per age group and gender, Source: EU websites' online user survey, conducted by the author in October 2005-January 2006.

Age	Female	Male	Totals	Percentage
Younger than 15 years old	0	1	1	< 0.5%
15-19 years old	1	7	8	4%
20-24 years old	19	33	52	24%
25-29 years old	36	35	71	32%
30-34 years old	8	28	36	16%
35-39 years old	3	11	14	6%
40-44 years old	2	8	10	4%
45-49 years old	3	5	8	4%
50-54 years old	0	13	13	6%
55-60 years old	0	4	4	2%
61-65 years old	0	4	4	2%
Over 66 years old	0	0	0	0%
TOTALS	72	149	221	100.00%

Table 5.3: Number of respondents per occupation and gender, Source: EU websites' online user survey, conducted by the author in October 2005-January 2006.

Occupation	Female	Male	Totals	Percentage
Public Officials EU	1	4	5	2%
Public Officials Non-EU	1	5	6	3%
IT	1	11	12	5%
Professional/Managerial	17	45	62	28%
Skilled Manual/Manual	1	7	8	4%
Unemployed/ Economically inactive	1	4	5	2%
Education Professionals	11	18	29	13%
Education: Students	38	52	90	41%
Health	1	3	4	2%
TOTALS	72	149	221	100%

With regard to the categories of the respondents' age and occupation, the survey produced some unexpected, although not statistically significant, results; for example, there were 8 respondents who were younger than 19 years of age, and even 1 respondent younger than 15. As far as occupation is concerned, although the relative data was eventually grouped in 9 categories, the respondents' occupations varied widely, from legal and financial advisors to students and from restaurant-owners to people working in the agriculture sector and individuals who were at the time economically inactive (unemployed or housewives)¹¹.

As far as the nationality of the respondents in concerned, the majority was from EU countries, although the collective percentage of non-

EU citizens and of respondents with two or more nationalities was unexpectedly higher than that of respondents from EU accession countries. The figures below present the number of respondents per country and per category (i.e. EU, EU-related, Non-EU, Multiple nationalities and N/A).

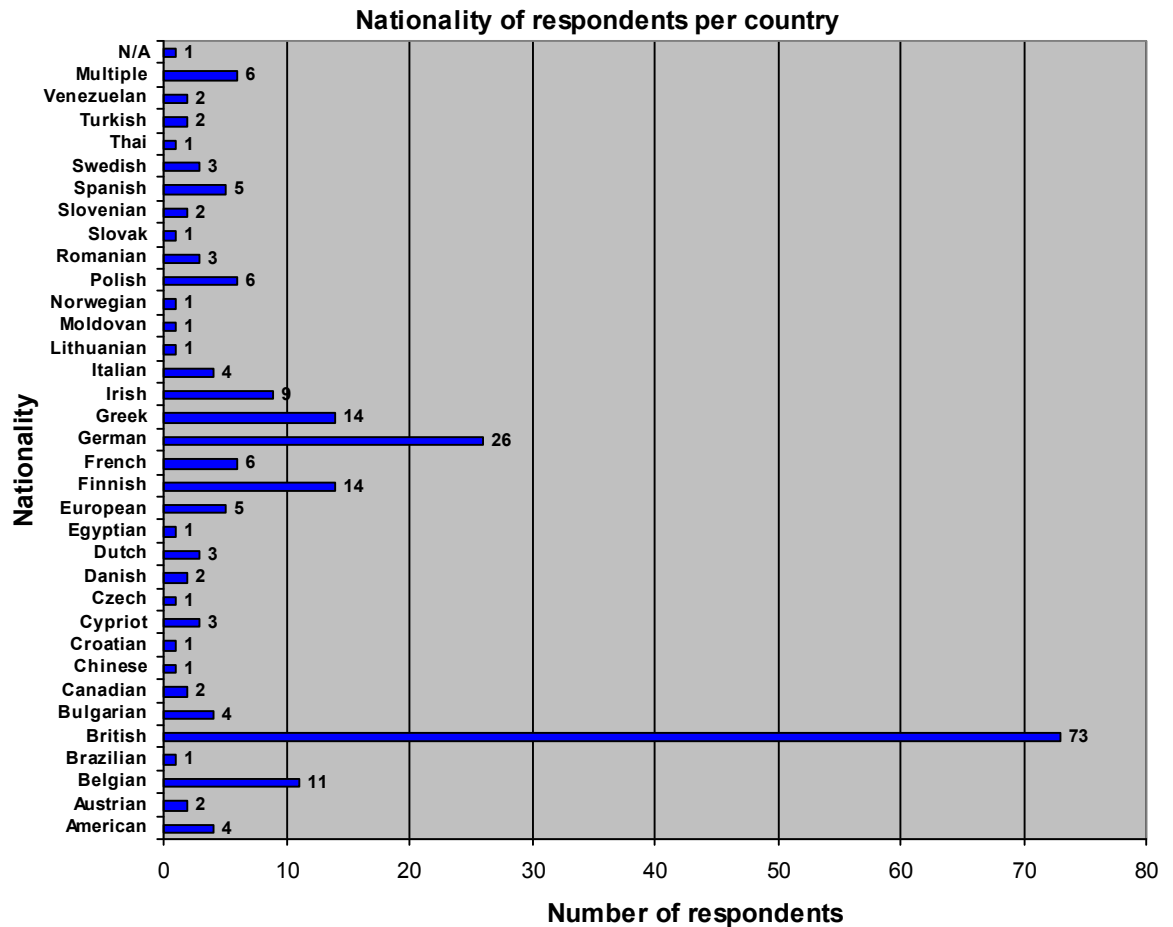


Figure 5.1: Nationality of respondents per country, Source: EU websites' online user survey, conducted by the author in October 2005-January 2006.

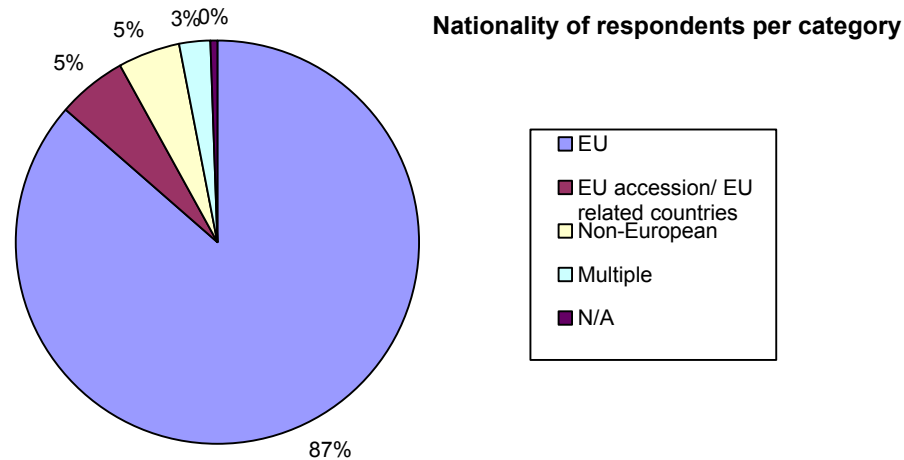


Figure 5.2: Nationality of respondents per category, Source: EU websites' online user survey, conducted by the author in October 2005-January 2006.

What is interesting about the data regarding the nationality of the respondents is that 3% of those under the “EU nationalities” category defined themselves as European, and not solely British, Spanish, German etc. British nationals make for more than 30% of the respondents. This is something that can also be observed in past surveys, performed by the EUROPA website team themselves (EUROPA 2003), where most respondents were of British nationality. Although it is not possible to determine all the factors that led to British nationals responding at a higher rate than the nationals of other countries in past surveys, in the case of the present survey this result may be attributed to the fact that most educational institutions and think tanks contacted were, for practical purposes only, British.

The final component of the demographic data regarding the respondents of this survey is that of education. As mentioned earlier, the respondents are educated, in their majority, to university level, with those who have a Master's degree having the overall majority within the sample. The tables below demonstrate the distribution of the individuals according to their education, gender and age. Further statistical analysis of the data showed that in the present survey education was independent from gender and age.

Table 5.4: Number of respondents per level of education and gender, Source: EU website's online user survey, conducted by the author in October 2005-January 2006.

Education	Female	Male	Totals
Not completed compulsory education	1	3	4
Completed compulsory education	4	16	20
Vocational Qualification	1	5	6
University Degree (BA, undergraduate degree)	24	46	70
University Degree (MA, postgraduate degree)	35	56	91
PhD	7	23	30
TOTALS	72	149	221

Table 5.5: Number of respondents per level of education and age group, Source: EU website's online user survey, conducted by the author in October 2005-January 2006.

Education	<15	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-54	55-60	61-65	>66	Totals
Not completed compulsory education	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	4
Completed compulsory education	0	4	9	3	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	20
Vocational Qualification	0	0	3	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	6
University Degree (BA, undergraduate degree)	0	4	27	17	6	4	5	2	4	0	1	0	70
University Degree (MA, postgraduate degree)	0	0	10	45	18	4	5	1	5	2	1	0	91
PhD	0	0	2	6	11	4	0	2	3	2	0	0	30
TOTALS	1	8	52	71	36	14	10	8	13	4	4	0	221

5.2.2 The respondents' Internet profile

Before proceeding with the analysis of the data regarding the respondents' views on the three official websites and their habits regarding EU-related websites and online fora in general, it is important to look at the overall Internet behaviour of the respondents. This will enable us to put the respondents' EU-specific online behaviour into a wider context.

The majority of respondents are frequent Internet users, thus achieving the aim of the sample to attract responses from experienced Internet users, as they would be more likely to have visited EU official websites and have had experience of online discussion fora (EU or non-EU). Nearly 96% of the respondents access the Internet every day and the

remaining approximate 4% go online every other day or at least once a week¹².

The respondents were also asked whether they access governmental/ political websites and if so, with what frequency. The majority of the respondents replied positively to the first part of the question (84% of those who answered the question, 83% of all respondents), although men appear to access governmental/ political websites slightly more frequently than women, as we can see in Figure 5.3. 70% of male respondents said that they access governmental/ political websites often, while in women, the percentage drops to 37% for the same level of frequency of Internet access. The majority of women respondents said that they only sometimes access such websites (46%).

When chi-square test and multi-variate analysis was performed, to determine the relationship between the three variables of “gender”, “occupation” and “frequency of accessing governmental/ political websites”, gender did not appear as a significant variable, when occupation was controlled, and vice versa. It would, therefore, be safe to presume that the differences between women and men, as far as frequency of accessing governmental/ political websites is concerned, occurred by chance in this particular sample.

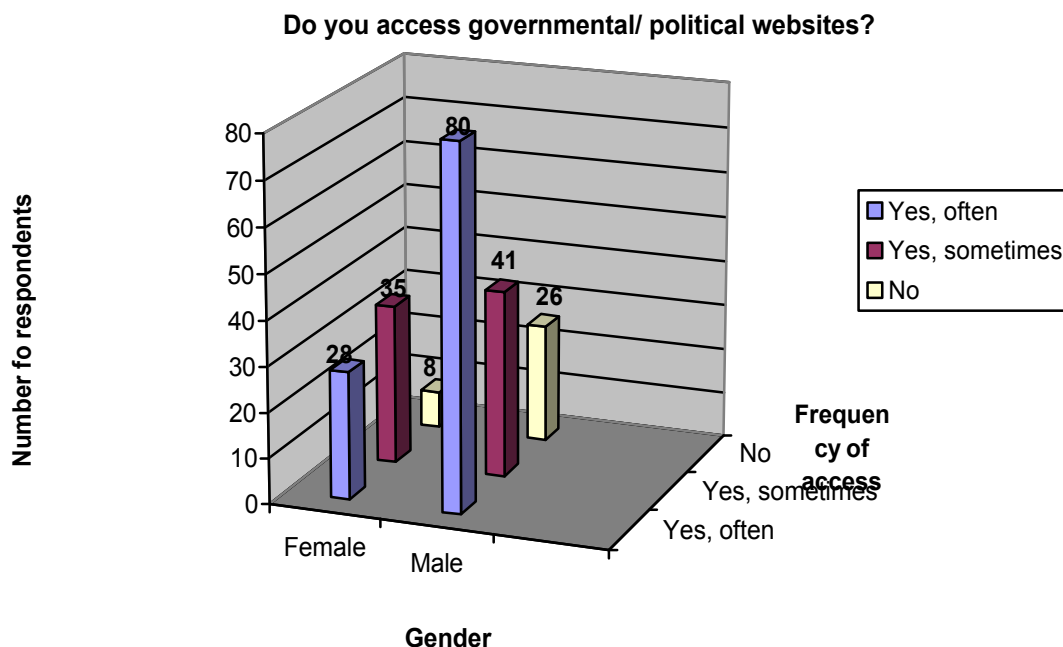


Figure 5.3: Frequency of accessing governmental/political websites per gender,
 Source: EU website's online user survey, conducted by the author in October 2005-
 January 2006.

Of the 218 respondents who answered the second part of the question (i.e. regarding the frequency with which they access governmental/ political websites), 96 went on to give further details of those websites. The majority mentioned governmental and local authorities' websites, as well as political parties' websites. Fewer listed national newspapers and television channels' websites and only seven mentioned political weblogs. 20 respondents mentioned at least one EU official website, or an EU-related, non-official website, with Euractiv¹³ being the website most frequently named.

Questions 21 and 22 aimed to assess the respondents' online behaviour with regard to online discussion fora. Although the response rate for these questions was relatively low, the replies make for interesting reading. More specifically, 97 individuals (44% of the respondents) replied that they access online fora in general¹⁴. 85 of them went on to give details of the fora they access, of whom 74 gave a valid answer¹⁵. Political fora

was the most frequently occurring type (38% of respondents mentioned such fora) followed closely by entertainment and lifestyle fora (35% of valid responses). The table below lists analytically all the types of online fora mentioned by the respondents¹⁶.

Table 5. 6: Categories of online fora that the respondents access most often,
Source: EU website’s online user survey, conducted by the author in October 2005-
January 2006.

"Which online fora regarding other issues (not EU issues) do you access?"		
Type of forum	Totals	Percentage (calculated on a total of 74 valid responses)
Politics	28	38%
Academic	9	12%
Entertainment/ Lifestyle	26	35%
IT	10	14%
Work-related	6	8%
General	18	24%
Total Number of respondents	74	

Because of the high “no-response” rate for question 22 (74 valid responses, out of possible 221), the above table can only be used as an indication of the respondents’ online habits, as far as discussion fora are concerned. Nevertheless, it is important to note that politics is of interest to most of these respondents, whether they only access political/governmental websites or online political fora as well, regardless of their age, gender, education and occupation. This will be used as a comparative measure, when examining the data regarding the respondents’ access of official EU websites below.

5.2.3 EU official websites: The respondents’ views

As seen in the paragraphs above, the respondents of the survey are frequent Internet users, the majority of whom also access political/governmental websites on a regular basis, some of which are EU-related (but not necessarily official EU websites). They, therefore, constitute the target audience that EU’s online Information and Communication strategy would aim to attract and address, as it transpired from the review of key documents in Chapter 3. Consequently, their comments and evaluation of the three official EU websites under examination (EUROPA, EU@UN and EURUNION) offer an indication of

the degree of success of the EU's online communication strategy. The sample may not be statistically suitable for generalisation of the results, yet valuable conclusions can be drawn from the respondents' comments, particularly when these are cross-referenced with the results of previous surveys on the EUROPA website and on the EU's overall communication strategy.

The first thing to notice when looking at the data is that the respondents hardly ever access any of the three official websites in question. EUROPA is the most frequently accessed of the three, still only ranking an average 2.7 degrees of frequency of access on a scale from 1 (Never) to 5 (Every day), while the EU@UN and EURUNION barely average 1 degree¹⁷. The respondents were asked to access the three websites at least once before filling in the questionnaire. The majority of the respondents had never accessed any of the three websites before, which makes their comments particularly valuable, since the first impressions an Internet user obtains of a website are crucial in determining whether she/he will return to that website in the future.

Most of the respondents chose to look for general information on the EU, with second most popular activity the search for legal/official documentation. A significant number of respondents (42%) also read the news. Of those who appear to have accessed these websites before, only 5% (calculated on the total of 221 respondents) had participated in an online discussion. Several respondents chose to contact an EU Institution or an individual at an EU institution (16% and 17% respectively). The table below illustrates the results regarding the respondents' activity on the three websites¹⁸.

Table 5. 7: Activities that the respondents chose to do on each of the three official EU websites, Source: EU website's online user survey, conducted by the author in October 2005-January 2006.

"Which of the following did you choose to do on each of the three websites (EUROPA, EU@UN, EURUNION)?"		
Activity	Number of respondents who chose this category	Percentage
Looked for general information on the EU:	146	66%
Looked for legal/official documentation:	127	57%
Looked for information on business in the EU:	34	15%
Read the news:	92	42%
Participated in the online discussion:	12	5%
Contacted an Institution:	35	16%
Contacted an individual at an EU institution:	37	17%
Obtained information regarding travel in the EU:	24	11%
Other ¹⁹ :	9	4%
No response	15	7%
Total number of respondents	221	

When asked to assess the overall quality of information and the accessibility of the websites they visited, the respondents gave all three websites mediocre ratings²⁰. EUROPA received the highest ratings, with the respondents giving it an average 3.4 rating on a scale of 1 (poor quality) to 5 (excellent quality) as far as the information provided is concerned. Both of the other two websites got average ratings of 2.8, for quality of information, while all three websites scored quite low with respondents as far as accessibility is concerned, with their average rankings not going over 2.9. Given that some of the respondents visited these websites for the first time for the purposes of the survey, and that a large number of respondents do not visit these websites very often, the low ratings on the quality of information and accessibility are a concern. As a result of poor accessibility, first-time visitors are unlikely to re-visit these websites, whilst for those who do access them poor accessibility is a plausible cause for their infrequent visits.

On a more positive tone, EUROPA was thought to provide adequate opportunities for interaction with EU officials by over 29% of the respondents, compared to a very poor 2.3% for EURUNION and 5% for

EU@UN. Nevertheless, the number of respondents who thought the opportunities for interaction were insufficient was also quite high (58 respondents/ 26%), while a significant 41.6% of the respondents opted for the “I don’t know” answer²¹.

In order to better understand what constitutes “adequate opportunities for interaction with EU officials” for the respondents, question 6 of the survey required them to chose one or more types of interaction they would like to see more of on the three websites, while also giving them the opportunity to add their own suggestions under the “Other” option. The majority of the respondents (163) replied that they would like to see more opportunities for interaction on the websites as Table 5.8 below illustrates. 36.2% of those thought that the EU websites need to both have more individual email addresses, rather than generic ones, and more opportunities for online dialogue with EU officials.

Table 5.8: Types of interaction that the respondents would like to see more on EUROPA, EU@UN and EURUNION, Source: EU website’s online user survey, conducted by the author in October 2005-January 2006.

"What type of interaction would you like to see provided more on EUROPA/ EURUNION/ EU @ UN websites?"	Number of respondents	Percentage
Email addresses directed to individuals, instead of generic email addresses	45	20.3%
More opportunities for online dialogue with EU officials/ politicians	29	13.0%
Both of the above	80	36.2%
Other	9	4.0%
The opportunities for interaction are adequate	26	12.0%
No response	32	14.5%
Total	221	100.0%

However, when asked if they have ever contacted an EU institution/ an EU official through the three websites (EUROPA, EU@UN and EURUNION) or over the phone/by correspondence/by visiting their offices, the majority of the respondents answered negatively on both accounts. More specifically, less than 40% of the respondents have ever contacted an EU institution/official through the three websites mentioned above, and less than 50% have contacted an EU institution/ official via more traditional means of communication, such as telephone, post etc²².

EUROPA is the website used to contact EU institutions/officials by most respondents, with request for documents, legal inquiries and

inquiries regarding contact details of individuals within EU institutions being by far the most popular types of inquiries online. When contacting EU institutions/officials over the phone/via correspondence etc, the respondents are again more likely to have legal inquiries, although less likely to request contact details of individuals (10.9% as opposed to 13.6% who would do so online). The respondents are also more likely to request general information about the EU and about business issues/doing business within/with the EU via traditional means of communication than they are to do so online.

The fact that the respondents had previously requested more opportunities for interaction with EU officials, in Question 6²³, when it now transpires over 50% of them have never contacted an EU institution/official in the first place, appears contradictory at first sight. A closer look at the data, however, shows that the majority of respondents would prefer contact emails directed to individuals rather than generic email addresses, which could explain why some of them at least have never contacted an EU institution. The results of this question also need to be examined in conjunction with the responses the participants gave with regard to their criteria of the websites' evaluation, and their opinion on the credibility of the official EU websites, which is examined below.

The official EU websites may not be a popular source of information for the majority of the respondents, but 84.2% of them look to newspapers for information on the EU²⁴. National TV is also an important source of information on the EU for over 50% of the respondents with magazines and books both preferred by 49.8% of the respondents. This is hardly surprising, since traditional media, such as television and the press, are an integral part of contemporary societies²⁵. Rather, what makes for interesting reading are the alternative sources of information that the respondents themselves have provided, under the option "Other" of this question: 42 out of 47 alternative information sources listed (19% of the 221 respondents) are online sources (respondents either mention the Internet in general as a source, or specific websites). Furthermore, 20 respondents specifically name weblogs as their alternative sources for information on the EU, while Café BABEL, EurActiv.com, EU Observer

and Euronews are the only other online information sources mentioned²⁶.

This further emphasises that for a significant number of respondents, the Internet is an important source of information on the EU, but although they access EU-specific websites, none of them are official EU websites. The fact that weblogs are also quite popular alternative sources of information suggests that the decision of the Commissioner for Communication to create her own weblog and interact with the public was a move in the right direction. More importantly, the argument presented by some EU officials during the interviews conducted by the author, that the EU citizens are not really interested in information regarding the EU, is not confirmed by the data examined here²⁷, as only 6% of the respondents declared their disinterest in the EU. The data also confirms that the Commission has been accurate in identifying young, educated Europeans as one of its priority target audiences, as they appear to have a high interest in EU issues.

This is also supported by the information collected under Questions 10 and 11 of the survey²⁸: 40.3% of all respondents confirmed that they access other EU websites except for EUROPA, EU@UN and EURUNION. 86 respondents went on to provide further information regarding the EU websites that they usually access. Of these, 79 responses were valid, and the results are displayed in Table 5.9 below²⁹. The table lists the websites that were mentioned by at least 3 respondents, while the category “Other” includes all the other websites that appeared in the respondents’ answers. The EU Parliament website was mentioned by 24% of the respondents, making it by far the single most popular official EU website on the list. Other EU official websites, such as the EU Council and the EU Presidency ones, also feature in the table below, alongside EurActiv and EU Observer, which appear consistently throughout the survey.

Table 5.9: EU websites other than EUROPA, EU@UN and EURUNION, usually accessed by the respondents, Source: EU website's online user survey, conducted by the author in October 2005-January 2006.

"Do you access any other EU websites except for EUROPA, EURUNION and EU @ UN?"		
Websites	Number of respondents	Percentage (calculated on the total number of valid responses for this question)
EU Parliament website	19	24%
Euractiv.org	6	8%
EU Delegations' websites	6	8%
EU Council website	5	6%
EU Presidency website	4	5%
CORDIS	4	5%
Eurostat/ Eurobarometer	4	5%
CURIA	3	4%
EUObserver	3	4%
Other	43	54%
Total number of respondents (excluding invalid answers)	79	

When asked to compare the EU websites they have accessed, including EUROPA, EU@UN and EURUNION, the respondents gave quite revealing answers as far as the criteria they use to evaluate a website are concerned. This is important, since it helps to better understand the way in which they evaluated the three official EU websites under examination. The analysis of the open-end responses to question 12 of the survey showed that the respondents use five criteria to evaluate a website, as illustrated in Figure 5.4 below³⁰.

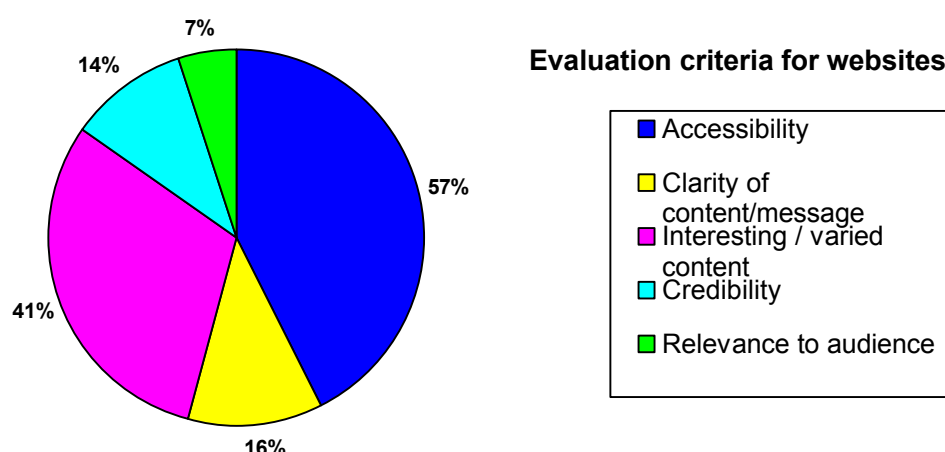


Figure 5.4: Respondents' criteria for evaluating websites, Source: EU website's online user survey, conducted by the author in October 2005-January 2006.

Although the non-response rate for this question was high, the value of the results is not affected as these match the results of previous questions regarding the overall quality of the EUROPA, EU@UN and EURUNION websites³¹, which received high response rates. It becomes apparent that unless a website is easy to navigate, it will not rate highly with the users, even if its content is interesting. Apart from accessibility and interesting/varied content, the respondents also expect clarity of the message/s that a website conveys. Furthermore, 14% of the respondents look for credibility of the source, while 7% evaluate the content of a website according to its relevance to their circumstances.

On a second level, the data collected under Question 12 was used to determine which of the EU websites (official and unofficial) that the respondents had accessed were considered best. In order to determine that, all answers were coded a second time, according to the five evaluation criteria identified above, and according to whether each respondent referred to a website in a positive or negative way, with regard to one or more of the five criteria. The results put EUROPA on top of the list, with 25 respondents (57% of those who gave a valid answer) agreeing that of all the official EU websites they have visited, EUROPA was the best. For these 25 respondents, EUROPA's content counteracted the negative effects of poor accessibility and opportunities for interaction with EU officials, which had caused the majority of the respondents to give it an overall low rating under Questions 3 and 4 of the survey.

The European Parliament's website came second in preference, with 7% of the respondents rating it best, while Café Babel and EurActiv received a small percentage of votes as best EU websites (2% of valid responses respectively). However, a substantial number of respondents (18% of those who gave a valid answer) thought that none of the EU websites that they had visited was good/worthy enough.

When asked if they ever access official online EU discussion fora, such as the FUTURUM webpage (where, however, ongoing active discussions were suspended in 2005), only 9% of the respondents replied positively. In contrast, the number of respondents accessing unofficial EU fora to discuss EU issues was higher (25%), with 10% actually visiting

such fora often. The questions from which this data was extracted³² had a very high rate of valid responses (96.8 % and 95.9% respectively) and thus reflect quite accurately the online habits of the respondents, as far as online EU debates are concerned.

Comparing these results with the data regarding the respondents' overall attitude towards online debates in general, it becomes apparent that the majority of respondents are likely to participate in debates concerning EU issues, but when they do, they prefer to debate in online fora other than the official EU ones (only one respondent mentioned Margot Wallström's weblog for example). More importantly, a significant number of respondents tend to visit national governmental websites to follow or to participate in EU debates. So they are more likely to obtain information or form opinions on EU issues through the prism of national politics.

This is crucial to the theoretical argument regarding the vertical Europeanisation of the public debates and its role in the democratic legitimisation of the European institutions. As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, vertical Europeanisation, i.e. the direct communication between the EU institutions and the public, is important if the former are to be incorporated in the emerging European public sphere, and therefore be recognised as legitimate participants of the public debate. Public communication was deemed central to this process, and its electronic/online form was identified as having the unique potential to bring EU officials and the public in direct, unmediated contact with each other³³. Yet what is emerging from the analysis of the data here is that the online debate regarding the EU is mainly mediated by national online fora. In other words, the EU institutions are failing to establish themselves as equal participants of the emerging online European public sphere.

The data examined so far has mainly concerned the effectiveness of the EU's official websites and has offered an indication of how Internet users, particularly EU nationals, view these websites. Nevertheless, the scope of this survey was not only to bring new data in the discussion regarding the EU's Information and Communication strategy online, but also to obtain Internet users' views on the EU's democratic deficit debate

and of the role that the Internet could play in addressing that deficit. The following section presents the survey results regarding the respondents' general views on these issues.

5.2.4 General questions: The role of the Internet in the EU's public sphere

As seen above, the majority of the respondents felt that there should be more opportunities for interaction with EU officials on EUROPA, EU@UN and EURUNION in the form of both email and online debate. In order to better understand the underlying reasons for the respondents' answers, Question 13 of the survey returns to the issue of interaction with EU officials, thus linking it to the accountability of the EU institutions. The respondents were asked whether they felt that having direct access to the EU officials/MEPs would increase the accountability of the EU institutions: Not surprisingly, over 60% replied "Yes", with another 11% opting for the "I do not know" response.

This question had a two-fold purpose: Firstly, to put the respondents' earlier answers regarding interaction opportunities on the official EU websites in a wider context; and secondly, to make a link with Question 14, one of the survey's most important questions, regarding the role of the Internet in addressing the EU's (perceived) democratic deficit. More specifically, as far as the second aim is concerned, the scope of Question 14³⁴ was to determine whether the respondents associate interaction with the accountability of the EU institutions and with democracy.

In order to answer these questions, the answers to Question 14 were coded in two ways: The responses were initially divided into four categories: those who agreed that the Internet can help address the EU's democratic deficit; those who disagreed; those who gave a non-valid response or were uncertain/ did not know; and those who rejected the concept of the EU having a democratic deficit in the first place. The majority of the respondents agreed that there is a democratic deficit of some type within the EU, and thought that the Internet could play a role in eliminating that deficit. Figure 5.5 below illustrates the results.

Do you think that the Internet can play a productive role in eliminating the perceived democratic deficit of the European Union?

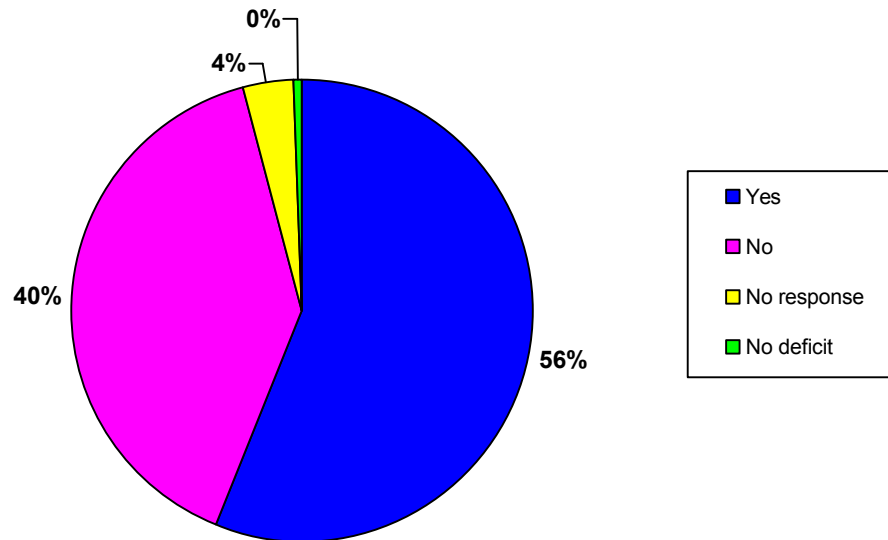


Figure 5.5: Can the Internet help eliminate the EU's democratic deficit? Source: EU website's online user survey, conducted by the author in October 2005-January 2006.

The question was compulsory, and therefore all respondents gave an answer, although a small percentage comprised non-valid/no-response answers (4%).

Looking at this data from a different perspective, the first important issue that emerges is that 96% of the respondents actually find that, in one way or another, the EU suffers from a democratic deficit. The second level of analysis of the answers for Question 14 revealed the criteria upon which the respondents based their answers.

A high number of those respondents who replied negatively to the first stem of the question (i.e. who believe that the Internet cannot help eliminate the EU's democratic deficit) did not explain their view further (87% of those who replied negatively). Of those who did, however, (albeit very few- 12 respondents), all agreed that the reason why the Internet could not contribute towards further democratisation of the EU lies in the gap between the Internet-haves and the Internet-have-nots.

On the other hand, the respondents who viewed the Internet's role in eliminating the EU's democratic deficit as positive produced more

elaborate answers in their majority (80% of those who replied positively). The main areas in which these respondents thought that the Internet can actually have a positive effect were:

- a)** Increased accessibility of information, which allows the citizens to make more informed decisions in relation to EU issues;
- b)** Increased accountability of the EU institutions by enabling people to contact the EU institutions/officials quickly and cheaply as well as by establishing more direct forms of democracy, such as e-governance, e-voting and participation in the decision-making process;
- c)** Increased opportunities for public dialogue (with or without the participation of the EU institutions/officials) which will lead to public pressure on the EU institutions for further democratisation of their structures and processes; and
- d)** Increased transparency: the Internet is seen as a medium which prevents institutions from functioning in secrecy, either because information is circulated via alternative routes or because the institutions themselves choose to make part or the whole of their decision-making process open to the public.

These criteria are very similar to those identified in Chapters 1 and 2 as essential in the success of the EU's public communication strategy in increasing the public's trust towards the EU institutions and contributing to the elimination of the EU's democratic deficit³⁵. They also coincide with the aims and actions the Commission proposes in the EU Information and Communication documents examined in Chapter 3. Therefore, the only weak link so far is the actual implementation of these criteria by the EU's online public communication strategy. Interestingly, some of the EU officials interviewed for this research project found the results of the survey "*not surprising*", and acknowledged the weaknesses in the EU's public communication policy online. This is despite the fact that all interviewees have more or less dismissed the claims regarding the democratic deficit of the EU institutions.

Of the above criteria, accessibility was the issue quoted by most respondents, with accountability being the second most frequently mentioned reason for the Internet's democratising potential given by the

respondents. The table below demonstrates the relevant percentages in detail.

Table 5.10: Respondents' views on the role of the Internet in eliminating the EU's perceived democratic deficit, Source: EU website's online user survey, conducted by the author in October 2005-January 2006.

"Do you feel the Internet can play a productive role in eliminating the perceived "democratic deficit" of the European Union? If so, in what way?"		
Category of response	Totals	Percentage (calculated on the total of 221 respondents)
Yes	25	11%
Yes: Accessibility	43	19%
Yes: Accountability	27	12%
Yes: Public Dialogue	19	9%
Yes: Transparency	13	6%
No	76	34%
No: Gap between the Internet-haves and the Internet have-nots	12	5%
No response	8	4%
No deficit	1	0.4%
Total number of responses	221	

The data from this question was cross-tabulated with the variables of gender, nationality, occupation, age and education, in order to determine whether any of these variables affected the respondents' answers. Chi-square tests and multi-variate analysis were also carried out for these variables. The tests indicated that the respondents' answers regarding the role of the Internet in eliminating the EU's democratic deficit were independent of the respondents' age, gender, nationality, education and occupation.

Going back to the respondents' earlier answers regarding the relation between direct access to EU officials and the accountability of the EU institutions, it becomes clear that although these two issues are interrelated in the eyes of the respondents, accountability alone is not considered sufficient to address the EU's democratic deficit. In fact, for the respondents, access to information is more important, as they find that this allows them to form more informed opinions regarding the EU. Unlimited access to information online and exchange of opinions and data regarding the EU are for a large number of the respondents directly linked with the

level of transparency and accountability of the EU institutions, which in turn directly influence the level of democratic decision-making within those institutions.

5.3 Conclusion

One of the main aims of this survey was to obtain feedback from regular Internet users on their overall impression regarding the quality of three of the EU's official websites (EUROPA, EU@UN, EURUNION). This was considered important because the last user survey regarding an official EU website (EUROPA) was carried out four years ago (in 2002) and only involved communication experts within EU institutions (EUROPA 2003). Although the sample for the present survey was a non-probability one, it was aimed towards individuals who would be expected to fall within the Commission's priority audiences (women, the young and the educated) and who at the same time would represent the average Internet user (also young and educated).

The findings clearly indicate that while the respondents show an interest in politics online, when they look for information concerning the EU online, the official EU websites are not their first choice of information source. Similarly, although a significant number of respondents access online political discussion fora, few access online fora to discuss EU issues. Even when they wish to discuss matters concerning the EU, the respondents choose non-official EU fora. The data collected from the open-ended questions suggests that this preference of the respondents for non-official EU websites and sources of information is two-fold. The respondents are either not aware of the existence of official EU discussion fora, or they are not confident that they will find reliable, objective information on official EU websites.

From the perspective of the EU's Information and Communication strategy aims, the results of the survey indicate that little progress has been made in bridging the gap between the EU institutions and the public, as far as online communication is concerned. Even the EUROPA website, which is the EU's main portal, and a key tool for the implementation of the EU's Information and Communication strategy online, was rated as best

website on EU issues by only 11% of the respondents (25 individuals).

The respondents indicated that the EU websites are difficult to navigate in and do not offer interesting contents, but more importantly, the majority of them thought that these websites do not offer adequate opportunities for interaction with EU officials. The importance of this last set of data became apparent when examining the results from the more general questions that measured the respondents' views on the role of the Internet in further democratising the EU's institutions and on the importance of interaction as a means to increase accountability of EU institutions.

For most respondents, interaction, accountability and democratic procedures are interrelated. This means that the EU's Information and Communication strategy is moving towards the right direction on paper, prioritising direct communication with the EU citizens and making more decision-making processes open, at least partly, to the public.

Nevertheless, the respondents' expectations go beyond generic email addresses, which the analysis of three of the EU's official websites in Chapter 4 has shown that are almost always available: They would like to see more opportunities for online dialogue with EU officials, as well as more opportunities for contact with individuals within the EU institutions. EUROPA also scores low as far as accessibility is concerned, as most respondents found navigation on this website difficult. This is a deterrent, as apart from quality and variety of content, another element of a quality website is the ability to find information on it easily and quickly. Furthermore, the respondents link unlimited access to information with the ability to form informed opinions regarding the EU and with the level of democracy within the EU. The failure of official EU websites to facilitate easy navigation enhances the perception that the EU institutions lack transparency and does not help to increase the credibility of the information available on the websites.

Besides this, despite the Commission's efforts to introduce various EU sources of information such as Europe Direct and Information relays, national media, particularly TV and newspapers, are still the most popular sources for information regarding the EU (for example, Europe Direct was

not once mentioned by the respondents). At the same time, most respondents also look for information regarding the EU online, but they prefer weblogs and non-official EU websites to official ones, again because of a lack of trust in EU official sources of information and/or lack of awareness as to the official websites' existence. Although it is positive that there is an indication of an emerging European public sphere online, with reference to the theoretical concept of online vertical Europeanisation of that public sphere, this survey provided no evidence that the EU institutions are part of the online public debate regarding the EU.

On a second level, the findings of this survey confirm what the official documents regarding the EU's Information and Communication strategy acknowledge overtly or covertly: The EU institutions are perceived by the public as lacking democratic legitimation and/or being deficient of democratic procedures. Whether scholars and Commission officials accept that there is a democratic deficit within the EU or not³⁶ is, therefore, irrelevant. Unless the public is convinced otherwise, they will remain sceptical towards the EU institutions on the whole, and towards the official EU information sources in particular.

Furthermore, what transpired through the survey data is that, for the respondents, democratic deficit and accountability, transparency and public dialogue go hand-in-hand. They accept that there is a democratic deficit within the EU and suggest more direct contact with EU officials, more access and openness of the decision-making processes and more opportunities for public dialogue with EU officials as remedies to the problem. For most of them, the Internet can help towards eliminating the democratic deficit because it facilitates interaction, openness and accessibility of information.

Most importantly, these suggestions did not come from communication experts, EU officials or EU theorists only. The varied professional background of the respondents indicates that the EU's online Information and Communication strategy should not only target elite audiences, such as journalists, academics and officials, as suggested in some of the Information and Communication strategy documents and by some Commission officials during interviews. The educational and

professional profile of the respondents suggests that the online European public sphere may be more inclusive than previously assumed and the EU's online Information and Communication strategy needs to take this into consideration.

Of course the online public sphere will be an elite one for as long as Internet access is not universally available. Working towards creating an all-inclusive public sphere online means aiming to eliminate the divide between Internet-haves and Internet-have-nots as well as close the gap between specialists and the general public. The latest EU Information and Communication documents, published after Margot Wallström's appointment as Communication Commissioner, have acknowledged this, as they set out the aim of addressing and involving the wider EU public, as well as the elites.

The fact that the respondents prefer to access non-official EU fora and weblogs in order to discuss EU issues suggests that the EU institutions/officials (with the exception of Margot Wallström's weblog) remain absent from the emerging online EU public sphere. This is crucial, for as long as the online EU public dialogue continues to evolve without any input or with only marginal input from the EU institutions/officials, the EU's public communication strategy will not become effective enough to change the EU public's perception of the EU institutions as lacking democratic legitimation.

The following figure summarises the main points of this survey in accordance with the theoretical framework first presented in Chapter 2³⁷. All four components of the framework have been updated here, in order to reflect the results of the online EU websites' user survey.

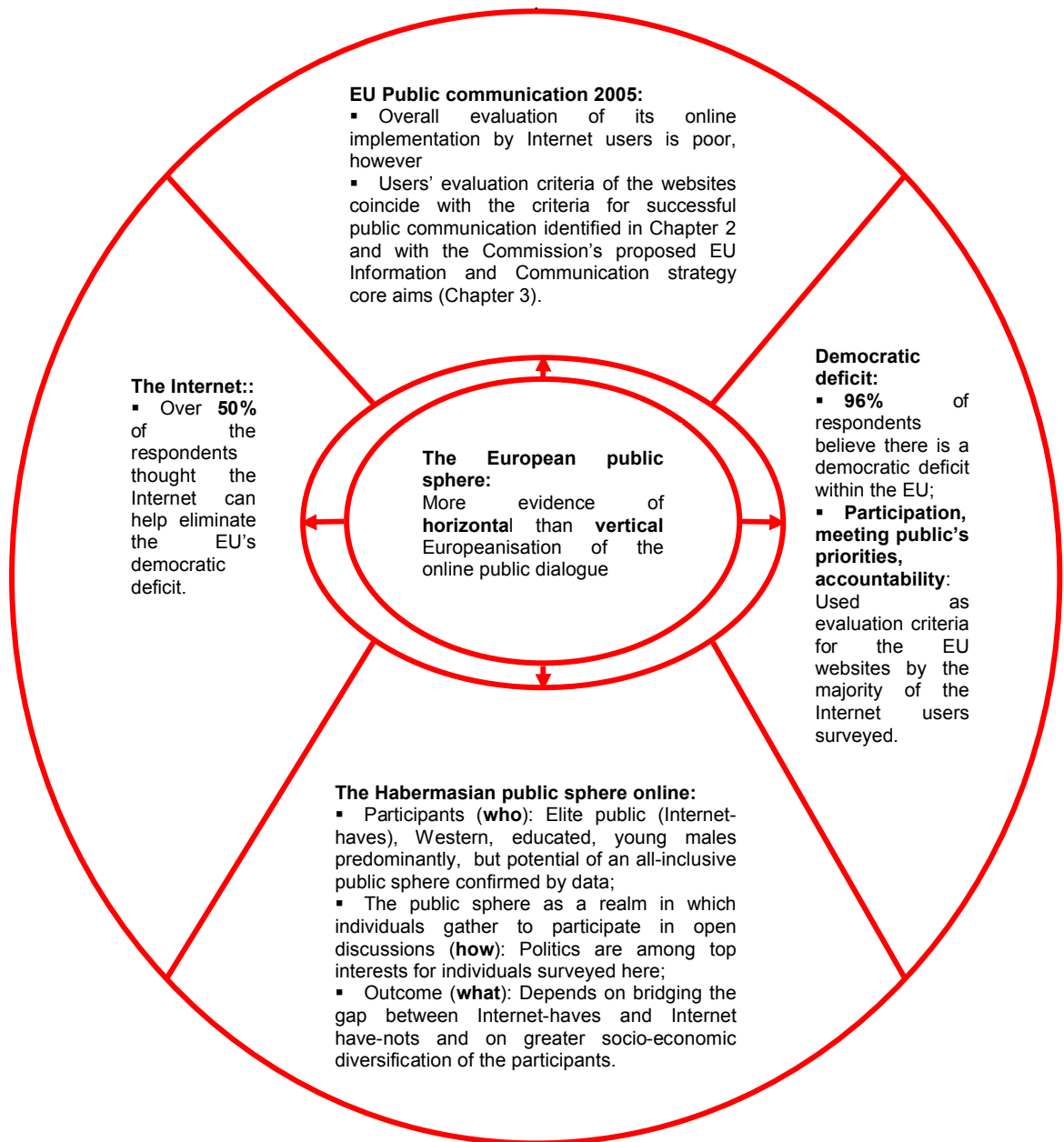


Figure 5. 6: Key components of the theoretical concept regarding the EU public sphere: Internet users' views, adapted from Figure 2.1, Chapter 2.

The following and final chapter of this research project summarises and compares the main components of the theoretical concept with the main points that emerged from the review of the EU's Information and Communication strategy documents, the analysis of three of the EU's official websites, the results of the Internet users' survey and the interviews with key Commission officials. It also briefly looks at any developments in the online implementation of the EU's public communication strategy in 2006, which were not measured by the analysis

of the websites and the Internet users' survey, and proceeds to suggest a set of recommendations for the future planning of the EU's public communication strategy online.

Notes

¹ See Chapter 3, Parts 3.1 and 3.2.

² According to Deacon et al, snowball sampling is suitable "*where no specific list or institution exists that could be used as the basis for sampling [...] A snowball sample relies on initial contacts to suggest further people for the researcher to approach*" (Deacon, Pickering, Golding, Murdock 1999: 53). In the present study, snowball sampling was deemed appropriate as it would be practically impossible to calculate the exact Internet users' population and determine a representative sample otherwise. The author relied on the initial contacts to forward the questionnaire to their peers.

³ See also Chapter 1, Section 1.3.2.

⁴ The classification of the initial contacts according to nationality/country of origin was based on the IANA-defined **country code Top-Level Domain** (ccTLD), i.e. the last part of the Internet domain name used by a country or a dependent territory (Internet Assigned Numbers Authority- IANA 2006). This is two letters long, for example **jp** for Japan or **uk** for the United Kingdom. Top-Level Domain, in general, comprises the letters which follow the final dot of any domain name. For example, in the domain name *www.website.com*, the top-level domain is *com* (or *COM*, as domain names are not case-sensitive). **top-level domain (TLD)** is the last part of an Internet domain name; that is, the letters which follow the final dot of any domain name. For example, in the domain name *www.website.com*, the top-level domain is **com** (or *COM*, as domain names are not case-sensitive).

Apart from the **country code top-level domains** (ccTLD), the regulator, Internet Assigned Numbers Authority (IANA), currently classifies top-level domains into another two types: **Generic top-level domain** (gTLD), used (at least in theory) by a particular class of organizations (for example, **com** for commercial organizations). It is three or more letters long. gTLDs are subclassified into sponsored top-level domains (sTLD), e.g. *.aero*, *.coop* and *.museum*, and unsponsored top-level domains (uTLD), e.g. *.biz*, *.info*, *.name* and *.pro*; and **infrastructure top-level domain**: The top-level domain **arpa** is the only confirmed one. **Root** has been known to exist without reason.

⁵ The Yahoo! Directory (Yahoo!Inc 2006) listed 14388 higher education institutes worldwide, on 25 February 2006, 47% of which were in the US, and approximately 22% (3203 institutes) in EU, or EU-related countries (i.e. accession countries, candidate countries and European Neighbourhood policy countries). Of these, the higher number (983 institutes) was listed under the UK domain name (*.ac.uk*), with Italy, Germany and France following with much lower numbers (300, 259 and 249 listed institutions respectively). In order to maintain a balance between the UK and the US institutes and

the institutes from other countries, the final contacts chosen were not in accordance with the institutes' distribution worldwide.

⁶ According to Blognet statistics (Blogwise.com 2006), there were 71252 weblogs in 204 countries listed on Blognet.com on 25/02/2006, with 89% of the countries having at least one weblog listed. Of all these weblogs, only 7547 were listed under politics and of these again only 55 were listed under the keywords "Europe" and/or "the EU" (0.73%). Of these, only 30 had an available contact email. In the end, 24 were chosen for the final sample, in order to maintain a balance between anti-EU and EU-neutral/pro-EU weblogs.

⁷ The think tanks chosen here were taken from a list comprising public policy institutes referenced on the Wikipedia list of public policy institutions (Wikipedia.org 2006c) and on the much sorter list of think tanks found on Politeia, a socioeconomic forum itself (Politeia website 2003). The final list of public policy institutes included 4 British politics think tanks; 6 EU politics/relations think tanks (2 Belgian, 1 British, 1 Spanish, 1 French, 1 German); 2 Economics think tanks (1 Danish, 1 US); 2 International Relations think tanks (1 Australian, 1 British); 2 US politics think tanks; and 1 German interdisciplinary student think tank. It must be noted that the categorisation of the institutes was based on how the institutes define themselves on their webpages. If a think tank defined itself as "a British politics forum" for example, then it was classified as such, even if part of its website's content referred to international relations or EU/UK relations.

⁸ There were no comprehensive lists of youth/student societies found online. A search on Google (Google Inc 2006) returned more than 25 million results for the keywords "youth student societies clubs". However, most of the top 50 results linked to UK educational institutes. A comparison of the student/young people's societies and clubs listed on 10 UK higher education institutes showed that most of these societies were replicated on all or most of the institutes. It was therefore decided to use only one UK higher education institute's list of student societies and clubs as the source for the sample of the present survey.

The student societies chosen included 1 Indian students' society; 1 Malaysian students' society; 1 Greek students' society; 1 Italian students' society; 1 Spanish students' society; 1 Thai students' society; 1 Muslim students' society; 1 Jewish students' society; 1 Christian students' society; and 14 non-nationality/religion-related student societies and clubs (i.e. sports clubs, debate societies, music/ drama clubs etc).

⁹ The main initiative to cover the divide between Internet-haves and Internet-have-nots in the EU is the Commission's i2010 Initiative, which was formed within the framework of the Lisbon strategy (March 2000), to transform the EU in the world's most dynamic and competitive economy by 2010. For more information on the i2010 Initiative see Commission of the European Communities 2006h. For details on the Lisbon strategy see EUROPA 2006e.

¹⁰ Chapter 2, Part 2.1.

¹¹ See Question 26, Annex 4.

¹² There was only one respondent who answered that he never accesses the Internet, but he makes up for a negligent 0.4% of the total sample.

¹³ Euractiv.com defines itself as follows: “*an independent media portal fully dedicated to EU affairs. EurActiv has an original business model, based on five elements (corporate sponsoring, EurActor membership, advertising, EU projects, and content syndication). It is well funded and the content usage is free*” (EurActiv.com PLC 2006).

¹⁴ See Annex 4, Question 21.

¹⁵ See Annex 4, Question 22.

¹⁶ See Annex 4, for further details on how the responses were re-grouped. Note that when added up, the totals per type of online forum exceed the total amount of valid responses to this question, as some respondents mentioned more than one type of fora in their answer.

¹⁷ See Question 3, Annex 4.

¹⁸ Note that the data has been regrouped, in order to separate invalid (no response) from valid responses and duplicates within the category “Other”. The percentages have been calculated on the basis of total number of respondents (221) and not on the added up totals of each category, as some respondents chose more than one categories.

¹⁹ Of the 9 responses under the “Other” category, 6 concerned a search for job opportunities or internships within the EU institutions. All 6 of the respondents were students in their first or second university degree.

²⁰ See Annex 4, Questions 3 and 4.

²¹ See Annex 4, Question 5.

²² See Annex 4, Questions 8 and 9.

²³ See Annex 4.

²⁴ See Annex 4, Question 7.

²⁵ With regard to the national public spheres as these appear through traditional, offline media throughout Europe and the “Europeanisation” of the offline public debates in the Member-states, see Holland and Chaban 2005; Koopmans, Statham, Kriesi, Della Porta, de Beus, Guiraudon, Medrano, Pfetsch 2004; Bond and Federal Trust for Education and Research 2003; Koopmans and Pfetsch 2003; Risse and van de Steeg 2003; Kantner 2002; Rauer, Rivet, van de Steeg 2002.

²⁶ See Annex 4, Question 7.

²⁷ See Annex 4, Question 7.

²⁸ See Annex 4.

²⁹ The total number of respondents who gave a valid answer is smaller than the added up totals per website chosen. This is because some respondents listed more than one websites in their answer.

³⁰ See Annex 4, Question 12. The figure is based on 44 valid responses, and not on the

collective total of the number of respondents per criterion, as some respondents based their evaluation on more than 1 criterion. If added up, the percentages shown in the figure exceed 100%. This is because in several cases, a respondent mentioned more than one criterion.

³¹ See Annex 4, Questions 3 and 4.

³² See Annex 4, Questions 18 and 19.

³³ See Chapter 1, Parts 1.2 and 1.3; Chapter 2, Parts 2.3 and 2.4.

³⁴ See Annex 4.

³⁵ See Chapter 1, Parts 1.2. and 1.3; Chapter 2, Parts 2.3 and 2.4.

³⁶ See Chapter 1, Part 1.2 and Chapter 3.

³⁷ See Figure 2.1, Chapter 2.

Conclusion- Theory and reality of the EU's public communication strategy online

Based on the two theoretical debates regarding the impact of the Internet on politics and the European public sphere and the EU's democratic deficit, which have been developing in parallel for the last 10-15 years, this thesis has investigated the role of the Internet in the EU's public communication strategy and the emerging EU public sphere.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the Commission, in its proposals for an EU Information and Communication strategy, has acknowledged that direct communication with the EU public is necessary in order to build the EU citizens' trust towards its institutions and address the issues of transparency and democratic legitimation of the EU's decision-making process. Furthermore, the EU's Information and Communication strategy regards the Internet as a key tool that would enable more openness and citizens' participation in the decision making progress.

However, when the policy was juxtaposed with its online implementation, in Chapters 4 and 5, it became evident that although there is an emerging European public sphere online, the EU's official input is mainly absent from that online public discourse. The underlying reasons of this gap between policy and online implementation were further investigated through interviews with senior policy-making and policy-implementation Commission officials, the results of which have been presented throughout Chapters 3-5, where necessary.

In this final chapter, the empirical data is summarised and used to assess the original theoretical model established in Chapters 1 and 2, in order to identify the areas where the online implementation of the EU's public communication deviates from the theoretical model and the Commission's proposed strategies.

i. From theory to reality: The concept of the online European public sphere

Using the Habermasian concept of the public sphere¹ as the normative framework of theoretical analysis in this research, two main

points were identified in relation to the European public sphere: Firstly, the European public sphere is directly connected to the issue of the EU's democratic deficit². If the purpose of the public sphere, in the Habermasian approach, is to ensure that society functions on democratic principles, then the European case appears to be one where public dialogue is not fulfilling its purpose, i.e. as a safeguard of democratic principles. Secondly, in the absence of an institutionalised pan-European public sphere based on a common language and mediated by pan-European media, the approach of several, interrelated, Europeanised national/regional public spheres offers the most realistic, from an ontological and methodological point of view, theoretical platform for analysis of the European public sphere³.

Pfetsch's model of the "horizontal" (communicative linkages between various EU member-states) and "vertical" (communicative linkages between national and European level) Europeanisation process of the public dialogue (Pfetsch 2004: 4) offered the theoretical framework within which to define the role of the EU's public communication strategy in the European public sphere⁴. Initially, public communication was defined as the top-down process of the communication between the EU institutions and the public, with three main areas of action, namely to increase people's familiarity with the EU; to increase people's appreciation of what the EU does; and to engage people with the EU/ in the debate of EU affairs⁵. Following Pfetsch's classification of horizontal and vertical Europeanisation of the public sphere, this definition placed public communication within the vertical process of Europeanisation of the public dialogue.

With interaction being a fundamental element of public communication and in the absence of pan-European mediated public fora, i.e. pan-European TV channels and/or press, the focus turned to the online direct public debate between EU institutions and the general public.

This brings us to the final component of the present study's theoretical framework: the Internet. The medium's key characteristics of identity fluidity, ability to bypass communication obstacles, elimination of geographical and time-related barriers and virtually endless flow of information (Poster 2003; Yang 2002; Jordan 2000) have led several

theorists to envisage an alternative, all-inclusive public sphere online⁶. In the case of the European public sphere, in particular, given its complicated nature (interconnected national public spheres, multilingual community, geographical distance between members of the public) the Internet becomes an attractive tool, which could be deployed towards the formation of a democratic, strong European public sphere (Leonard and Arbuthnott 2002; Engström 2000). To what extent is this hypothesis confirmed by the online reality of the EU's public communication strategy? This issue, which forms the core research question of the present study, was addressed in 3 stages.

The EU's public communication: Information and Communication policy 2001-2006

Firstly, the EU's Information and Communication strategy documents from 2001 onwards were reviewed in order to obtain the EU's official position on the role of the EU's public communication in the European public sphere and in addressing the EU's democratic deficit, through the deployment of the Internet.

What became evident from the documents reviewed was that the Commission is aware of the issues regarding the emerging European public sphere and the openness, accountability and democratic legitimisation of the EU institutions, particularly after 2005. Through its Information and Communication documents, the Commission has thus:

- a) Declared its intention to establish a two-way communication process with the European public, in order to offer more opportunities for citizens' participation in the decision-making process and to gain the trust of the public towards the EU institutions;
- b) Committed itself to the creation of a more homogeneous communication amongst the EU institutions, which, in turn, will reflect a more coherent image of what the EU stands for and help communicate more clearly the EU's goals and achievements to the European public; and
- c) Recognised the Internet as an integral part of the EU's public communication strategy.

The Commission has also maintained coherence and consistency

of the values it suggests as core EU values throughout the documents, despite any changes introduced in the proposed Information and Communication strategy. The figure below was used in Chapter 3 to illustrate the three core EU values, as these emerged from the review of the Information and Communication strategy documents.

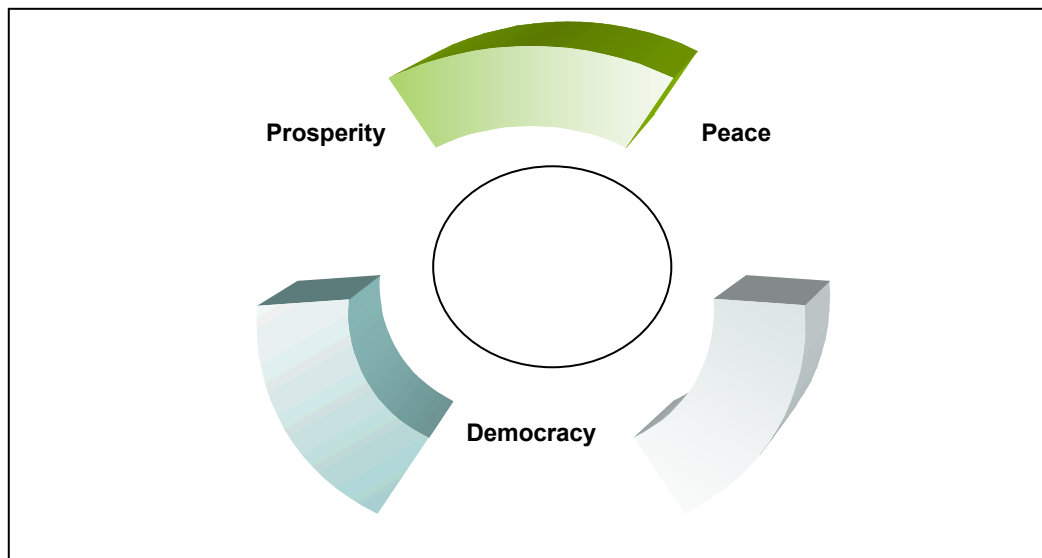


Figure 3.1: “The circle of prosperity”, the three key ideas underlining the EU’s Information and Communication strategy, Source: the author, based on Commission Information and Communication strategy documents 2000-2004 and 2004-2006, Chapter 3, Part 3.3.

Despite the consistency in the values projected and in its basic commitments with regard to the EU’s public communication strategy, there are several problems with the Commission’s proposals on paper. To begin with, it is not always clear if the Commission is referring to EU member-states and citizens only, or to the wider European community, thus sending confusing messages to the public (intra-EU and foreign alike). The references to non-EU audiences are rare, and there are no clear policies proposed in addressing these audiences.

Moreover, the Commission recognises that the EU public is questioning the democratic legitimacy of the EU institutions yet never really goes beyond merely acknowledging the existence of this argument. In addition, while most of the documents examined rather tactfully dismiss the claims that the EU has a democratic deficit, several of the EU’s public communication materials addressed to the public, both online and offline,

blatantly reject such an argument⁷.

Not accepting the lack of democratic legitimation of the EU institutions undermines the Commission's emphasis on citizens' participation in the decision-making process and on further openness of the EU institutions' procedures. In other words, it is not clear whether the Commission intends to actually address the EU's democratic deficit by introducing new possibilities for the citizens to give feedback and monitor the decision-making procedures on EU level, or these measures aim to change the public's perception regarding the EU's democratic deficit.

Finally, it has not always been clear if it is the Commission's view that the Internet should be used to address a niche public, i.e. the European elites, more than it should be used to communicate with the general public.

Despite the problems identified in the EU's Information and Communication documents, from a methodological point of view, the consistency in the projected values and aims offered a solid basis for analysis of the EU's public communication messages online.

The EU's public communication: Online implementation

The main points of the Information and Communication strategy were juxtaposed with the findings from a 24-week-long monitoring of three of the EU's official websites, in Chapter 4, in order to establish the relation between the official communication policy and its online implementation. The system of key values identified in the Commission documentation was used in conjunction with the theoretical concept of public communication developed in earlier chapters as the basis upon which a set of coding values was built, allowing for the systematic mapping of the three websites' homepages. This methodological approach made it possible for the data produced to be evaluated in relation to both the EU's Information and Communication aims and the normative aims of successful public communication.

What emerged from the analysis of the three official websites was a gap between policy and implementation online, particularly when it came to interaction and citizen's participation in the decision making process.

Although the EU's messages online adhered to the key concepts that the Commission has consistently pointed out as core EU values throughout the Information and Communication strategy documents, interaction with EU officials was only available in the form of generic email addresses. Online public dialogue in the form of discussion forum debates was recorded only in 2004, in two instances: the permanent online debate regarding EU issues on the EUROPA website (FUTURUM public forum) and the brief, temporary online discussion regarding mainly trade issues, which appeared on the EURUNION website for three weeks only. In 2005 the FUTURUM discussion forum was suspended, at the height of the debate regarding the future of Europe and the Constitutional Treaty of the EU. Although online public debate was reintroduced on the EUROPA website in 2006, in the form of the Debate Europe forum, there has been no formal commitment that the feedback from the public will be incorporated in any way in the policy-making process of the EU nor has there been any indication so far that this will change in the future.

Furthermore, all three EU websites were found to lack sufficient coverage of the issues which, according to recent Eurobarometer surveys, concern the European public mostly, i.e. social issues, such as unemployment, pensions and education⁸. From this perspective, the EU's online public communication, as observed in EUROPA, EURUNION and EU@UN, failed to meet another of the aims of the normative model of public communication, i.e. to meet the audience's needs and interests.

EU public communication online: Policy impact on key online audiences

Having established a gap between the EU's public communication policy and its implementation online, the third step was to investigate the impact of the EU's public communication online on what the Commission has defined as 'key audiences', i.e. the young and educated, who also fit the average Internet user's profile, thus being amongst the individuals most likely to access the official EU websites and/or participate in an online debate. For this reason a survey was conducted in late 2005-early 2006 aiming to record the views of such priority audiences.

Conducting such a survey proved challenging, both in respect of methodology and resources. Measuring the exact Internet users' population and calculating a representative sample that would fit both the profile of "key EU audiences" and that of the average Internet user would have been an enormously time-consuming, if not impossible, from a methodological perspective, task. Even if the methodological obstacles were overcome, conducting a large-scale online survey of a representative sample of Internet users would have required financial resources greater than the ones available for the present research. For these reasons, the survey focused instead on obtaining as wide a range of data as possible from a small sample of Internet users, who still matched the key EU audience and average Internet user profiles. Although the number of respondents was small and the survey, therefore, did not allow for greater generalisations by itself, it was possible to reach some generalisations by cross-referencing the responses with data from earlier, larger-scale surveys on the EU citizens' attitudes towards the Union (Eurobarometer 2006a, Eurobarometer 2006b; Davies and Readhead 2004; COM(2002)705, final).

Although the survey aimed mainly to obtain responses from individuals who fit the demographic profile of key EU audiences and of the average Internet user (the majority of the respondents were young, male and educated to high levels), the resulting sample included responses from individuals who fall under the umbrella of "vulnerable" audiences (Eurobarometer 2006b), i.e. women (one third of the respondents), individuals who left education early (14% of the total sample) and individuals younger than 24 years of age (approximately 30% of the respondents). The majority of the respondents also claimed to visit political/governmental websites on a regular basis (83% of the respondents).

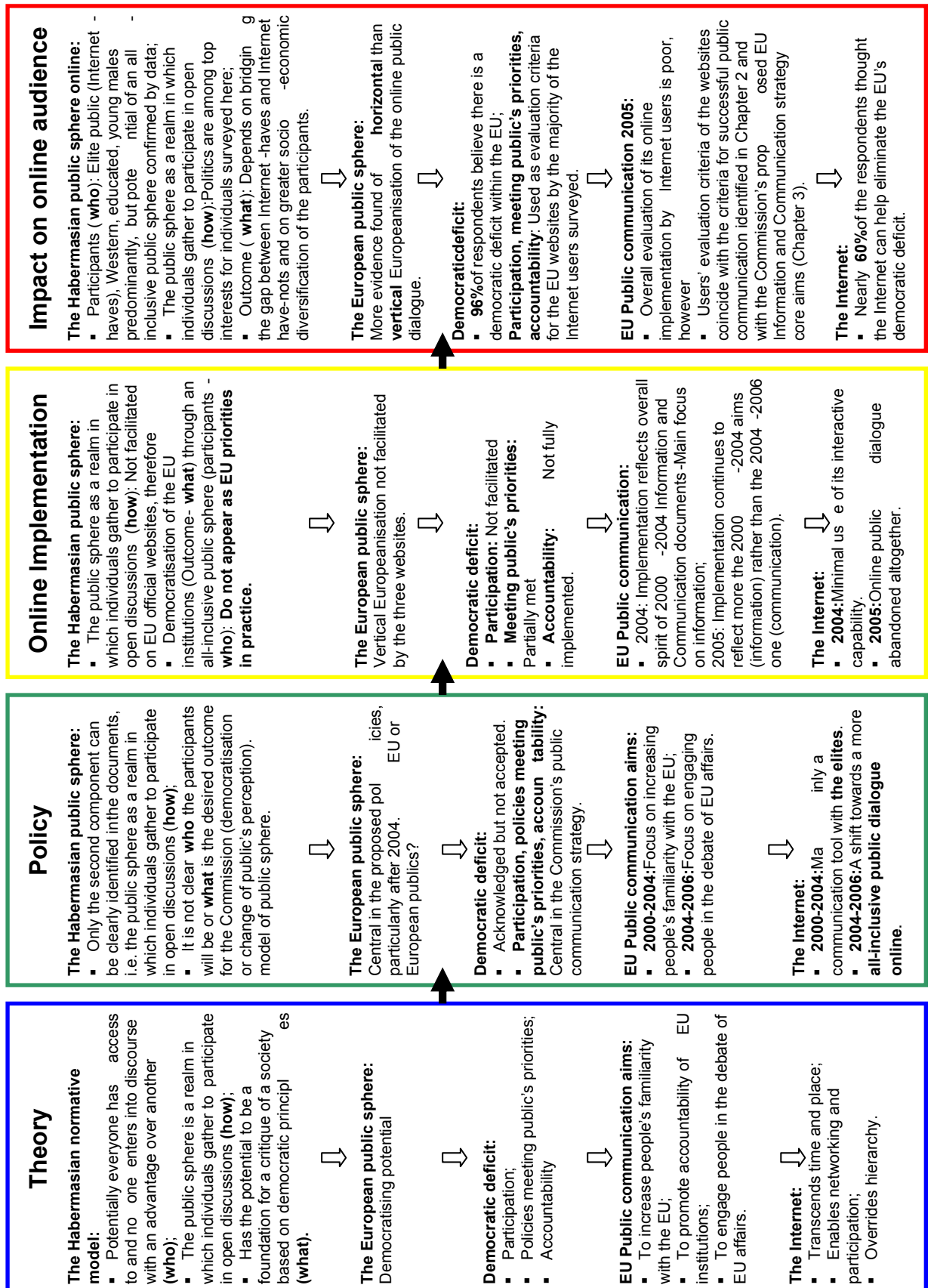
Gender, education, nationality and age were statistically found to have no effect on the respondents' Internet behaviour or views on the EU websites and on the role of the Internet in eliminating the EU's democratic deficit. However, the results highlighted something which recent larger-scale Eurobarometer surveys have also showed: The Commission (in the

present case three of its official websites) is struggling to convince the very audiences that it has identified as “priority targets” of its public communication strategy and which have traditionally been pro-EU (Eurobarometer 2006b). The respondents rated the EU websites low in terms of accessibility, content and interaction opportunities and claimed not to access official EU websites often, despite the fact that several of them are interested in EU issues and often access relevant online public fora. In other words, there is a possibility of an emerging European public sphere online, from which the EU’s official voice is currently absent or excluded. More importantly, the respondents almost unanimously agreed that there is a democratic deficit in the EU (96% of respondents) and for the majority of them (56% of all respondents), the Internet can contribute towards eliminating this deficit, as it allows for accountability, openness and direct dialogue between the EU officials and the public.

Figure c.1 below illustrates the relation between the theoretical framework regarding the EU public sphere (i.e. the democratic deficit of the EU institutions, the EU public communication strategy and the role of the Internet as both a tool of public communication and a means of democratisation of the EU) and the reality of the EU’s public communication strategy online, as this emerged from the 3-level analysis described above.

This 3-step analysis confirmed the theoretical hypothesis that the Internet has an important role to play in the emerging European public sphere and highlighted the gap between EU public communication policy and its online implementation, insofar as the Internet’s deployment in promoting public dialogue between the EU officials and the general public is concerned. This, in turn, generated another question. If the Commission has committed itself to promoting public dialogue and has identified a key role for the Internet in all its Information and Communication strategy documents since 2001, to what can this gap between policy and implementation be attributed?

Figure c.1: EU public communication- Theory, policy and online reality, Source: The author, based on Figures 2.3, 3.2, 4.12 and 5.7.



In order to address this question, interviews with key Commission officials involved in the EU's Information and Communication policy-making process were conducted. The interviews allowed for an understanding of the institutional culture behind the policy-making and highlighted some of the underlying causes of the EU's public communication strategy shortcomings, thus showing that there is scope for further investigation of the institutional culture behind the making of the EU's public communication policy in future projects.

The individuals who were interviewed held key positions within the Information and Communication policy-making and implementation mechanism at the time (some still hold the same positions today) and were interviewed in 3 phases, after the completion of each of the above three research steps (documents' review, websites' analysis and Internet users' survey), in order to obtain the officials' input on every aspect of the findings. The results of the interviews have been presented throughout the previous chapters, where necessary. The main issue that emerged from these interviews was that the gap between policy and implementation is a reflection of the situation within the relevant policy-making and policy-implementing bodies, i.e. the Commission and the Directorate-General (DG) Communication:

a) The DG Communication has undergone restructuring four times since 2001, which may well at least partly explain the fact that most public communication documents reviewed in Chapter 3 repeat the same aims but make little and abstract reference to any progress achieved in obtaining these aims⁹. This also partly explains the poor implementation of the EU's public communication policy online, which this thesis has shown.

b) There is a difference of opinion/perception between officials on policy-making level and officials who are charged with implementing the policy with regard to the aims, online target audiences and role of the Internet in the EU public communication strategy¹⁰. This is another factor impeding the implementation of the policy online.

c) Any references to the emerging European public sphere found in the public communication documents reviewed in Chapter 3 occurred mostly

“by chance” by the interviewees’ own admittance, rather than through a consultation process or dialogue with academics/experts in the field¹¹.

d) There is an element of naivety within the EU institutional culture, as far as communication with the public and the public’s perception of the EU is concerned, which could explain the surprise of the EU officials when the referenda in France and the Netherlands resulted in the rejection of the Constitutional Treaty¹².

e) The reluctance of the Commission to take the lead from the member-states in the implementation of the EU’s Information and Communication strategy is caused by the fear that the Commission will be accused of propaganda and of attempting to countermand national sovereignty altogether¹³.

f) The officials working on the EU’s Information and Communication strategy are in their majority non-experts in the field of public communication. This partly lies beneath the very slow embrace of new communication technologies and in particular the Internet in the implementation of the EU’s public communication strategy, despite policy-makers constantly underlining in every EU Information and Communication document the importance of this medium in reaching target audiences¹⁴.

ii. Is it necessary to bridge this gap between the EU’s public communication policy and its online implementation?

The results of this research project have shown that there are discrepancies not only between strategic planning and implementation of the EU public communication online, but also between policy and institutional culture. More importantly, all evidence points to the issue of political power within the EU, an issue which underpins the democratic deficit of the EU institutions. This is directly linked to the reluctance of the Commission to be seen as more proactive in the area of communication with the public, continuously leaving the initiatives to national and local governments, although this has not been an effective strategy in terms of getting the EU’s messages across to the public so far. It is also directly linked to the lack of public communication experts within the relevant

policy-making bodies, as the Commission would not want to be accused of “*hiring professionals to try and sell the EU to the public*”, as one interviewee put it¹⁵.

Public communication alone cannot resolve the issue of the democratic deficit of the EU institutions. This is more a matter of political will and consensus on behalf of the member-states than a technical or communication issue. What public communication can do is to create the prerequisites for an open political dialogue among member-states and ultimately a consensus as to the political nature of the EU. Successful public communication is built on mutual trust between the institutions and the public. In turn, trust is developed through open dialogue, which allows direct input of public opinion in the policy-making process, and honesty, not spin-doctoring, on behalf of the institutions with regard to the issues that concern EU citizens most.

Although privately, most EU officials would be prepared to accept that there is a democratic deficit within the EU institutions, the EU institutions appear to be in denial in public, even after the negative referenda in the Netherlands and France, which apparently “*sent shockwaves to the Council and the EU Parliament*”, in the words of one interviewee¹⁶. Even the surveys on how the EU citizens view the future of Europe conducted in the aftermath of these referenda are written in as mild a way as possible, despite presenting data which clearly show that the citizens are unhappy with the EU because they do not feel it is meeting their priorities/needs (Eurobarometer 2006a, Eurobarometer 2006b)¹⁷.

The evidence, therefore, points to the fact that the Commission is far from achieving what Risse et al describe as “*similar horizon of reference*” (Risse and van de Steeg 2003:19), that is the top-down communication process within the European public sphere does not address issues within the same context as the public does. This is a prerequisite for a “*community of communication*” (ibid.:19) or the formation of a public sphere in which participants recognise each other as legitimate contributors in the public debate, precisely because they a priori agree on the same context framework. This is not to be confused with universal consensus over an issue: The official EU position on the democratic deficit

may differ from that of the public's, but they still need to agree on a common framework, namely to agree that there is a democratic deficit, if they are to engage in a public dialogue between them.

Furthermore, the present study has shown that the Commission is failing to meet one of the main aims identified in the normative concept of public communication. In other words, the Commission is failing to match messages to the public's priorities¹⁸: At the moment, the latest Eurobarometer surveys show that the Europeans find that the EU is not doing enough to improve areas that they think have direct impact on their everyday life, such as unemployment and social security (Eurobarometer 2006a; 2006b). The EU websites' analysis presented in Chapter 4 showed that the EU's online public communication focuses on politics more than financial and social issues. When we take into consideration the issues that the EU public has defined as priority ones, and that these issues do not really receive the appropriate coverage not even by EUROPA, the EU's main portal, the reasons behind the negative evaluation that the three EU websites received in the survey conducted for the present study become more apparent. Not only were these websites difficult to navigate in and offered little opportunities for interaction with EU officials, but they also failed, as it now transpires, to address effectively the issues that concern the EU public the most.

The credibility of the EU's public communication online, and offline, does not depend only on the extensive coverage of the EU's achievements in areas that concern the public the most and on the degree of accessibility of information. It is also directly linked to transparency of the decision-making process, or rather to making this decision-making process clear to the public. Apparently, transparency has become a "trend" issue within EU institutions with *"everyone wanting to be transparent but not really knowing what they are to be transparent about"* according to one senior interviewee¹⁹. The institutions have picked up on the public's expectations and demands for greater transparency of the decision-making process, but have not yet managed to put this issue into perspective. Although transparency is a priority in all official documents regarding the EU's governance and Information and Communication

strategy and steps have been taken online, for example to make all legal EU documentation available to the public, EU citizens, individually, have no real input or access in the actual decision-making process, which continues to take place, by and large, behind closed doors.

So far, the points concerning transparency, credibility of the message and achieving a “*similar horizon of reference*” (Risse and van de Steeg 2003:19) can be applied equally to the EU’s public communication strategy online and offline. Nevertheless, the Internet is the only medium, at the moment, which allows the EU institutions/ the EU establishment, to engage in direct public dialogue with the EU citizens and foreign audiences alike. Unmediated public dialogue or, more specifically, dialogue that does not rely on national communicators (offline media) is crucial if the EU is to establish the credibility of its messages. Since the prospect of a widely-accepted supranational TV channel or newspaper is distant in the case of the EU, the only other public space where the EU establishment has the opportunity to directly approach the EU and foreign publics is cyberspace.

The online public sphere has the potential to become all-inclusive, as gender, age, socioeconomic and/or ethnic background do not constitute eligibility factors in the online public sphere. Furthermore, some of the EU’s priority target audiences (for example, young Europeans) are also amongst the groups that access the Internet the most. As the data from the EU websites’ online user survey has shown, online discussion fora are also used by individuals within what the EU calls “vulnerable” groups (for example Eurobarometer 2006b), i.e. women and individuals who have not reached higher levels of education.

Finally, language does not play such an important role in online communication: English is the most widely used language online²⁰. In addition, as the recently re-launched Debate Europe webpage (Commission of the European Communities 2006b) clearly demonstrates, it is possible for a public debate to take place online even if the participants speak different languages²¹.

For all these reasons, the Internet constitutes an important public communication tool, which allows for the official EU voice to reach the

public directly, bypassing national/regional media and participating in a potentially all-inclusive European public sphere. For the last six years the Commission has repeatedly committed to promoting dialogue with the general public and has identified a key role for the Internet in this process. This study has shown, however, that little progress has been made in the implementation of these proposals. Even the most recent and significant step towards the materialisation of the Commission's dedication to public dialogue, i.e. the re-introduction of an online discussion forum on EUROPA in 2006 (ibid.), has not been accompanied by the necessary formal commitment that the public's feedback will be incorporated in the EU's decision-making process.

Nevertheless, for the first time the Commission is directly asking the public "What Europe do you want?" (ibid.) and Europeans are responding to the call for public dialogue on the future of the EU in far greater numbers than before. This is an opportunity for the EU institutions not to be missed: At a time when the EU's identity and its role in Europe and in the world are widely debated in traditional media and recent developments within the Union have revealed a gap between the officials' vision of the EU and the public's needs and expectations, the EU institutions cannot afford to be excluded from the public sphere debating precisely their role and future. Whether the Commission will actually listen to what Europe **we** want or not will determine whether the EU's public communication is moving towards a European public sphere or just a European sphere of publicity.

Notes

¹ I.e. a normative model where the public sphere is seen as an all-inclusive public realm, which ensures that society functions on democratic principles by publicly discussing all aspects of societal life (Habermas 1989). See Chapter 1, Part 1.1.

² Chapter 1, Part 1.2.

³ Chapter 1, Section 1.2.2 and Part 1.3. The definition of the European public sphere was based particularly on the approaches of Pfetsch (2004) and Guidry, Kennedy and Zald (2006).

⁴ See Chapter 1, Section 1.3.4.

⁵ See Chapter 1, Section 1.3.4.

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- ⁶ See Chapter 2, Part 2.1.
- ⁷ See Chapter 3.
- ⁸ See Chapter 4, Part 4.2.2.
- ⁹ See Chapter 3, Sections 3.1.5 and 3.2.5.
- ¹⁰ See Chapter 3, Part 3.2.4.
- ¹¹ See Chapter 3, Part 3.1.2.
- ¹² See Chapter 3, Note 42.
- ¹³ See Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, Section 4.2.2.
- ¹⁴ See Chapter 4, Part 4.3.
- ¹⁵ See Chapter 3, Section 3.2.3.
- ¹⁶ See Chapter 3, Section 3.2.1.
- ¹⁷ See Chapter 4, Part 4.2.
- ¹⁸ See Chapter 1, Part 1.3.
- ¹⁹ See Chapter 4, Part 4.3.
- ²⁰ See Chapter 1, Part 1.2, Section 1.2.2.
- ²¹ See Chapter 4, Section 4.2.2.

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Annex 1- Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate: Tables of actions

Table I: Promoting citizens' participation in the democratic process, Source: Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate (COM(2005)494, final: 18).

Operational sub-objectives / actions	Point in Plan D	Achievements	Expected results / impacts	Indicators
3.1. Promoting more effective consultation	4.2.1.	Optimum use of existing tools for obtaining feedback from the public	Input and feedback in shaping EU policies	Number and quality of consultations carried out Target audiences reached Ex ante and ex post evaluation
3.2. Support for European Citizens' Panels	4.2.2.	Organisation of panels at inter-regional level. Recommendations/reports to regional and national governments	Helping to restore confidence in political systems. Making citizens feel more involved	Number of regions represented/number of panels/number of participants/ex ante and ex post evaluation
3.3. Greater openness	4.2.3.	Openness of the Council's and other institutions' proceedings. Opening of votes to the public	Public identification with Council decisions. Understanding of its role as legislator and of the role of the institutions.	Openness measures adopted/amended rules of procedure
3.4. Increased voter participation	4.2.4.	Creation of an interinstitutional working group	Boosting the legitimacy of the democratic institutions	Improved electronic voting systems/turnout in elections

Table II: Assisting national debates on the future of the EU, Source: Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate (COM(2005)494, final: 16).

Operational sub-objectives / actions	Point in Plan D	Achievements	Expected results / impacts	Indicators
1.1 Organisation of national debates	3.1.	Assistance in the organisation of events promoting the debate	Organisation of one national debate per Member State. Promotion of regional initiatives and involvement of national Parliaments	Number of debates organised. Reports by Member States
1.2 Feedback process	3.3.	Organisation of the European Conference in May 2006/ synthesis document	Pooling of the initial conclusions emerging from the debate and pointers for the preparation of the June 2006 European Council	Number of Conference participants. Ex ante and ex post evaluation

Table III: Generating a real dialogue on European Policies, Source: Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate (COM(2005)494, final: 19).

Operational sub-objectives / actions	Point in Plan D	Achievements	Expected results / impacts	Indicators
4.1. Commissioners' availability to national Parliaments	4.1.2.	Explanation of EU policies by Commissioners before national Parliaments	Facilitation of the debate on the EU. Greater transparency of the EU institutions	Number of parliamentary sessions/debates
4.2. Specific Eurobarometer survey on the Future of Europe	4.3.1.	Presentation of a specific Eurobarometer survey on the Future of Europe	Analysis of citizens' viewpoints and expectations regarding European integration	Indicators showing the use made of survey findings. Profiles of the public
4.3. Internet	4.3.2.	Development of a new website devoted to the debate	Interactive communication facilitating the debate, attractiveness of the website, overall consistency, effectiveness of the search tools	Trend in the number of visits to the website/capacity of systems
4.4. Targeted focus groups	4.3.3.	Use of focus groups by the Member States	Enhanced consultation machinery	Number of focus groups. Number of replies. Integration of the results

Table IV: Stimulating a wider public debate, Source: Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate (COM(2005)494, final: 17).

Operational sub-objectives / actions	Point in Plan D	Achievements	Expected results / impacts	Indicators
2.1. Visits by Commissioners to Member States	4.1.1.	Visits by Commissioners to Member States, increased contacts with regional and local media, communication actions	Better understanding and image of Commissioners in the different countries, better information quality and targeting, the EU brought closer to citizens	Media coverage, citizens' knowledge of EU affairs
2.2. Opening the Representations to the public	4.1.3.	Organisation of monthly information events and debates with target audiences at national level	The EU institutions brought closer to citizens. Improvement of the listening function at national level	Number of sessions/public debates organised in each Member State. Number of participants
2.3. Utilising Europe Direct centres for regional events	4.1.4.	Promotion of the Europe Direct network	Feedback collected from different target audiences at local level. Citizens better informed and the EU brought closer to citizens	Number of events held and topics covered/ number of participants/ ex ante and ex post evaluation
2.4. European Round Table for Democracy	4.1.5.	Establishment of a European Round Table. Organisation of national round tables	Political dialogue between the Commission and the other institutions and citizens	Number of round tables established Audiences reached and number of participants Ex ante and ex post evaluation
2.5. European Goodwill Ambassadors	4.1.6.	Organisation of events attracting many target audiences. Media coverage	Improved image of the EU and better understanding of its policies. The EU brought closer to citizens	Number of events Number of participants Quality of the media coverage

Annex 2- Semi-structured interviews in a free format

For the purposes of this study, six interviews were conducted with senior Commission officials in key EU Information and Communication policy-making and policy-implementation positions within the DG Communication and the EU Delegation in Washington, DC. The purpose of the interviews was to gain an insight into what Commission officials actually hope and try to achieve through the EU's websites as well as gain a greater understanding of the institutional culture towards the role of the Internet in the EU's public communication in general. Furthermore, the interviews aimed to obtain the Commission officials' views on the issue of the EU's democratic deficit and the role of the EU's public communication strategy in the emerging European public sphere.

The interviews were conducted in three stages, coinciding with the three stages of empirical data collection for this project. The officials were presented with the results of the EU websites' analysis and the EU websites' online user survey, in order to obtain the communicators' interpretation of the findings, in relation with the EU's public communication strategy.

The format considered more appropriate for the interviews was that of semi-structured (Deacon, Pickering, Golding, Murdock 1999) discussion with the Commission officials, in order to achieve as active and open-ended dialogue as possible. Semi-structured interviews do not undermine rapport, like standardised interviews, and, at the same time, reduce the interviewer bias, which may occur in completely free-format interviews: Although the interviewees have the opportunity to express their thoughts and opinions on their own terms and thus give more in-depth answers, the interviewer still needs to follow an interview guide, which has to be the same for all the interviews conducted in relation to the issue under investigation (*ibid.*: 67-68).

Because of the senior positions held by the interviewees, all the data obtained through the interviews is mainly used as background information in this study. Any direct quotes are clearly indicated in the text, but the names of the interviewees have been substituted with numbers,

i.e. Interviewee 1, Interviewee 2 etc. Below is a chronological list of the interviews conducted and a description of the position of each Commission official interviewed.

2006:	Interviewee 1	Senior official, DG Communication, Commission of the European Communities.
	Interviewee 2	Member (at the time) of Vice-President Margot Wallström's Cabinet.
2005:	Interviewee 3	Senior official, Press and Communication Service, Commission of the European Communities.
	Interviewee 4	Official, Press and Communication Service, Commission of the European Communities.
	Interviewee 5	Official, RELEX//5, Commission of the European Communities.
2004:	Interviewee 6	EURUNION website Information Officer, European Commission Delegation Washington D.C., US.

Annex 3- EU websites' coding variables

Table V: Coding Variables 1-3.

Variables (number and SPSS name)	Label	Values
1) Website	One of the three EU websites selected	1. EUROPA 2. The EU@UN 3. EURUNION
2) Link	Each link found on the homepages of the 3 websites was given a unique coding number	1001-1038: EUROPA links 2001-2052: EU at the United Nations links 3001-3080: EURUNION links
3) Day	The websites were monitored for a period of 24 weeks: 12 weeks in 2004 and 12 week in 2005. The coding took place once a week (24 days in total).	Day 1: 26/03/04 Day 2: 31/03/04 Day 3: 06/04/04 Day 4: 14/04/04 etc.

Table VI: Coding Variables 4-22, Reactive public communication.

Variables (number and SPSS name)	Label	Values
4) pd1.1.1	Reactive-Politics-Political ideals the EU stands for	1.Yes 2.No
5) pd1.1.2	Reactive-Politics-Relations between member states/How the EU works	
6) pd1.1.3	Reactive-Politics-External relations/Foreign policy of the EU	
7) pd1.2.1	Reactive-Economy-Euro	
8) pd1.2.2	Reactive-Economy-Transport/Internal	
9) pd1.2.3	Reactive-Economy-Trade/Development/Internal	
10) pd1.2.4	Reactive-Economy-Environment/Internal	
11) pd1.2.5	Reactive-Economy-Financial Aid/Internal	
12) pd1.2.6	Reactive-Economy-Trade/Development/External	
13) pd1.2.7	Reactive-Economy-Environment/External	
14) pd1.2.8	Reactive-Economy-Financial Aid/External	
15) pd1.3.1	Reactive-Society-Work-related issues	
16) pd1.3.2	Reactive-Society-Health-related issues	
17) pd1.3.3	Reactive-Society-Volunteering/Solidarity issues	
18) pd1.3.4	Reactive-Society-Education	
19) pd1.3.5	Reactive-Society-Culture	
20) pd1.3.6	Reactive-Society-Science/Research	
21) pd1.3.7	Reactive-Society-Language-related issues	
22) pd1.3.8	Reactive-Society-Travelling in the EU	

Table VII: Coding Variables 23-41, Proactive public communication.

Variables (number and SPSS name)	Label	Values
23) pd2.1.1	Proactive-Politics-Political ideals the EU stands for	1.Yes 2.No
24) pd2.1.2	Proactive-Politics-Relations between member states/How the EU works	
25) pd2.1.3	Proactive-Politics-External relations/Foreign policy of the EU	
26) pd2.2.1	Proactive -Economy-Euro	
27) pd2.2.2	Proactive -Economy-Transport/Internal	
28) pd2.2.3	Reactive-Economy-Trade/Development/Internal	
29) pd2.2.4	Proactive -Economy-Environment/Internal	
30) pd2.2.5	Proactive -Economy-Financial Aid/Internal	
31) pd2.2.6	Reactive-Economy-Trade/Development/External	
32) pd2.2.7	Proactive -Economy-Environment/External	
33) pd2.2.8	Proactive -Economy-Financial Aid/External	
34) pd2.3.1	Proactive -Society-Work-related issues	
35) pd2.3.2	Proactive -Society-Health-related issues	
36) pd2.3.3	Proactive -Society-Volunteering/Solidarity issues	
37) pd2.3.4	Proactive -Society-Education	
38) pd2.3.5	Proactive -Society-Culture	
39) pd2.3.6	Proactive -Society-Science/Research	
40) pd2.3.7	Proactive -Society-Language-related issues	
41) pd2.3.8	Proactive -Society-Travelling in the EU	

Table VIII: Coding Variables 42-60, Relationship-building public communication.

Variables (number and SPSS name)	Label	Values
42) pd3.1.1	Relationship-building-Politics-Political ideals the EU stands for	1.Yes 2.No
43) pd3.1.2	Relationship-building -Politics-Relations between member states/How the EU works	
44) pd3.1.3	Relationship-building -Politics-External relations/Foreign policy of the EU	
45) pd3.2.1	Relationship-building -Economy-Euro	
46) pd3.2.2	Relationship-building -Economy-Transport/Internal	
47) pd3.2.3	Relationship-building -Economy-Trade/Development/Internal	
48) pd3.2.4	Relationship-building -Economy-Environment/Internal	
49) pd3.2.5	Relationship-building -Economy-Financial Aid/Internal	
50) pd3.2.6	Relationship-building -Economy-Trade/Development/External	
51) pd3.2.7	Relationship-building -Economy-Environment/External	
52) pd3.2.8	Relationship-building -Economy-Financial Aid/External	
53) pd3.3.1	Relationship-building -Society-Work-related issues	
54) pd3.3.2	Relationship-building -Society-Health-related issues	
55) pd3.3.3	Relationship-building -Society-Volunteering/Solidarity issues	
56) pd3.3.4	Relationship-building -Society-Education	
57) pd3.3.5	Relationship-building -Society-Culture	
58) pd3.3.6	Relationship-building -Society-Science/Research	
59) pd3.3.7	Relationship-building -Society-Language-related issues	
60) pd3.3.8	Relationship-building -Society-Travelling in the EU	

Table IX: Coding Variables 61-64.

Variables (number and SPSS name)	Label	Values
61) comm1	Text/One-way communication	1.Yes 2.No
62) txttype	Type of text	1. Formal/Scientific/Official document 2. Informal/Every-day language/Written for publishing on the website 3. Both
63) cnttype	Type of content	1. Informational 2. Analytical/Explanatory 3. Both
64) comm2	Interactive communication	1. Discussion/Forum 2. Email 3. Real-time communication with officials (non- technical communication) 4. All of the above 5. Types 1 & 2 above 6. Types 2 & 3 above 7. Types 1 & 3 above 8. Not applicable

Table X: Coding Variables 1A-8A for links that provide interactive communication type 1 (online discussion/forum).

Variables (number and SPSS name)	Label	Values
1A) website	One of the three EU websites selected	1. EUROPA 2. The EU@UN 3. EURUNION
2A) link	Links found to provide interactive communication type 1	1001-1038: EUROPA links 2001-2052: EU@UN links 3001-3080: EURUNION links
3A) day	The days when the coding took place (one day per week of monitoring)	Day 1: 26/03/04 Day 2: 31/03/04 Day 3: 06/04/04 Day 4: 14/04/04 etc.
4A) offinput	Official input	1. Provision of topic for discussion only 2. Provision of topic for discussion and official documentation relevant to the topic 3. Provision of topic and leading the discussion/debate 4. Provision of topic and participating but not leading in the discussion 5. No official input
5A) topic	Topic of discussion	1. Politics-Relations between member states/How the EU works 2. Politics-External relations/Foreign policy of the EU 3. Economy-Trade/Development/Internal 4. Economy-Trade/Development/External 5. Economy-Euro 6. Economy-Financial Aid/Internal 7. Economy-Financial Aid/External 8. Work-related issues 9. Health-related issues 10. Education 11. Culture 12. Language-related issues 13. Other
6A) Partno	Number of participants (other than officials)	The number of participants varies depending on the topic and the day.
7A) commno1	Number of comments on topic	The number of comments on each topic varies depending on the subject of the discussion and the day.
8A) commno2	Number of responses to other participants	The number of responses to other participants varies depending on the topic and the day.

Annex 4- EU websites online user survey 2005-2006, questionnaire and results

The complete questionnaire, including all the original answers of the individuals who participated in the survey, are presented in the following pages, in LEARN survey analysis format.

For question 2, the option “Other” was further categorised in “No response” answers (15) and “Duplicates” (15), with the remaining 6 answers under the “Other” option re-allocated to the already existing categories of “Obtained legal/official documentation”, “Obtained general information”, “Contacted an individual at an EU institution” and “Looked for business information”.

Likewise, for question 6, the responses under the “Other” category were re-classified to “Other” and “No response”. In addition, several respondents chose more than one answers, which were either contradicting each other (for example some respondents chose both “Email addresses directed to individuals” and “The opportunities for interaction are adequate”) or were duplicating each other (for example some respondents chose “Email addresses directed to individuals” and “More opportunities for online dialogue” and “Both of the above”). In the cases of duplicate answers, the answer that covered best the respondent’s view was chosen. For contradicting responses, the decision was made to calculate them in the “No response” category.

Answers under the “Other” category for question 7, were re-grouped into “Other” and “Duplicates”, with the latter excluded from the final results. For the same category in questions 8 and 9, the answers were re-grouped in “Other” and “No response”.

The answers to Question 11 (a follow-up to question 10), which required respondents to give details of any EU websites other than EUROPA, EU@UN and EURUNION that they access, were regrouped in 11 categories, namely “No response”, “Other” and the 9 websites which appeared in 3 or more responses.

Similarly, the answers to Question 12 (a follow-up question to questions 10 and 11) were analysed in two ways: Firstly, they were divided

in valid and “No response” answers. The responses were, then, coded according to the criteria respondents used to compare and evaluate websites. From this coding 5 criteria emerged, namely accessibility; clarity of content/message; interesting/ varied content; credibility; and relevance to audience. On a second level, the data was analysed in order to identify which websites the respondents rated as best. In this case, the categories that emerged were: one category for each of the 9 websites that were deemed best by at least one respondent, one category for the “no-response” answers and one category for the respondents who thought none of the EU websites they had visited were good/ worthy enough.

Question 14, which regards the role of the Internet in the EU’s perceived democratic deficit, required coding of all the responses and classification of the answers in two levels. On a first level, the answers were divided in “Yes”, “No”, “No response” and “No deficit” categories, to indicate the respondents’ original view on whether the Internet can play a productive role in the EU’s perceived democratic deficit. On a second level, the answers that were classified under the “Yes” and “No” categories were further coded, in order to determine **the ways** in which the respondents thought that the Internet could/ could not play a productive role in the EU’s perceived democratic deficit. This process resulted in 8 categories:

- a) Those who only replied “Yes” without further explaining their view;
- b) Those who only replied “No” without further explaining their view;
- c) Those who related the Internet’s positive role in eliminating the EU’s perceived democratic deficit with the increased accessibility it offers to information;
- d) Those who linked the Internet’s positive role with increased accountability on behalf of the EU officials;
- e) The respondents who attributed the Internet’s potentially beneficial role in eliminating the EU’s perceived democratic deficit to the increased opportunities for public dialogue;
- f) Those who attributed its potentially beneficial role to increased transparency;
- g) The respondents who rejected the Internet’s potential as one of the tools

for further democratising the EU on the grounds of the increasing gap between the Internet-haves and Internet-have-nots; and finally

h) The respondents who rejected the question altogether, and supported the view that there is, in fact, no democratic deficit.

Other questions where the responses were further categorised were questions 17, 20 and 22. The answers to questions 17 (follow-up to question 16) and 20 (follow-up to question 19) were divided in valid and “No response” ones. The responses to question 22 were coded and classified under 6 categories, namely political websites; academic-related websites; Entertainment/ Lifestyle websites; IT websites; work-related websites; miscellaneous websites; and “no response”.

Finally, questions 23 and 26, regarding nationality and occupation respectively, were also open-ended questions, and further categorisation of the responses was, therefore, required.

This resulted, with regard to question 23, in the responses being regrouped under 34 categories, which were then further classified under the following 5 supra-categories:

- a)** EU;
- b)** EU accession/ EU related countries;
- c)** Non-European;
- d)** Bi-national/ Multinational; and
- e)** No-response category.

As far as the answers to question 26 are concerned, these were coded and classified under the following 9 categories:

- a)** Public Officials: EU;
- b)** Public Officials: Non-EU;
- c)** IT;
- d)** Professional/Managerial;
- e)** Skilled Manual/Manual;
- f)** Unemployed/ Economically inactive;
- g)** Education: Professionals;
- h)** Education: Students; and
- i)** Health.

1. On a scale from 1(Never) to 5(Every day), please indicate how often you access the three websites below.

	Average rank					
	1	2	3	4	5	
EUROPA						(2.7)
EU@UN						(1.4)
EURUNION						(1.4)

2. Which of the following did you choose to do? (You can choose more than one)

Looked for general information on the EU		(145)
Looked for legal/official documentation		(125)
Looked for information on business in the EU		(33)
Read the news		(92)
Participated in the online discussion		(12)
Contacted an Institution		(35)
Contacted an individual at an EU institution		(37)
Obtained information regarding travel in the EU		(24)
Other: Avoid		(1)
Other: Browsed to see what was in each site		(1)
Other: data search (non-business)		(1)
Other: follow press conferences		(1)
Other: Following tenders		(1)
Other: for reference/study		(1)
Other: I don't use their sites		(1)
Other: I have never visited these web sites		(1)
Other: If I answer never shouldn't there be a not applicable box for this question?		(1)
Other: Ignored		(1)
Other: Information for internships		(1)
Other: internships in the EU		(1)
Other: job opportunities		(1)
Other: job search		(1)
Other: Looked for an environmental directive WEEE		(1)
Other: Looked for info about the uniformization of citizenship laws accross EU		(1)
Other: looked for info onconstitution		(1)
Other: Looked for information on trade, the environment and human rights policy		(1)
Other: Looked horrified		(1)
Other: N/A		(1)
Other: Never been on the sites		(1)
Other: never used above		(1)
Other: newsletter		(1)
Other: none		(1)
Other: None		(2)
Other: nothing		(3)
Other: Obtained contact information of MEPs		(1)
Other: obtained information on job opportunities with the EU and registered my profile in EPSO		(1)
Other: scholarships		(1)
Other: statements by the DGs or Commissioners on news items- for example Mandelsson on the China debate		(1)
Other: statistics and facts		(1)
Other: studies, jobs		(1)

Other: used it on daily basis for internship in Brussels, incl. public tenders and funding programmes like Leonardo etc.	0.5%	(1)
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3. On a scale from 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent), please rate the quality of the information provided on each of the three websites below (If you haven't accessed a website, please leave that row blank).

	Average rank					
	1	2	3	4	5	
EUROPA						(3.4)
EU@UN						(2.8)
EURUNION						(2.8)

4. On a scale from 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent), please rate the accessibility of each of the three websites below, i.e. how easy it was for you to navigate around and find what you were looking for (If you haven't accessed a website, please leave that row blank).

	Average rank					
	1	2	3	4	5	
EUROPA						(2.9)
EU@UN						(2.9)
EURUNION						(2.8)

5. Of the three websites below, which one/s do you think provide/s adequate opportunities for interaction with EU officials? (you can choose more than one)

EUROPA	29.4%	(65)
EURUNION	2.3%	(5)
EU @ UN	5.0%	(11)
None of the above	26.2%	(58)
I don't know	41.6%	(92)

6. What type of interaction would you like to see provided more on EUROPA/ EURUNION/ EU @ UN websites? (you can choose more than one)

Email addresses directed to individuals, instead of generic email addresses.	28.5%	(63)
More opportunities for online dialogue with EU officials/ politicians	19.0%	(42)
Both of the above	32.6%	(72)
The opportunities for interaction are adequate	13.6%	(30)
Other: A way of finding out which EU representatives are in their positions because they were voted for by the people and which were not.	0.5%	(1)
Other: Abolished	0.5%	(1)
Other: better info about what constitutes EU citizenship and how they intend on harmonizing the naturalization procedure	0.5%	(1)
Other: Blogs	0.5%	(1)
Other: current legislative proposal list	0.5%	(1)
Other: D/K	0.5%	(1)
Other: deep information about the country's culture	0.5%	(1)
Other: depends on institution / DG: some have excellent information, others poor	0.5%	(1)
Other: Dissent for those that do not agree with the EU project. These websites are self-aggrandising	0.5%	(1)
Other: easier menu structures; at present mirrors the public image of the EU as labyrinthine	0.5%	(1)
Other: European related events	0.5%	(1)
Other: I don't know	0.5%	(1)
Other: I'm not sure what opportunities exist	0.5%	(1)
Other: Info about the website existence	0.5%	(1)
Other: Leave the EU	0.5%	(1)
Other: Non, abolish it	0.5%	(1)
Other: none	0.9%	(2)
Other: other languages than English	0.5%	(1)
Other: phone numbers	0.5%	(1)
Other: RSS, opportunities to comment on policies, weblogs. I'm working on a newsfeed which will scrape Europa and the Parliament site - drop me a line if	0.5%	(1)

Other: Suspension of the FUTURUM debate/discussion site was inexcusable	0.5%	(1)
7. Do you use other sources of information regarding the EU? (You can choose more than one)		
Newspapers	84.2%	(186)
National TV	53.8%	(119)
EU by Satellite	8.6%	(19)
Radio	33.9%	(75)
Magazines	49.8%	(110)
Books	49.8%	(110)
Library	35.7%	(79)
EU Information points	15.8%	(35)
I am not interested in information regarding the EU	5.9%	(13)
Other: Anti-EU blogs	0.5%	(1)
Other: BBC News Online	0.5%	(1)
Other: BBC, NYTimes	0.5%	(1)
Other: Blogs	3.2%	(7)
Other: blogs	1.8%	(4)
Other: blogs of EU parliament members	0.5%	(1)
Other: Cafe Babel	0.5%	(1)
Other: cafe babel	0.5%	(1)
Other: EU Observer, EURACTIV and many others	0.5%	(1)
Other: euobserver.com	0.5%	(1)
Other: euractiv	0.5%	(1)
Other: Euractiv, State Watch	0.5%	(1)
Other: Euronews, 3rd party internet & blogs	0.5%	(1)
Other: Euronews, Cafe Babel	0.5%	(1)
Other: Info directed jot journalists	0.5%	(1)
Other: Internet	1.4%	(3)
Other: internet	1.8%	(4)
Other: internet media sources from bbc, guardian, blogs etc	0.5%	(1)
Other: Lecture notes	0.5%	(1)
Other: online European Magazine café babel and euractiv	0.5%	(1)
Other: Online news sites	0.5%	(1)
Other: Online sources, blogs, etc.	0.5%	(1)
Other: The Internet (blogs)	0.5%	(1)
Other: The Web	0.5%	(1)
Other: UKIP	0.5%	(1)
Other: university courses	0.5%	(1)
Other: Web based The EU site give only one view	0.5%	(1)
Other: web blogs	0.5%	(1)
Other: weblogs	1.4%	(3)
Other: wikipedia	0.5%	(1)
Other: www	0.5%	(1)
8. Have you ever contacted an EU institution/ official through the websites of EUROPA, EURUNION or EU @ UN? (You can chose more than one)		
No	63.3%	(140)
EUROPA- on legal issues	13.6%	(30)
EU @ UN- on legal issues	0.5%	(1)
EURUNION- on legal issues	0.5%	(1)
EUROPA- on business issues	7.2%	(16)
EU @ UN- on business issues	0.9%	(2)

EURUNION- on business issues	0.5%	(1)
EUROPA- to request access to documents	18.1%	(40)
EU @ UN- to request access to documents	1.4%	(3)
EURUNION- to request access to documents	0.5%	(1)
EUROPA- to request general information about the EU	10.9%	(24)
EU @ UN- to request general information about the EU	0.5%	(1)
EURUNION- to request general information about the EU	1.4%	(3)
EUROPA- to request contact details of an individual	13.6%	(30)
EU@UN- to request contact details of an individual	0.5%	(1)
EURUNION- to request contact details of an individual	0.9%	(2)
Other: All three to request interviews with individuals	0.5%	(1)
Other: EUROPA for application for work	0.5%	(1)
Other: Europa to request copies of survey data	0.5%	(1)
Other: EUROPA-to apply for Internship	0.5%	(1)
Other: EUROSTAT	0.5%	(1)
Other: I contact the press service pretty regularly to complain. They're sick of me.	0.5%	(1)
Other: no i use paper, email and phone; the websites give the contact info I need	0.5%	(1)
Other: None	0.5%	(1)
Other: request for a meeting	0.5%	(1)
Other: research interviews	0.5%	(1)
Other: to request information about a certain policy area	0.5%	(1)
Other: to request specific information on a dossier	0.5%	(1)

9. Have you ever contacted an EU institution by visiting its offices/ over the phone/ by correspondence? (You can choose more than one)

No	50.2%	(111)
Yes, on legal issues	19.0%	(42)
Yes, on business issues	13.1%	(29)
Yes, to request access to documents	15.8%	(35)
Yes, to request general information about the EU	16.7%	(37)
Yes, to request contact details of an individual	10.9%	(24)
Other: Contacted my MEP by phone.	0.5%	(1)
Other: EPSO	0.5%	(1)
Other: Excursions	0.5%	(1)
Other: I work for an EU agency (EMEA)	0.5%	(1)
Other: in relation to the organisation of debates and discussion on the EU	0.5%	(1)
Other: in the framework of an European Summer Academy	0.5%	(1)
Other: internship	0.5%	(1)
Other: only to get to know more of EU business	0.5%	(1)
Other: see above	0.5%	(1)
Other: to conduct a research interview	0.5%	(1)
Other: to request an interview for research	0.5%	(1)
Other: Traineeship	0.5%	(1)
Other: visited European Parliament for PR and other info material	0.5%	(1)
Other: visited the institutions with Loughborough university	0.5%	(1)
Other: yes to apply for internships	0.5%	(1)
Other: Yes, to apply for a job	0.5%	(1)
Other: Yes, to correspond with MEPs on EP debates	0.5%	(1)
Other: Yes, to establish working relations	0.5%	(1)
Other: Yes, to organise visits.	0.5%	(1)

10. Do you access any other EU websites except for EUROPA, EURUNION and EU @ UN?

Yes, often		18.6%	(41)
Yes, sometimes		21.7%	(48)
No		55.7%	(123)
TOTAL		95.9%	221

11. If yes, which ones? (please provide name and/OR complete URL)

#	Response
1	(not EU ones but MEPs home pages can be pretty good for general information. I've used Caroline Lucas's and Eryl McNally's.
1	-
1	.
1	Cafebabel, Europarl
1	cafebabel.com
1	can t remember
1	Commitee of regions, Eco and social commitee
1	Cordis
1	cordis.lu, cost295.net
1	Country pages on EU: http://www.vm.ee/eng/euro/ http://www.government.fi/vn/liston/base.lsp?r=716&k=en
1	curia
1	curia.eu.int
1	DG Environment, European Parliament
1	don't know any more
1	EC Delegation to Bosnia-Herzegovina
1	Email websites, news, information
1	EU Delegation BiH, EU Delegation Croatia
1	EU in Bosnia and Herzegovina, EUSR, EUPM, EUFOR, Comission's Delegations
1	eu observer
1	EU Observer. Euractiv, EU Politix
1	EU Parl
1	EU Presidency websites, High Representative for CFSP website
1	EUobserver (though not sure if it is funded directly by the EU)
1	euobserver.com
1	euractiv, europa-digital
1	Euractiv, State Watch
1	Euractive.com
1	EUreferendum
1	Eurocontrol
1	EURODICAUTOM
2	eurolex
1	Europa direkt
2	EuroParl
1	Europarl, ue.eu.int, ukrep, MEPs websites, presidency websites.
1	europarl.eu.int, Eur-Lex..
1	europarl.eu.int; council and presidency websites
1	Europe 2020, Interegionet
1	European Commission, European Parliament, Commitee of the Regions, Eurobarometer; http://www.europe2020.org ; http://european-convention.eu.int ; http://www.theepc.be ; http://www.eurozine.com ; http://www.cer.org.uk + loads of others too many to mention
1	European Information Society, European e-gov
1	European Parliament
1	European Parliament, CORDIS, EPSO
3	EuroStat
1	Factiva.com, presidency wew sites eg.

1	Friends of Europe, European Environmental Bureau, Eurooppa Tiedotus
1	Homepage of Javier Solana
1	http://europa.eu.int/eures/index.jsp
1	http://europa.eu.int/scadplus/ ; http://europa.eu.int/celex/ ; http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/index_en.html
1	http://saxontimes.blogspot.com/ http://eureferendum.blogspot.com/ http://eurota.blogspot.com/ http://euobserver.com/ http://europhobia.blogspot.com/ http://www.eurosavant.com/weblog.php http://www.eursoc.com/ http://blogs.unige.ch/droit/ceje/dotclear/index.php/ http://herovonesens.blogspot.com/ http://neilherron.blogspot.com/ http://www.european-democracy.org/ http://transatlanticassembly.blogspot.com/
1	http://weblog.jrc.cec.eu.int/page/wallstrom
1	http://www.emea.eu.int http://pharmacos.eudra.org/ http://www.eudravigilance.org (all for work)
1	http://www.eu.int/documents/index_en.htm
1	http://www.euractiv.com/
1	http://www.euronews.net/create_html.php?page=home&lng=1 http://europa.eu.int/comm/avservices/video/video_prod_en.cfm?type=docu_vnr
1	http://www.europarl.eu.int/
1	http://www.europarl.org.uk/index.htm http://epp.eurostat.cec.eu.int/portal/page?_pageid=1090,30070682,1090_33076576&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL
1	http://www.eurydice.org/accueil_menu/en/frameset_menu.html , http://www.coe.int/T/E/Cultural%5FCo%2Doperation/education/Teacher%5Ftraining/Courses%5Fand%5Fseminars/ , http://FUTURUM2005.eun.org/ww/en/pub/FUTURUM2005/index_15mins.htm , http://www.citizen.org.uk/speakout/about.html , http://www.britishcouncil.org/home/learning/learning-international-experience/learning-ie-teaching-exchange/learning-council-of-europe.htm
1	http://www.info-europe.fr
1	I can not remember
1	CAN'T REMEMBER
1	I go straight to the EP website a lot more frequently than europa.eu.int
1	Legislative Observatory (OEIL), Parliament, ECJ, Eurostat
1	N/A
1	no official but civil society websites
1	official websites of UK, Belgium, France etc - they give the relevant information directly and more easily
1	one with stars on it
1	other EU specific EU news websites; and Delegation of EU in Turkey and Russia
1	Permanent Representations of different countries
1	the Council/the EP/the EC/ EC delegations
1	the European Parliament and Council websites; maybe these are part of Europa; wouldn't know
1	ue.eu.int, eesc, European Convention at the time (excellent site)
1	various Baltic and Nordic members of the European Parliament's personal blogs; I sometimes comment on specific blog entries or e-mail the politician that authored them privately.
1	Websites of EC delegations; all EU institutions websites (Council, Commission, EP etc.)
1	www.cordis.lu
1	www.curia.eu.int
1	www.eds.org
1	www.euractiv.com
1	www.euractiv.com ; www.eurotreaties.com
1	www.euroactiv.com
1	www.europa-digital.de
1	www.europarl.eu.int , Council website, websites of presidencies
1	www.europarl.eu.int/public
1	www.europarl.eu.int ;
12. If you noticed any differences between the EU websites you accessed (including EUROPA, EURUNION and EU @ UN), please provide further information. Which website did you think is best and why?(please indicate which websites you are comparing)	
#	Response

1	no differences
1	-
1	.
1	All EU web sites take it for granted that there is only one future and that is based on the EU becoming the supranational government. Until the people have democratically elected for this I reject the assumption because it is not the proven choice of the people.
1	Cordis is better structured. Europa ist cluttered with a lot of info, not easy to find what you want
1	differences in accessibility/legibility/clarity (see above)
1	EU at UN; because it contains more important and interesting informations than the other two.
1	EU websites vary in their utility in finding specific information. Generally, I find the European Commission website easier in this respect than the EU Council website, although both can be frustrating to navigate around, and the search facilities never come up with the information I'm looking for.
1	Euractiv gives me most of the info I need
1	Europa because it deals directly with issues pertaining to the EU. The other two sites seem to be EU policies with regard to global politics and trade...not aimed at the citizen.,
1	europa because it is more official
1	Europa because it was easy to find the materials I was looking for
1	Europa has more info relevent to citizens.
1	EUROPA is a very complex site but it's necessary to provide such a wide range of information
1	Europa is an excellent site
1	EUROPA is best because it is so large, but difficult to navigate
1	Europa is best. The most comprehensive. Everything that can be found on the others can usually also be found on Europa
1	EUROPA is by far the best out of the three sites, since it is very well organised, it is in Greek and very easy to navigate. The EU@UN site, comes second, since it offers more or less the same things, but in a lower quality. EURUNION is a site far from the European temperament; can't offer much to a European individual, on E.U.'s information.
1	Europa is easier to navigate than Eurunion and EU@UN.
1	EUROPA is very easy to navigate, summarises the issues, and suggests new ones to mock. I mean, investigate.
1	Europa looks the most professional and feels easier to use. Eudravigilance has all the information necessary on this project and easily accessible
1	Europa seemed to be aimed at young people and at convincing the younger generations to learn about and to be positive about the EU. EurUnion has similar youth areas but these are presented in an adult way, as if adults control this information. EU@UN seemed the site most interested in current news and political change, and for this reason, I preferred it, though visually it was the least interesting.
1	Europa, clean laid out, right amount of information on one page, good catergrisation
1	europa, for its somewhat better ease of use and navigation
1	EUROPA, most complete website
1	europa-UN, the un web sites has more links for specific informations
1	EUROPA; easiest to navigate around, more concise info.
1	Europarl has improved, but is still too full of lists. The Council website remains awful. Some of the best websites belong to individual institutions (both EU and national) such as those belonging to UKRep or individual MEPs.
1	European Parliament website looks different from the others, and is a slightly more recent web design
1	EURUNION - user friendly
1	Eurunion most business focussed - Europa patronising - EU @ UN worthy but uninspiring
1	First impression: EUROPA is most logical to use and contains more valuable information.
1	I find them equally dull/uninformative
1	I like Europarl best because it appears to be very open and clear (I find everything at one click). Also, I appreciate OEIL.
1	I only have visited Europa
1	I preferred EUROPA (out of the three). It seemd to contain a lot of information in a simple and straightforward layout. Having said that, the absence of a Search facility on the home page was a bad omission.
1	I think all of these websites are a bit confusing at first glance. You need to get used to the websites in order to find the information you're looking for. I would say Europa is the clearest and EU@UN the unclearest.

1	I think Europa is the best (comparing Europa, Eurunion and EU@UN) because it's easier to find what you are looking for
1	It's important the websites do not have too many blinking banners but important issues are clearly indicated. Also, the search engine needs to work perfectly.
2	N/a
1	Non, abolish it
1	none
1	None of the 3 above sites provide anything useful to my situation, now that I looked at them. At best, they wreek of state propaganda.
1	of EUROPA, EURUNION and EU@UN, EUROPA was most user friendly portal for new-comers. info was presented in clear concise manner and was aesthetically pleasing too. there was a wide range of nfo from background to more detailed stuff
1	Once you've got the hang of the OEIL site, it's quite impressive by comparison with the others. But it's still pretty limited.
1	Out of the three the Europa website is most difficult to navigate it is sometimes easier to google the search and it takes me straight to the document/page. However, for content I think the EUROPA website is still the best.
1	search capability
1	The entry pages of both EUROPA and EU@UN do not score well for usability - it's annoyingly slow to find and click on your chosen language out of the horde of identically-presented options. This weakness is also apparent in the large number of textual links once inside. By contrast, the EURUNION main page is a bit more well-structured and friendlier.
1	The Europa site was on less of a hard sell
1	the search engines are of different quality. the old celex search engine was working well, while the new eur-lex engine produces contradictory results and is difficult to handle for daily research work; curia.eu.int has the best search engine but lacks the database of EuR-Lex.
1	The US one is very slow. Europa seems to work most smoothly.
1	they are more or less the same, except that europa.eu.int has more info
1	UNpage is stupid, only english
1	www.cafebabel.com (for a civil society and young generation point of view on EU issues)

13. Do you feel that having direct access to the MEPs/European officials would increase the accountability of the EU institutions?

Yes	61.5%	(136)
No	27.6%	(61)
I don't know	10.9%	(24)
TOTAL	100.0%	221

14. Do you feel the internet can play a productive role in eliminating the perceived 'democratic deficit' of the European Union? If so, in what way?

#	Response
1	.
1	absolutely
1	Absolutely, the internet can provide transparency (live broadcasting of meetings, publication of decisions and who voted in which way)
1	All EU-related information should be available on the Internet. When it's there, it will be easier to count on the system.
1	allows everyone to gain access
1	At least some people will eventually find out the truth, which is liberty
1	being quicker and cheaper
1	Better & quicker means of contact for information and make comments, if listened to.
1	Bring the common members within easy access of people in power within the governing areas of the institution
1	by helping to organise an exit from the EU via democratic referendum
1	Can be used to give correct, non biased information
1	closing the huge gap between "us" and politicians
1	CONVENIENT
1	creating contact between officials and citizens
1	definitely yes

1	DEFINITLY! The gap between the EU and its citizens is huge at the moment.
1	Depends. If you mean can EU sites play a productive role in eliminating any perceived democratic deficit? Then my sense is that they probably can'tt - and almost certainly not in their current form. It seems to me that there needs to be a greater pan-European awareness of (and consensus for) the political process of 'union'. As for the wider internet - and specifically non-EU sites - the internet probably does play a productive role in at least as much as it provides a relatively unregulated forum in which a diversity of views are aired. Whether this is per se a 'good' thing is questionable but it does at least provide a counter-weight to the established MSM. (*BTW this reply box format sucks.)
1	Direct and reliable information and procedures are what Internet can provide, in order to strengthen E.U., in general.
1	direct interaction with real people
1	direct participation, online vote, treansnational discussions between citizens
1	Directly getting one's voice heard by the MPs in Brussels.
1	Don't think so
1	Dont know
1	Even just a small readers poll on relevant issues facing the EU such as how we feel about new entrants, how EU aid gets disbursed and just overall interaction between the citizen and EU institutions would be great. As it is now, if we send an email, it seems it's just buried under a mountain of paperwork. I doubt anyone actually reads anything there.
1	every little helps
1	Everyone gets a chance to have their say
1	First educate citizens on use of Internet and provide incentives
1	giving information on what's happening and who is deciding
1	good way to bring the EU Integration issues to the ordinary people - increasing legitimacy to a certain extent
1	greater transparency
1	Hardly, but it could be a way to get more and better info to the public. The possibility is not yet use.
1	Having a chance to cimunicate with those in charge would increase trust.
1	How do you mean "perceived"
2	i don't know
1	i don't think so. The democratic deficit should be cured from above.
1	i reject the question. Try and answer "Do you feel the internet can play a productive role in eliminating the perceived 'democratic deficit' of Saudi Arabia".
1	I think "democratic deficit" regarding EU institutions is more related to a general misunderstandig and unknowledge of EU institutions and legal framework of EU action. Anyway I think internt can play a big role on reducing this gap
1	I think any perceived defict is in the hands of the politicians and not the internet or most media sources.
1	I think we need independent websites about EU policies and their consequences that are just giving us the facts and relevant contexts about the issues without the pro-EU hardsell or an anti-EU rant.
1	If the EU citizens would have an oppportunity to get their opinions through to EU officials/ decision makers, they would feel that their voice is heard and that their opinion actually matters. If it would be easier for the citizens to express their concerns/ideas, it could increase their interest in the EU issues. This would benefit both the EU citizens and the EU itself. Happier citizens increase the voting about EU issues, so the democratic deficit is decreased
1	If those with the "democratic deficit" would have easy access to internet.
1	in the future maybe it will be possible to follow the sessions on Internet and to intervene in some way
1	Increased transparency and availability would not increase democracy per se - after all, how often do we contact national officials? I think the EU is probably just as accessible as many national institutions. That said, the Commission would seem more transparent if you could actually contact people directly. However, transparency would not solve the fundamental issue of the democratic deficit.
1	Increasing dialogue with EU officials
1	Internet is a good way for young europeans to know more about EU
1	Internet may serve as an excellent source of information that the EU wishes to make public. On the other hand, the amount of such information is overwhelming and it is often difficult to find what you are looking for because of that. In my opinion, it very much depends on the people, i.e. EU citizens, and their willingness to take their time to find what they are looking for. The question is how willing are people nowadays to dedicate their time to learning more about processes in the EU. Connected with this is question no. 13. I am afraid that 'direct access' to the MEPs/EU officials must be restricted in order for them to do their work. If they were asked to answer all e-mails and phone calls, it would prevent them from doing anything else, especially with the overall EU population growing.

1	Involving citizens
1	It can help to expose the waste of money and resources invested in this wretched organization.
1	It can if there is interaction between institutions and citizens
1	it can, but the knowledge gap problem is worse on the web than elsewhere so the "cure" would just shift the type of deficit from low (but more or less fair-distributed) interaction to more, but also more selective input
1	it could by asking its citizens to participate in online referendums on key issues
1	It could, but I'm not sure that the EU actually cares
1	It is a means with which many people can interact and exchange political views
1	It is NOT a PERCEIVED deficit ! it's a REAL deficit! The internet could allow us to vote online to elect/dismiss EU officials.
1	It may play a supplementary role in speeding up communication processes and transparency. In the case of document transparency it offers a whole new world of working methods. Never the less it excludes those who donot have acces, e.g. those who cannot afford it or dont know how to use it (elder generations).
1	it provides access to a larger public than any other communication menas
1	It would be better to have direct voting on representatives and fewer unelected officials
1	It would be great if citizens can make official complaints to their MEPs
1	make information on the websites more userfriendly
1	make them speak English.
1	many peple see the EU as something 'other' to ourselves, something we hear about but never really encounter on a personal basis - if more people have access to information and the individuals representing us in the EU then this gap between 'us' and 'them' will begin to close. the internet is perhaps the most effient way of acheiving this
1	maybe, but the internet is full of scams
1	More openness, accessibility to dpcuments, more transparency in decision-making process, more opportunities to bring Europeans together for public debate
3	
9	no
1	No (democratic deficit is an illusion nothing can eliminate)
1	No - the principals of the EU must abandon their ivory towers & talk to the people, explain to the people, not fire whistle-blowers, account transparently, simplify structures.
1	No it is being and will be used to create an EU demos. The only thing that will eliminate the democratic deficit is for the EU to become fully accountable to the people. After of course the people have chosen to allow the EU to become their government.
1	No, abolish it
1	No, as in my opinion this is due to the power of national governments compared to the elected EU Parliament
1	No, because the folks who are interested in the EU and waht's going on in the EU political process use the internet. All the other don't. The EU has to reach those another way . A way more easy for those people.
1	No, It is not a perceived deficit, the deficit is real. The internet wont change that
1	No, not significantly
1	No, nothing could eliminate that other than the demise of the EU
1	No, only elections can remove a democratic deficit. This would be required at all levels.
1	No, the EU is not democratic
1	no, the lack of accountability would remain. it would make expressing views easier, but MEPs still not under any obligation to address
2	No.
1	No. Perceived by whom?
1	No. I believe the majority of people who access European websites are well informed. The problem arises in providing appropriate information to those who don't.
1	No. The democratic deficit is not 'perceived', it is real.
1	No. See http://mk.ucant.org/archives/000103.html for things net can't help
1	No. The EU is not truly "democratic". It dictates to the individual nations on laws, etc., and can detrimentally affect the rights of individuals in those nations to make their own laws, etc.
1	No. The EU is undemocratic. Fancy presentation wilol not change that.
1	No. The European Union will continue to drag its feet, regardless of what the peasants think or say. Our "betters" will see to it. And then they wonder why a Constitution that starts with the immortal

	words "HIS MAJESTY THE KING OF THE BELGIANS" gets flushed down the drain.
1	not all that much, apart from reducing the distance between the people (those with an internet connection!) and the institutions
1	Not at all-we need to vote for these people-emailing will not help.
1	Not how these sites work - the EU would need to infiltrate mainstream sites & other media instead of relying on people to find their sites.
1	Not in a big way, as it requires access to the net and high IT literacy; it may do something to sway/appease the 'always-on' broadband aristocracy, though
1	Not much difference. National politicians need to talk more about the benefits of EU membership.
1	Not necessarily /
1	not really
1	not really, because too many people don't use the net and those who do often don't know about the eu's sites
1	Not really.
2	Not sure
1	not sure, but I do not think that people would really use the opportunity to contact MEPs directly
1	noway
1	Only if enough people feel that it is a useful and appropriate conduit. Not sure what the 'democratic deficit' is, but not everybody has access to the internet - and often those that are under-represented in one area are also under-represented in others.
1	only if it serves to provide access to decision-makers
1	Only if people visit the internet pages- and then probably they get an overload of information and not the specific bits they wanted
1	Possibly, but probably not
1	Possibly, but these sites need to be more widely known for it to happen.
1	Potentially yes, if it allows a greater number of facts to escape to the public domain
1	probably yes, because this way you can easily get the (basic) info you want on EU, it is a first contact point with the EU
1	providing clear information what they are doing, so that the judgments re the EU are fact-based rather than prejudiced
1	rapid access to up-to-date information
1	reducing the geofigureic gap
1	repling to e mails
1	Some people are sceptics no matter what means of contact or information is given to them.
1	Sorry! Not sure what this 'democratic deficit' is!
1	Spreading awareness of the fundamental flaws in the EU should lead to its disintegration
1	sure, because it will allow people to question their representatives
1	The 'democratic deficit' is inbuilt into the very notion of the EU from its earliest days (see Booker & North, The Great Deception). As such, not even the internet can eliminate the EU's technocratic superiority.
1	The internet brings the European Union closer to the people.
1	The internet can easily provide access to a lot of information and this would help in bringing the EU closes to the people. However, TV broadcasting should also be used in my opinion because it can address a larger population
1	The internet has made many people aware of the democratic deficit. From it we get our first indications of the nature of the EU. The democratic deficit will be eliminated at the same time as the EU is.
1	througout more direct informations given to EU citizens than to nationals over national official representations
1	To a degree, but only for those who have the time, interest, access, etc.
1	To be honest i believe that the media (television) would really if possible make that difference more than the internet
1	Vox populi pressure
8	yes
1	yes
1	yes - eg it helped the french campaign over the constitution
1	yes - increased transparency

2	Yes because it provides a quick and easy way for people from all over the world to discuss various issues and form for example online petitions. Also the audience is wider and membership (if you create a pressure group) will make it easy to join.
1	yes but it depends on the importance they give to that.
1	yes it can but it is not sufficient
1	Yes, because it provides a simple conevtion between the EU and its people.
1	Yes, because it's fast, free and a lot off people have access to internet. In internet a lot off people, like me, are doing questions and are starting discussions of EU politics
1	Yes, but I don't need it because I am an ex EU official
1	Yes, but it remains a source used mainly by researchers and elites, and I can't imagine members of the public accessing EU websites without prior interest and information.
1	yes, but needs \"push\" as well as \"pull\"
1	Yes, but only if EU officials not only acknowledge the existence of the \"democratic deficit\" but also sincerely attempt to make themselves accountable to the people and those acting on their behalf in a non-official capacity. So far, there has been very little sign of that happening.
1	Yes, but only if people would be really interested to get the information they need. Most people just believe what is written in their national newspapers, which are often biased.
1	Yes, but to a very limited extent - the deficit is in my view not a matter of new practical solutions or improvement of the existing channels of communication between the institutions and the publics, but substantial political reforms
1	Yes, by expanding interactivity in the public sphere.
1	Yes, by making it easier for individuals to identify both MEPs and Commission officials and providing a convenient electronic means of contact with appropriate individuals within the EU with a guaranteed response, along with published response statistics (e.g. '88% of those who contacted John Smith MEP received a response within 14 days').
1	yes, by providing accesible information on how things work and what is going on
1	yes, definitely. easy access for lots of people. however, still too much English based
1	Yes, especially if there is an equivalent to the excellent http://www.theyworkforyou.com/ . All EU website are SLOW to put news on time. It is a mess to find something on the EP website. EU institutions can be accountable only if they have quality information/website. For example, there is no XML/RSS system (as far as I know) to keep track on live of the latest developments.
1	Yes, I think that being able to easily reach your MEP using the web is a good way of helping people realise how the EU can work for them and that it is not just 'Brussels' running the country. For many British people, Brussels is synonymous with the EU in general, with little regard for the individual institutions of the EU.
1	yes, if it would be easier to find out information on certain issues
1	Yes, if the websites are interesting.
1	Yes, improve information flow, increase knowledge and decrease the gap between elite and society
1	Yes, in my opinion, information leads to a higher participation in for example EU Parliament elections which would definitely increase the democracy inside the EU.
1	Yes, in the sense that the europeans would have access in a public sphere that is now hard -or impossible- to experience.
1	yes, internet provide easy access to information and may increase the chances of general public taking interest in the EU, However, the content is still control by the EU, it is not excatly a \"public domain\"
1	Yes, it already does. Civil Society is able to exist more visibly and communicate Europe much more efficiently than Politicians.
1	Yes, it can make MEPs seem more accessible
1	Yes, it can provide information and services. A very useful website, which stresses the service aspect, is for example the EURES website
1	Yes, it can provide real time information on political processes in the EU institutions (information - transparency - which then allows direct reaction by citizens). I was amazed when I discovered (by chance) that the EUROPA website offers a real time follow up on votings on EU directives... but too few people know about that!
1	yes, its a powerfull tool to increase political information gathering
1	Yes, It's a good way to communicate. More marketing about website and make them attractive to visit.
1	yes, more and more general inormation on the EU and institutions in ALL official languages
1	Yes, online discussions and e-mail contact provide with an opportunity to discuss about citizens' concerns about the role of the EU. However, these methods also have some limitations.
1	yes, online consultations, discussions and fora

1	Yes, partly, by facilitating access to documents. but internet alone is not enough to solve the democratic deficit
1	yes, perhaps more e-governance etc., something like public "hearings" on the web
1	Yes, reducing distances with the institutions and making direct participation in european affairs a way to strenghten european identity
1	yes, same as for any other media. They should simply increase the information about the EU and related topics and diversify the press coverage
1	Yes, since access available all the time, perception of bureacratic obstacles and closed door dealings is reduced
1	yes, the EU websites already provide lots of access to documents (once you have found out where...). It is only very hard for an ordinary citizen to influence the policy-making process (even like if you have access to documents).
1	yes, the sphere of action of Internet is very large and it is incresing every day
1	Yes.
1	Yes. Blogs, online fora, etc.
1	Yes. Compare it to the situation 10 yrs ago - then everything was secretive.
1	Yes. Easy access to information will help us hold the politicians responsible for their actions, especially if we have direct access.
1	Yes. Everybody needs to be able to have aquick access to information. However, large websites with several languages have a creditability problem with slow update of information (eg. docs)
1	Yes. Publicise its generally half-baked socialist tripe for all to see.
1	yes.. transparency
1	yes;
1	yes; Q and A
1	You can already contact MEPs easily enough so the above question is irrelevant. Officials are a different matter. The key problem remains that people throughout Europe do not see what the EU does for them in their daily lives and visiting the EU institutional websites simply reinforces this - who in their right mind would be even remotely interested in some of the technical regulatory issues that the parliament or any other institution has to deal with? One thing I can't stand is the pathetic attempts on most of the websites, especially member state presidency websites, to include some 'youth'/cool Europe' pages that I know from my own work with young people are condescending and lacking in any real information. Why bother?

15. How often do you access the Internet?

Every day	95.9%	(212)
Every other day	2.7%	(6)
Once a week	0.9%	(2)
Once a fortnight		(0)
Once a month		(0)
Once every three months		(0)
Rarely		(0)
Never	0.5%	(1)
TOTAL	100.0%	221

16. Do you access governmental/ political websites?

Yes, often	48.9%	(108)
Yes, sometimes	34.4%	(76)
No	15.4%	(34)
TOTAL	98.6%	221

17. If yes, which websites do you access and why? (please provide the name and/OR full URL)

#	Response
1	A range of local government websites, especially from other inhternational organisations
1	About 50 sites, no room or time for details
1	All Finnish political parties' websites, at their EU Policy section.
1	All the websites mentioned on question 11 and own interests, Parliament of Finland because I want to know what's going on in my own country
1	all the websites related to my job... too much to provide all





1	assemblee-nationale.fr
1	Auswärtiges Amt Deutschland; Bundesregierung
1	BBC News, various blogs
1	belgian government, luxembourg government, EMEA (pharma)
1	Belgian government, UN
1	British and German government websites, for information purposes
1	British Government, French Gouvernement
1	CIA World Factbook, Auswärtiges Amt, Statistisches Bundesamt
1	conservative party website
1	council, local government for information, contacts, opportunities (courses, jobs, fundings)
1	Court service-England, Scotland-I am a lawyer. also UK government sites as interested in UK news/politics.
1	Data Protection Authorities
1	environmental / sustainable energy related info
1	EUObserver, www.politikerscreen.de, www.ictsd.org
1	Euractiv Stae Watch
1	EURActiv, DG environment, Emissions Trading websites
1	euractiv, euobserver
1	europa.eu.int; europarl.eu.int; bund.de; French government
1	Eurostat, Most German and UK governmental sites
1	find information
1	For information http://www.hmcourts-service.gov.uk http://www.downingstreetsays.com/ http://www.fco.gov.uk/fco/communities/fora http://www.cor.eu.int/en http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/ http://www.sparkpod.com/eulaw http://weblog.jrc.cec.eu.int/page/wallstrom http://www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/eu/monnet_eurofunding.html
1	for MSc and PhD research: http://www.cities-localgovernments.org/uclg/index.asp ; http://www.ccre.org/ ; http://www.rgre.de/
1	for teaching and research: governmental (UK, D, A), academic (UK, D, A, I, F) and national statistics offices (A). Newspapers/media agencies (UK, US, D, A, HU).
1	for university: euractiv, europa, greenparty for voluntary work
1	Foreign and Commonwealth office, Home Office, Dept of Constitutional affairs, Parliament, Hansard (Lords and Commons) "because politics is not a spectator sport"
1	general .gov.uk sites for business purposes
1	German foreign ministry, French foreign ministry, Belgian foreign ministry
1	gov departments
1	gov.ro
1	Greek governmental websites, political parties websites
1	Hansard, HMSO statutes, equivs for other nations + EU, govt depts
1	HMRC - work (+ other UK government websites - DEFRA, EA etc)
1	Home Office and Foreign Office for work purposes.
1	hse, office of dep prime minister general information
1	http://barcepundit-english.blogspot.com/
1	http://euobserver.com ; http://www.euractiv.com ; http://www.euabc.com ;
1	http://eureferendum.blogspot.com/
1	http://eureferendum.blogspot.com/ - because it's true. Also many others; too many to list here.
1	http://www.direct.gov.uk/Homepage/fs/en I use this site often as it is easy to use and very clear about which links take you where. The language used in this is clear, unlike the jargon used on the europa.eu.int website.
1	http://www.euoparl.fi/ep/index.jsp
1	http://www.formin.fi/
1	http://www.nio.gov.uk/
1	http://www.publicwhip.org.uk/index.php http://www.bloggerheads.com/
1	http://www.samizdata.net/blog/ and others
1	http://www.sdo.lshtm.ac.uk/

1	http://www.thecep.org.uk
1	http://www.valtioneuvosto.fi/vn/liston/base.lsp - to obtain information on the Finnish government
1	http://www.ypepth.gr , http://www.ypes.gr , http://www.departmentofjustice.gr and generally, those concerning the various Greek ministrys.
1	I acces in political websites: www.parties-and-elections.de for be informed of the elections in the European states and regions, Cabe Babel for read some articles about Europe (European Politics, statal politics, European problems, European society)
1	I access embassies websites or other governmental websites for work reasons. Websites I visited most recently: www.esteri.it ; http://www.ambhanoi.esteri.it/
2	I frequent the Campaign for An English Parliament, http://www.thecep.org.uk/ and their blog at, http://www.thecep.org.uk/news/ because it is a good source for issues facing England and news relating to those issues with various people offering opinions. It also highlights the democratic deficit in England and the case for a symmetrical equivalent for parity.
1	I really couldn't list them, let's say my favourites include around 100+ such websites.
1	I see hundreds of sites. You should rethink your question. Maybe list 50 or so well know web sites, both official and unofficial that can be ticked.
1	I visit europa.eu.int according to study purpose
1	info on government services, tho more often local government rather than national
1	information for newspaper stories
1	Inland Revenue, MI5, DWP,
1	Invariably to try and check on media bias
1	Irish government web site, Moldovan government web site, ngos' web sites
1	Labour/ Tony Bliar to ask pertinent questions which he avoids answering
1	local government sites to find out information for my area
1	Lots: www.leics.gov.uk and www.charnwood.gov.uk for local information and access to local council; inland revenue and Dept for work & pensions for information, labour party website for news & to contact my local MP, other independent websites for political discussions / articles / news
1	many - studies
1	Many and for various countries
1	many national administrations
1	many, for research purposes
1	member state governments, think tanks, research institutions
1	MFA-websites for work
1	ministries' websites for information
1	Ministry of European Integration Croatia/ and Serbia Montenegro are two of the many, for research purposes, uptodate information and contact details
1	most EU governments' web pages, plus a number of pol.di-pages
1	most of the .gov.uk websites for work reasons; the french and italian government and parliament sites.
1	most of the govt sites
1	Most UK government websites (eg dfes, home office, ons) for blogging and use in political debate
1	nasa
1	national government and agency websites
1	NATO, UN, EU, Home Office, Stanford Uni Academic Web Pages. - To learn more, keep up to date on contemporary news, academic study
1	New Labour Homepage, BBC Politics
1	newssites (euractiv, eu-observer), think tanks (ICG, ...), newspapers, ...
1	NHS related websites as work related
1	Not saying
1	number10, firstGov
1	odin.dep.no , regeringen.se , norges-bank.no , several federal reserve banks,
1	ODPM, Defra, Dept for education, DTI, Various Local Council websites
1	OECD, DTI, National Science Foundation (US), MEXT, METI (japanese ministry urls)
1	oecd.org ; odci.gov ; cia.gov ; nato.org ; un.org ; Greek government sites--economy, education, justice
1	ones that tell the truth
1	Planning Departments
1	Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Polish Ministry of Defence etc.





1	politics.guardian.co.uk
1	regularly access an average of 60 such sites every day because of my job
1	sides of all MS, New MS and CCs for professional reasons
1	Some libertarian sites.
1	stratfor.org, aljazeera.net, alahram.org.eg
1	The conservative parties website, as i an active conservative
1	the cyprus government official site
1	the webs of my government
1	They Work For You, Public Whip, BBC Europhobia, Adam Smith, Bloggerheads, Post Political Times, Ton Watson, Samizdata, Virtual Stoa
1	to many to mention
2	too many
1	too many to list
1	UK DTI, and other business sites to check on legislation
1	UK gov
1	UK Gov sites, information and advice
1	uk government - tax returns/DTI etc
1	UK government and various departments.
1	UK government dperatment (education, passports, home office).
1	UK government website for visas, legal info etc
1	UK government websites (eg House of Commons, Foreign Office), international NGOs e.g. International Crisis Group, International Alert, Research institututes/ EU reportage e.g. EU Institute for Security Studies, EUobserver, European Voice
1	UK Home Office, Parliament
1	UK, Australian, Canadian & New Zealand Govt sites. Also political party sites, blogs, etc to keep abreast of political events affecting my family and friends.
1	UN site, Belgian government site: for information
1	UN, CofE, Uk Parl & NGO's like Amnesty
1	UN, world bank,
1	uno, european commission, german ministries/ information and contact
1	various websites for research
1	Website in the community. Local laws,happening and help in issues. Also websites about healthcare (governments)
1	Website of German Government / Ministries (for information on policy fields), Website of different Think Tanks like TEPSA, CEPS, etc. for news, events and analyse of policy fields; Euractiv for news;
1	websites of MFA's, MoD's, various governments etc - because I work on the security issues research
1	websites of news agencies such as Agence Europe EUJobs, etc
1	Websites of various international organisations, i.e. BIS, ECB, IMF, UN, etc.
1	Why: Politics is my field of study. In the moment: http://www.premier-ministre.gouv.fr/ , because I study there; http://www.spd.de ; political magazines and newspapers like Spiegel-online oder lemonde.fr
1	www.auswaertiges-amt.de to check stuff, as well as Bundesumweltministerium to keep up with new developments
1	www.bundestag.de to get brand nex information and to look for internships
1	www.bverfg.de ; www.bverwg.de , www.bundesgerichtshof.de - purpose: research for my phd-thesis
1	www.direct.gov.uk www.statistics.gov . Both useful for supporting academic research
1	www.direct.gov.uk , www.hmrc.gov.uk - for info
1	www.gov.org
1	www.gov.ro
1	www.governo.it www.gov.ie research/teaching
1	www.kemi.se , http://www.naturvardsverket.se/ because of my work
1	www.mae.es ; www.la-moncloa.es ; www.un.org ; www.nato.int ; www.stabilitypact.org ; www.osce.org
1	www.mol.fi www.minedu.fi www.uvi.fi
1	www.politik-digital.de to have an excellent library of articels
1	www.pouruneeuropesociale.org
1	www.service-public.fr ; www.premier-ministre.gouv.fr

1	www.statistics.gov.uk/; www.direct.gov.uk/; www.canterbury.gov.uk/ mostly for business info (first two) or local info (last one)
1	www.un.org (information on member states and UN activities in various fields); www.hrad.cz (access to the Czech Constitutions and news about the activities of the Czech President); www.vlada.cz (to access an archive of the Czech government's regulations and meetings minutes); www.psp.cz and www.senat.cz (mainly to get contact information for the Czech MPs and Senators); www.royal.gov.uk (activities of the British Head of State); www.europarl.eu.int (mainly for composition details and reports); www.coe.int (general information); www.nato.int (information on current activities, reports, access to national representations' websites)
1	www.writetothem.com, www.theyworkforyou.com, www.publicwhip.org.uk, www.parliament.gov.uk, europa.eu.int - to keep tabs on politicians, read press releases, debates, legal documents, contact MPs/MEPs

18. Do you access the official EUROPA online fora (Discussion Corner) to discuss EU issues?

Yes, often	 0.5%	(1)
Yes, sometimes	 8.6%	(19)
No	 87.8%	(194)
TOTAL	 96.8%	221

19. Do you access other online fora to discuss the EU/ EU issues?

Yes, often	 10.0%	(22)
Yes, sometimes	 14.9%	(33)
No	 71.0%	(157)
TOTAL	 95.9%	221

20. If yes, please indicate which ones (please provide name and/OR full URL of the online fora you access) and the reasons for accessing them.

#	Response
1	---
1	A private forum (www.dasprovisorium.de) for general political discussions
1	again dozens. eg. I read Tom Worstall and Owen Barder's weblogs today
1	BBC news website "Have your say" discussions
1	biased bbc blog, euserf blog
1	cafebabel, radicali.it
1	Conservative party/UKIP discussion groups
1	Contribute to blogosphere about it; google Martin Keegan
1	Cross of St George Forum
1	der standard (austrian newspaper)
1	EU Referendum, EU Pundit, Fist Full of Euros, Europhobia
1	EUreferendum, Road to EU serfdom, MOrgot Wallstrom blog
1	eureferendum.blogspot.com, weblog.jrc.cec.eu.int/comments/wallstrom/Weblog/
1	forum.politics.be
1	french newspaper (lemonde, liberation, figaro)
1	General/Private forms, just for talking on general political matters.
1	http://forum.gazeta.pl/forum/71,1.html?f=522
1	http://my.aegean.gr
1	http://no-pasaran.blogspot.com, http://barcepundit-english.blogspot.com
1	http://www.crossofstgeorge.net/forum/
1	http://www.eureferendum.com/forum/viewforum.php?f=2 http://www.whistlestopper.com/forum/forumdisplay.php?forumid=5
1	http://www.europhobia.blogspot.com rational debate and interesting articles
1	http://www.finlandforthought.net/
1	Margot Walstrom's Blog site
1	militaryphotos.net
1	MND, iFeminists, SYG, to contribute/discuss.
1	n/a
1	National front , White nationalists party ,

1	newsgroup: uk.politics.misc
1	no
1	tagesschau.de
1	Technology websites with off-topic sections, to discuss EU issues with a more international POV
1	the forum of the Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation in Germany dealing with EU-issues, because I was supported during my study in Germany and I keep contact with the foundation and its experts
1	Tim Worstall's blog, EUrota blog
1	to many to mention
1	to tell them they should abolish it
1	Various blogs and chat rooms to exchange comments & ideas.
1	Various Social Networking sites, such as Orkut, DotNode, etc. where the creation of discussion topics and of topic-specific fora are bottoms-up, rather than EU's top-down approach.
1	View the blog role on http://saxontimes.blogspot.com/
3	www.cafebabel.com
1	www.cafebabel.com and www.takingitglobal.org for change opinions
1	www.fistfulofeuros.net www.timworstall.typepad.com
1	You are not up to date - the FUTURUM on line discussion site has been suspended for at least twelve months, I have visited other sites - e.g. http://www.unieurope.org and others but none of them have proved as effective in acting as a platform for engaging ordinary European citizens in discussion about European issues

21. Do you access online fora regarding other issues (not EU issues)?

Yes	43.9%	(97)
No	52.5%	(116)
TOTAL	96.4%	221

22. If yes, what type of online fora do you access? (you do not need to provide full URL, only name or general description).

#	Response
1	---
1	academic, current politics
1	Air-pro working holidays, Tenerife workers general forum
1	BBC site (sometimes) about various issues
1	better focussed discussion fora
1	blogger fora dedicated to EU and national issues
1	Blogs and chat rooms to exchange ideas and comments.
1	Blogs, mainly politics or media based
1	come on - give me tick boxes
1	comments at various news/discussion sites
1	Creative Commons, Free and Open Software, anything on Immigration policies in various countries.
1	crooked timber, slugger o'toole, angry bear + wine & bridge fora
1	Cross of St George Forum
1	education, research
1	entertainment; politics
1	EPSRC
1	EUreferendum No2ID Let the people decide etc
1	Far too many to name, on the subjects of technology, games, sports etc
1	FOR THE BUSINESS
1	fora about Economics and political issues
1	Fora about University issues (or politics) and about Computers (regarding malfunctions etc., in order to get assistance).
1	fun christian and survivors fora
1	games
1	General computer programming, and particularly Java programming
1	genral politics, sport, music, culture
1	here and there

1	http://www.sluggeroole.com/
1	http://www.thecep.org.uk/forum/
2	I go to the Cross of St. George Debate to discuss English issues in a devolved UK and the democratic deficit in a smaller but longer established "union".
1	IMDB movie reviews
1	islamonline.net
1	It's dasprovisorium.de which is a general forum. From sports, movies, computer games to politics, personal 'my girlfriend left me' stuff and what have you.
1	Karate / Martial Arts
1	Libertarian fora
1	Literary studies fora and discussion groups discussing things regarding the stud of literature
1	Literature discussion groups related to my research, just for details, updates, calls for papers; occasionally I access other general fora on music/film/art/writing/towns & local information etc but generally I find them ridiculous places where people end up having personal arguments and stating grand opinions based on rumours and ignorance of their subject, so I avoid them.
1	mainly blogosphere
1	militaryphotos.net
1	music, science&religion
1	music, studying/working abroad
1	n/a
1	nationalist
1	naval warfare fora
1	no
1	normalt online fora, linked to sports or history
1	Not relevant to EU (private interests)
1	noyb
1	Nursing. Trade Union. Motorcycling.
1	on development issues, like www.epo.de or websites of the UN
1	online magazines
1	Ones related to my work
1	ones that want to abolish the EU
1	online versions of print newspapers; media critic sites.
1	Photofigurey, shooting, British Equalitarian
1	Political blogs
1	political fora, including discussing EU issues like Margot Walstrom's blog, but not actively participating
1	Political fora, students fora.
1	Political Shooting
1	politics
1	Politics "because politics is not a spectator sport"
1	Politics, Democracy
1	politics, economics
1	politics, music, literature
1	professional
1	relationships, tv series, mobile phones
1	Scientific ones
2	see above
1	Social and work related fora.
1	Technial, legal
1	technical fora
1	Technical IT
1	technology related; gaming and gadgets
1	technology, science, UK politics, film, finance
1	The Adam Smith Institute (free market blog), Samizdata.net
1	to many to mention




1	UK politics, martial arts, computing
1	US issues-related fora
1	various
1	various, e.g. newspaper, uni
1	wikipedia
1	Wolves (football team), 606 (BBC sports), BBC news
1	WTO issues and also for various hobbies and interests
1	www.iesaf.fi

23. Nationality













#	Response
1	American
1	Australian /English
1	Austria
1	AUT
9	Belgian
2	Belgium
1	Brazilian
39	British
2	British
1	British and Australian
1	Bulgaria
3	bulgarian
2	Canadian
1	Catalan
1	CHINESE
1	Croatian
3	Cypriot
1	Czech
1	D
1	Danish
3	Dutch
1	Egyptian
17	English
1	English-British-European
2	European
1	European of heart, but Spanish in the papers
1	European/German
1	Finland
2	Finn
11	Finnish
6	French
1	French American
1	French/German (binational)
1	from North West England (I am Mancunian by birth)
1	GB
25	German
1	german
12	Greek
1	Greek/French
2	Hellenic
9	Irish

1	Lithuanian
1	Moldovan
1	Multiple - UK, Australia, Sri Lanka, Holland
1	Norwegian
1	Not Willing to Disclose as do not see importance of collecting this data
6	Polish
3	romanian
1	Slovak
2	Slovenian
4	Spanish
3	Swedish
1	thai
2	Turkish
12	UK
1	UNITED KINGDOM
3	USA

24. Gender

Female	 32.6%	(72)
Male	 67.4%	(149)
TOTAL	 100.0%	221

25. Age: Please select an age group

Younger than 15 years old	 0.5%	(1)
15-19 years old	 3.6%	(8)
20-24 years old	 23.5%	(52)
25-29 years old	 32.1%	(71)
30-34 years old	 16.3%	(36)
35-39 years old	 6.3%	(14)
40-44 years old	 4.5%	(10)
45-49 years old	 3.6%	(8)
50-54 years old	 5.9%	(13)
55-60 years old	 1.8%	(4)
61-65 years old	 1.8%	(4)
Over 66 years old		(0)
TOTAL	 100.0%	221

26. Occupation

#	Response
2	Academic
1	Academic -ex Commission
1	Academic Librarian
1	administrative assistant
1	Administrator
1	Architect
1	asdf
1	assistant
1	Assistant to the CEO
1	attorney
1	Biochemist
1	Campaign Manager
1	Carer
1	CFO

1	Chemist
3	civil servant
1	Commercial officer
1	communication
2	Company Director
1	construction
3	Consultant
1	Contract Agent at the European Commission, DG Enlargement
1	cs administrator
2	Currently unemployed.
1	Database Administrator
1	development NGO
1	economist
1	Editor/writer
1	Education advisor
1	Educator
1	Employed
1	employee
1	energy advisory
1	engineer
1	Entrepreneur
1	EU civil servant
1	European Civil Servant
1	Farmer
1	Financial Services
1	Full time student
1	Full-time student
1	Government Affairs Specialist
1	house wife
1	ICT Technician
1	international civil servant
2	IT
5	journalist
1	Law enforcement
3	lawyer
2	Lecturer
1	Lecturer (HE)
1	Librarian
1	management consultant
1	managing director
1	Manufacturer
1	MD of a Figureic Design & Media company
1	media
1	MEP Parliamentary Assistant
1	n/a
1	Night Porter
1	Nurse
1	Office worker
1	Operations Manager
1	parliamentary assistant
1	Ph.D. student, business consultant
1	PhD

2	PhD Candidate
16	PhD Student
1	PhD student, researcher
2	phd-student
1	physiotherapist
1	political economist
1	Political Science Student
1	private employee
1	Product Manager
1	programmer
1	project planner
1	Psychologist
1	Quality and enviromental coordinator
1	Quantity Surveyor
1	Reporter
1	reseacher
1	Research
1	Research Associate
1	Research Fellow at the Institute for International Relations, Zagreb, Croatia
5	Research student
8	researcher
1	researcher at university
1	Researcher/PhD Candidate
1	Researcher
1	Restaurant owner
1	Retired
1	sales
4	Scientist
1	Secondary School teacher
1	Self Employed
1	Small Business Owner
2	Software
1	Software Developer
52	Student
1	Student
1	Student, BSc
1	Student/Bartender
1	Student/Research Consultant
1	System Test Engineer
2	teacher
1	teaching assistant
1	Technical ICT Architect
1	technician, paper industry
1	TELESALES REP
1	terminologist
1	Transport professional
1	UK Civil Servant
1	Uni Staff
2	University lecturer
1	University Student
1	web developer
1	Web editor

1	Writer	
1	xxx	
1	young expert in the foreign service	
27. Education		
Not completed compulsory education	1.8%	(4)
Completed compulsory education	9.0%	(20)
Vocational Qualification	2.7%	(6)
University Degree (BA, undergraduate degree)	31.7%	(70)
University Degree (MA, postgraduate degree)	41.2%	(91)
PhD	13.6%	(30)
TOTAL	100.0%	221