

# New media dynamics and European Integration

## *Nuevas dinámicas de medios e Integración Europea*

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### Abstract

This article addresses the question whether the potential of mass media as a motor of social integration, order and unity can be transposed from the national to the transnational and European level of society. The issue is how the media (new and old) can re-establish the link between social order and democratic legitimacy that characterized the national public sphere. To approach this question of the relationship between the media, a new transnational (European) society and democracy the article delivers a general account of how media (old and new) interact with the project of European integration. Can we speak in any meaningful way of the mass media as a facilitator of European integration? Or are the mass media the major obstacle to the political efforts to further integrate Europe. The notion of an EU mediatized democracy is introduced to understand this interplay between EU institutions and various attentive publics in the contestation of EU legitimacy.

### Resumen

*El presente artículo trata la cuestión de si el potencial vertebrador de los medios de comunicación de masas como motor de la integración social, el orden y la unidad pueden ser trasladados del nivel nacional de la sociedad al transnacional y europeo. Se trata de cómo los medios (nuevos y viejos) pueden re-establecer el nexo entre orden social y legitimidad democrática que caracteriza la esfera pública nacional. Para aproximarnos a la relación entre los medios, una nueva sociedad y una democracia transnacional (europea) el artículo ofrece una panorámica general de cómo los medios (tradicionales y nuevos) interfieren en el proyecto de integración europea. ¿Podemos hablar con sentido de los medios como facilitadores de la integración europea? ¿O son los medios un gran obstáculo para los esfuerzos políticos de integrar Europa? La noción de una democracia europea mediatizada se introduce para entender las interacciones entre las instituciones de la Unión Europea y los diversos públicos que contestan la legitimidad de la UE.*

### Keywords

European public sphere, EU democracy, mediatisation, EU communication policies

### Palabras clave

*Esfera pública europea, democracia europea, mediatización, políticas de la comunicación europeas*

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### Sumario

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## 1. Introduction: Redefining the role of media and social integration in contemporary Europe

**Communication theorists** together with historical sociologists have often maintained an interest in the social integration function of the mass media. From an instrumental perspective, the role of the mass media as a facilitator of collective action and as an agent of social control has been emphasized. Mass media maintain social order by controlling the information flows within society and facilitate the exchange between power holders and the citizens (Demers and Viswanath 1999). From a symbolic perspective, the emphasis was placed, instead, on the role of the mass media as the signifier of the unity of society. Mass media define citizens' identities and feelings of attachment to social units and thus facilitate democracy as grounded in the trust of an imagined political community (Anderson 1991; Hardt 2004; McQuail 2010: 89). At the same time, communication scholars at an early stage have shifted the focus from the mass media as the motor of social integration to the disintegrating media effects. There is a long tradition of critical media studies holding mass media responsible for the lack of social cohesion and the alienation or dispersion of the publics in modern societies (Burton 2010).

This relationship between mass media and social integration continues to occupy our attention in the analysis of contemporary European societies and their transformation. Our traditional understanding of the integrative functions of the mass media for modern society is challenged by two current developments. The first challenge is linked to the displacement of politics and democracy. The political integration of the Europe of states has been advanced at a higher speed than the social and cultural integration of the Europe of citizens. While political authority has gradually shifted from the national to the supranational level there is no corresponding community of communicating citizens that could back such a process. Public opinion remains fragmented and bound to national public spheres. The second challenge is linked to displacement effects of the media itself. The nation state is no longer the unitary space of media production and distribution. What concerns us here is a correlation between the disintegration of society and the disintegration of formerly unitary systems of mass media communication. With the event of the new media the imagined community called the nation is fragmented again into different user communities and such differentiated media use is seen as one of the driving forces of social disintegration (Keen 2012). Today's media create an environment of turbulence and volatility. With the British media scholar Brian McNair we can speak of a new 'cultural chaos' that has replaced the ordered and controlled flows of communication within traditional public spheres (McNair 2006).

In this article, I wish to address the question whether the integrative potential of mass media as a motor of social integration, order and unity can be transposed from the national to the transnational and European level of society. In short, the question is how the media (new and old) can re-establish the link between social order and democratic legitimacy that characterized the national public sphere. To approach this question of the relationship between the media, a new transnational (European) society and democracy I will for the purpose of this overview article deliver a general account of how media (old and new) interact with the project of European integration. Can we speak in any meaningful way of the mass media as a facilitator of European integration? Or are the mass media the major obstacle to the political efforts to further integrate Europe. The function of the mass media – following a dictum of Niklas Luhmann – is to facilitate the self-observation of society (Luhmann 1996). The mass media are firmly established as the observatory of society, of its unity and of its frictions. But through mass mediated communication, society primarily observes itself as national society. Can mass media be the catalyst for the self-observation of a European society? Can mass media facilitate the imagination of unity and coherence that underlies the social bonds of Europeans?

## 2. What does it mean to speak of the mediatization of politics?

**If we** want to analyse how and at which level media have an integrative force, we need to understand how media interact with society. There is a specific term for this interaction between media and other sub-sectors of society: we speak of mediatization. Mediatization, most basically, indicates that there is a social relationship between the media and something which is not the media. Mediatization is a relational term; it is only possible to speak of the mediatization of something.

Scholars, who discuss mediatization emphasize that mediatization and media effects or media causalities should be kept separate. Against the more narrow analysis of media causality, mediatization relates to a broader process of societal transformation (Krotz 2007). It relates to a dual structural relationship of dependence and independence between media and other societal subsystems (like politics). The omnipresence of the media and their operational independence penetrates other societal sectors and causes them to adapt to media logic. Following this dual structural logic, “media are at once part of the fabric of society and culture and an independent institution” (Hjarvard 2009: 106). Mediatization theory in its broadest sense is a theory of social change and change takes place at the level of society (Couldry 2012: 134-137).

Frank Marcinkowski in an important contribution interprets mediatization as a functional requirement of social subsystems which rely on the generation of publicity, defined here in a more narrow sense as visibility<sup>1</sup> (Marcinkowski 2005). There are however important differences in the degree to which different societal sectors rely on publicity and these correlate with their degree of inclusiveness (Marcinkowski and Steiner 2009). Especially democratic institutions operate under the constant pressure to generate sufficient degrees of visibility for their operations. Democratic politics operate under the assumption of all-inclusiveness, which creates the highest demand for public attention and acceptance for its topics of communication. The mediatization of politics is thus explained in relation to the legitimacy requirements of the modern state, which is based on popular sovereignty and claims for democracy.

Mediatization becomes in this sense a key notion for political legitimacy research. Democratic politics are never just the victim of mediatization, not subject to it, not subordinated to media or colonized by it. There is rather a specific correlation between mediatization and democratization that concerns us here. Mediatization immediately relates to the way society defines itself as an all-inclusive and integrated unity of individuals, in other words, as a political community of democracy.

In spite of these recent scholarly efforts, mediatization remains a fuzzy concept that does not refer to a well-established research agenda (Couldry 2012: 134-155; Livingstone 2009). In the following, one possibility for sketching such a research agenda is followed with regard to the question of the mediatization of the political system of the European Union. The specific correlation between mediatization and democratization will thus be tested with regard to the dynamics of the emergence of an EU mediatized democracy.

### 3. Towards an EU mediatized democracy?

**In a** first approximation, it is useful to discuss EU mediatization dynamics beyond the more general background of the possibilities for the emergence of a European public sphere. Scholars who are interested in the communicative exchanges and debates that contribute to the constitution of a European public sphere have followed different paths. One group of scholars has analyzed processes of political communication that involve EU-level actors and citizens directly (e.g. the promise of more participatory forms of democracy or the potential of so-called strong, deliberative publics and procedures of EU decision-making).<sup>2</sup> Others have invested in large scale quantitative or qualitative comparative media content analysis to measure media performance in covering EU issues and debates. Related to this, a research agenda has been developed to compare degrees of Europeanization between different countries or media formats.<sup>3</sup>

- 1 For a normatively grounded definition of publicity that links the activity of 'making visible' to the possibility of critique and reflection see Bohman (1999; 2004) and my own critical reconstruction of a theory of the digital public sphere in Trenz (2009)
- 2 For this former tradition of European public sphere research see Bohman (2007) and Eriksen and Fossum (2002).
- 3 For this latter tradition of European public sphere research see Koopmans and Statham (2010), Risse (2010), Trenz (2005) and Wessler et al. (2008).

In all these different variants, European public sphere research implies that there is an interrelation between media and EU politics that shapes the general representation of the EU system of governance and the possibilities for its public legitimation (Fossum and Schlesinger 2007; Trenz 2008a). This relates to the question of the mediatization of the EU system of governance (Kriesi et al. 2013; Meyer 2009; Michailidou and Trenz 2010; Trenz 2006; 2008a). Instead of mapping the performance of journalism in covering EU news from a national-comparative perspective, mediatization research traces feedback mechanisms of media presence and practice on the EU political system and its public legitimation. The mediatization thesis maintains that ‘processes of political communication depend on the media infrastructure and are subject to change as the media are changing’ (Kriesi 2013: 10). Under conditions of mediatization, ‘media logics’, and, in particular the commercial logic of the media industries in marketing public attention, increasingly become a frame of reference for the ‘staging’ of the political process and thus of democracy (Mazzoleni and Schultz 1999).

In tracing back these feedback mechanisms of media presence in the EU political process, the question is not so much how the media (new and old) have a direct impact on EU policy-making. I rather wish to discuss in the following how EU actors and institutions take up the democratic challenge to respond and interact with media. This opens a different perspective on EU democracy not simply as direct or represented or participatory but as *mediated*. At the same time it opens a different perspective on EU governance not simply as intergovernmental, poly-archic or deliberative but as *mediatized*.<sup>4</sup>

EU democracy from a mediatization perspective is thus reconceived as a dynamic communicative process which takes place in the public sphere, filtered and shaped by the media environment. In a series of previous publications, Asimina Michailidou and myself have addressed this complex relationship of political institutions, media, citizens and formal settings of democratic participation and representation under the label of *EU mediatized democracy* (Michailidou and Trenz 2010; 2013). The aim of this work was to shift the focus of EU democracy research from an institutional-input-output perspective to a media perspective. The decisive question for us was not to assess the normative credentials of EU democracy, to measure the performance of political institutions, or to confront EU representatives with voters’ preferences or changing attitudes of the citizens. Mediatization research rather takes its starting point from the media practices and routines that are developed by EU institutional actors and citizens alike to contest democratic legitimacy.

Going beyond the more confined agenda of European public sphere research and its assessment of the normative credentials of EU governance in the interplay with national or European media, the mediatization research agenda opens a different perspective on EU democratic legitimacy as being essentially shaped by media actions and interactions. In this sense, EU mediatized

4 A media perspective is chronically absent in political scientists’ debates on the prospects of EU democracy and their main focus on institutional and procedural designs of EU governance, legal-constitutional provisions or the strategic positioning of main actors like governments, parliaments, political parties or civil society. See however the contributions in Eriksen and Fossum (2012) and Kohler-Koch and Rittberger (2006) where plural perspectives on EU democracy are discussed that move beyond the EU governance paradigm.

democracy needs to be understood not only in terms of the media salience and news coverage of EU representative politics but more broadly, in terms of the general transformation of representative politics and its impact on the generation of political legitimacy of the EU. In order to understand the legitimacy impact of media communication on European integration, we need to look beyond the instrumental use of media by political actors/institutions or political parties and develop a more encompassing approach of media logics and practices penetrating and constraining the EU political system. With this widened focus, the mediatized public sphere can be reconstructed not merely as the infrastructure for the mediation of EU representative politics but as the place where the representative claims-making of the new transnational elites resonates, meets with national (or other) counter claimants and informs public opinion and will formation.

From the above, we can approach not only the downsides but also the promise for a mediatized EU democracy. We can expect the EU to become a case of mediatization to the extent that it defines itself as a political entity that is also in need of public legitimacy. There is thus a relationship between mediatization and the deficits of democratic legitimation in the context of political integration in Europe. Enhanced media communication and debates contribute to outlining the contours of the political society of Europe which raises public demands for democracy.

#### 4. Approaching evolving forms and practises of EU mediatized politics

**The European** Union is, without any doubt, a new type of political order and authority in search of public legitimacy.<sup>5</sup> But is it also a case of mediatization? One way to argue is that the European Union is primarily a case of system integration and not a case of the social integration of citizens. Since inclusiveness of the system towards individuals would be low, also its demand to create public attention and acceptance would be low. This would be the case of a political system that creates legitimacy purely through the efficiency of governance.

A second possibility would be that we are confronted here with a complex, multi-level system of governance that creates specific demands for public legitimation. The reason for this is that political decisions actually affect citizens. Like any other political system, the EU would then need to define degrees of inclusiveness and publically justify them. It would with all likelihood also provoke resistances by those who feel affected by its decisions. The EU would be in need of generating publicity, it would need to rely on inclusive and participatory mechanisms that address the various affected parties involved in it. In the words of John Dewey, there would be ‘the problem of the public’ in need of self-identification, the public that needs to be included in discussions and that

<sup>5</sup> This has been the background assumption of the so-called legitimacy turn in EU studies (Kohler-Koch and Rittberger 2007).

needs to be persuaded about the benefits of integration. The EU would be similar to any other political system in relying on mechanisms of public legitimation, which in complex societies can only be satisfied through services provided by the mass media. The EU would however still be different, because it cannot rely on mass media services and operations to the same degree as national governments do and it is confronted with higher degrees of media contingencies. The public attention and resonance of an anonymous mass audience remain sporadic and fragmented. If the European Union were a case of mediatization, it would represent the rather unique case of mediatization without an independent mass media system that serves demands for publicity and as a consequence makes also the formation of a mass audience difficult. The EU would be a case of mediatization at the demand side with a deficit in actual media attendance and performance at the supply side. The EU would create a growing demand for mediatization while still being confronted with a large deficit of mediation.

My proposal is that mediatization research should analyse this discrepancy between increased demands for media attention generated within the political system and the limited supply of publicity by the media organizations involved. In the case of the current crisis of EU legitimacy, we need to analyse why the EU is in need of media attention, how it generates mass publicity and to what extent it can rely on it.

The answer to the question why the EU is in need of generating publicity can be found in its striving for public legitimacy through inclusive mechanisms that empower the citizens. The mediatization of the EU system of governance is first and foremost to be seen as a condition for the facilitation of democratic politics. Following the public legitimation paradigm just outlined above, there is a correlation between mediatization and democratization of the EU (Trenz 2008b). The more the EU system of governance confronts public demands and expectations of democracy, the more it relies on the generation of publicity for its internal functioning. To the extent that mediatization is imposed upon the political system of the EU from the outside, there is a growing demand to engage with media from within the EU system of governance. The legitimacy requirement of EU policy-making and the publicity seeking efforts of EU political actors and institutions are closely interlinked.

To approach EU mediatized democracy empirically thus implies not simply looking at how EU politics are increasingly exposed to the media but how they are relying on media performance. In the case of the performance of EU democratic institutions such as the European Parliament, for instance, we would expect a shortage of media attention. For an inclusive institution such as the European Parliament, such a shortage of public attention is however increasingly perceived as insufficient (Marcinkowski 2005; Marschall 2009). Even if the European Parliament remains for the most part invisible, it can still be in need of mediatization. The European Parliament can be unmediated but mediatized. It can create demands for

mediatization and operate under the assumption of publicity, yet be confronted with the effects of a systematic shortage of supply of media services.

Let's turn now to the question how the EU is mediatized. Mediatization of the EU takes place wherever the EU and its institutions rely on specific services of the mass media as part of their own operations, not only effectively make use of media services, but quite frequently also simply express intentions to make use of it, demand it or engage in failed attempts to make use of it.

At the more abstract level, we can distinguish between the basic mediatization and the reflexive mediatization of political institutions (Marcinkowski and Steiner 2009: 13). In the basic mode, EU institutions would be found to respond to the agenda that is given by the mass media, they would turn media topics into their own topics. In the case of reflexive mediatization, EU political actors and institutions would rearrange their own internal communication in a way to increase the chance that their inputs are taken up by the media. They become 'reflexive' on the performance of the mass media in organizing their own communication and they can launch 'strategic' communication to address the media and relate to the public. One could claim that the EU is a special case of reflexive mediatization that is characterized by a deficit of basic mediatization. Reflexive mediatization is enhanced by the EU's own communication policies. Media communications become an integral part of the functioning of EU political institutions. All EU institutions invest in public relations and the current European Commission has set up a very resourceful directorate-general for public and media communication. There is however no straightforward way for the EU to simply respond to the media. The basic mediatization of the EU encounters several well-known structural barriers: there is no media reference system, there are only national media with diverging agendas. There is also no unified audience that pays attention. There is what has been labelled a democracy of several fragmented constituencies: territorial, sectoral or simply irregular bystanders (Cheneval and Schimmelfennig 2013; Nicolaidis 2004). The EU is thus a case of enlightened government or reflexive governance which creates demands for mediatization, but has only limited possibilities to rely on mediation: to interact with media, to respond to it and to reach targeted audiences through the media.

Looking in detail at such routinized interactions between EU political institution and media organizations, I will sketch in the following the media interactions and dynamics of three key institutions that set up the EU system of governance: the European Commission, the governments of the member states and the European Parliament:

#### **a) The European Commission**

The PR and information policies of the European Commission have been accurately described as a multi-level game for public attention (Brüggemann 2008; 2010). The Commission needs to balance its interaction with journalists at two



levels: Brussels-based EU correspondents at the supranational level and national and local media at the member state level. In particular the Commission has given priority to the promotion of the decentralization of media and communication policies. For this purpose, it has tried through its national representations to establish regular contacts with national and regional journalists. We can interpret this as an institutional learning effect of a reflexive multi-level mediatization game. Decentralized media communication is coordinated in partial autonomy by the press offices of the national representations of the Commission in the capitals of the member states and their regional branch offices. In the UK, for instance, the London Representation's Press Office serves all British media, as well as international media based in London. Three local offices in Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast respond to regional and local media.

“We are here to provide a rapid response to journalists on topical European Union issues and bring issues of possible media interest to their attention. In addition to responding to requests for information from journalists, the Press Office encourages accurate media coverage of the EU”.

European Commission representation in the United Kingdom. Online press room: ([http://ec.europa.eu/unitedkingdom/press/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/unitedkingdom/press/index_en.htm))

The encounter between political institutions and media institutions is organized here in a traditional hierarchical way, not interactive, not even responsive but top-down: the Commission's press office selects relevant topics and expects fair and accurate coverage by the journalists. The press team of the Commission's Representation is available to 'assist' and to 'brief' journalists, but responsiveness is restricted. The Commission's Representation website is also used as a tool to reach out and to prevent misinformation of UK citizens who are exposed to British media coverage of the EU. A curious example of these pedagogical efforts of the Commission is the 'no-nonsense guide to UK citizens' regarding what the EU delivers (<http://www.the-eu-and-me.org.uk/>). It is designed as a tool to help UK citizens to learn about the benefits of EU membership, presupposing that they might know too little or be misguided. The Commission's website even provides a historical archive of 'media lies' and a specially designed 'Euomyths' section:

“Here in the online Press Room you can find Factsheets to help you understand what lies behind some of the EU stories featured in the UK media, or find out some of the truths behind the most persistent Euomyths”.

European Commission representation in the United Kingdom. Online press room: ([http://ec.europa.eu/unitedkingdom/press/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/unitedkingdom/press/index_en.htm))

All these instruments can hardly be defined as a case of 'basic' or 'responsive' mediatization. The Commission does not invest in its capacities to take up the media agenda. It does not accept issues selected by the media and turn them into own issues. The Commission does not establish a responsive mechanism: it rather establishes a corrective mechanism of interacting with media. Its website does not really try to talk to the journalists but is used to unmask the inaccurateness of journalistic services in the UK. The Commission's public relations efforts consist in replacing the news values applied by the mass media with the epistemic values and public good orientations of the political system. In a form of educational advertisement, the drama and personalization of the mass media is rejected and inaccurate news stories are corrected.

The Commission thus continues to be rather reluctant to adapt to media logics but nevertheless is confronted with daily encounters with media contingencies. It seeks to strategically place information but, from its own perspective, mainly yields the crop of media inaccuracies, lies or hostilities. The daily EU news coverage confronts the Commission with its own failure of public communication and exposes its communication deficits. The Commission seeks to counteract through appeals for more media quality, fairness and accuracy. This however rather forecloses the further mediatization of the EU system of governance in the sense of a mutual penetration of media logics and political logics. The EU system of governance and the relatively closed and self-referential national media systems can at best be said to be uncomfortable with each other. The encounter between the Commission and the mass media is thus to a large extent still based on a relationship of mutual mistrust. Any confrontation with media contingencies leads to protective measures to shield administrative practices and 'expert' governance from media logics.

#### **b) The governments of the member states**

The publicity seeking practices of the governments of the member states in turn are still highly selective, nationally biased and mainly concerned with feeding national journalists with information. While national governments still need to be considered as the main interlocutors for citizens to be informed about the EU, their investments in EU communication policies are modest and mainly restricted to moments of focused attention like EU referendums or the EU presidency. In particular EU presidencies need to be promoted. EU presidencies create specific identities based on good intentions, values and ideas linked to European integration. This requires careful planning and governments invest in strategic management of public relations. For that purpose, governments often hire top PR firms to guarantee that their ideas are diffused worldwide and the success of their presidency is made visible to foreign media. In the case of the Danish presidency of 2012, for instance, publicity seeking efforts were coordinated by a special task force within the Foreign Ministry which made long preparations

over one year. Core activities included the establishment of a visual identity of the Danish Presidency, the launch of a website and reaching different target audiences (foreign journalists and citizens). The public communication of the presidency fulfilled a double purpose: it sought interaction with journalists about the goals and achievements of the Danish Presidency and it sought to place particular contents that were considered of relevance for foreign publics. The lines between advertisement and information were often blurred: apart from some sort of general factual knowledge about the EU, visitors to the site were mainly informed about tourism in Denmark or elements of national pride (like Danish design, Danish movies and Danish Christmas donuts). Governmental communication of EU policy is therefore still more similar to the traditional use of media services as tools of propaganda in diplomacy and foreign policy than to responsive and interactive EU media politics. In the case of the Danish presidency, it is further noticeable that a lot of emphasis was placed on online media strategies, without however fully exploring the potential of Web 2.0 communication. This resembles domestic strategies of e-government, which is often organized in absence of e-citizens.

The Danish presidency can nevertheless be said to be mediatized to the extent that the government developed demands for media attention and expectations in media performance and also invested in communication policies to meet these demands. The decisive difference of EU mediatization lies, however, in the modes of supply of media services, the responsiveness of the media and also the impact of public attention and acceptance. The Danish government demanded the attention of non-Danish publics but did not rely on the support of these foreign publics nor was it directly exposed to their responses. Foreign media also interact differently with national governments: the foreign correspondent is a guest journalist who is not primarily interested in the control of the Danish government but rather guided by more specific rules of politeness and fairness. Foreign correspondents are also less investigative and more willing to adopt ready-made contents that are delivered by national government (Hannerz, 2004). In short, EU policy is still protected from media logics and media effects and governments maintain control over communication content and processes more than in other areas.

### **c) The European Parliament**

As a third example for the potential of EU mediatization, I wish to address briefly the public relations management of the European Parliament. Like other EU institutions, the Parliament has built up a professional press service and maintains information offices in the member states with the task of feeding journalists with information. More than any other EU institution the European Parliament has also experimented with new digital media communication formats and explored the potential to reach out to its constituency through social media networks. The European Parliament Facebook profile can be considered a pioneer

of this endeavour to meet the demand of public attention through online media and social networking media (Tarta 2013).

Parliaments in contrast to national government have a tradition of applying more horizontal, more interactive and more plural and diversified PR. One would thus expect parliamentary communication to be less mediatized and to search a more direct link with the electorate. Elected political representatives are also more inclined than unelected officials to make use of social networking media communications. Political communication through social media can in this sense be interpreted as an explicit attempt to sidestep or to eliminate the effects of mediatization. Despite this inclination to more networked forms of communication, parliaments as institutions are absent on major social networking sites such as Facebook, with one notable exception: the European Parliament.

The Facebook page of the European Parliament was launched in April, 2009. It has now (October 2013) consolidated with nearly one million likes and can thus be considered to be the most widely diffused platform of European political communication that reaches out to the citizens. The page also provides direct links to the MEPs' own Facebook profiles and their presence on other online platforms, including Twitter, blogs and the EP's official website. Communication that runs through these various channels is meant to be conversational, not mediatized. The Facebook profile of the European Parliament is built by professional communication managers as a site for encounters among citizens from different member states to socialise through interactive online media, to exchange opinions and to chat with each other. At the same time, the medium is used to place information, which is expected to be entertaining and playful but of relevance for the citizens. Users should have fun but also be informed. The public takes here the role of a fan group and is fed with selected topics by a political organization. But unlike the closed guestbook of a private website, the social networking media make public closure difficult. The fan is also free to comment on the cues and contents provided by the Parliament. The obvious risk implied in these forms of social network communication is the loss of ownership and control by the Parliament over its own communication inputs. As the provider of information the European Parliament is itself only one of many users of Facebook and needs to follow the institutionalised rules of distribution of the network. Public relations in the traditional sense are therefore inapplicable in the world of political communication facilitated by the new social networking media. The media enterprise and its specific functional logic disappear in this kind of interactive environment. Facebook is in this limited sense no more than a technical facilitator for creating publicity and voice. As a media platform, it is simply expected to function, to allow unlimited access for its users and to safeguard their privacy against publicity where or when it is called for. But Facebook rarely interferes as a media enterprise that selects or restricts the political opinions expressed and it does of course also not further comment on or evaluate the contents posted by its users.

In meeting the new dynamics of social media communication, the notion of mediatization has reached its limits. More than mediatization, we find attempts for the development of a public discourse and also attempts by political institutions to interlink with public discourse. The main function of the media to create publicity for selected issues is shared by the information provider and the user. Social media facilitate a form of self-organized mediation of political contents and debates but selection and framing falls back to the dynamic interplay between the owners of the profile and their subscribers. The European Parliament and its social network of fans are in this sense their own mediator.

We can conclude therefore rather tentatively that EU mediatized democracy might proceed even without the special involvement of media actors and media organizations. The Parliament is successfully applying new forms of conversational communication. It is regaining control over the selection and framing of issues and debates from the media organizations and journalists only to lose it again to its social network of Facebook users. Social media are helpful in this regard to escape the mediatized national public sphere and to satisfy demands for mass publicity. They provide an example of how demands for mediatization and processes of mediation can be recoupled in a transnational communication environment.

## 5. Conclusion: EU mediatization and the reconfirmation of the public sphere

**In this** article, research on mediatization and research on democratization have been found to be interlinked in various ways. In particular, mediatization scholars have introduced a new research focus on the generation of political legitimacy at the throughput level, which is measured in the ways the mass media a) generate visibility and focus public attention (publicity); b) include plural voice (participation); and c) provide critique and compete over the definition of value of politics and institutional arrangements (public opinion formation). The particular link between mediatization and democratization is thus provided by the public sphere.

At the same time, I have emphasized that the concept of mediatization should be used not only in the narrow sense to analyze the impact of media on the operational modes of the EU political system, but, in more general terms, to capture the transformation of the public sphere and the changing conditions for the generation of political legitimacy both at national and at European level. Mediatization helps us in this sense to broaden the technical understanding of the public sphere as a mediating infrastructure, which is often underlined by media and communication analysts. The mediatization research agenda reminds us instead of the intrinsic link between mediation, legitimation and democracy. It confronts

us with the critical standards for the mediation of political communication in its input, throughput and output dimensions which is geared towards the generation of political legitimacy (Gerhards & Neidhardt, 1991).

The challenge for EU mediatized democracy is to turn the enhanced demands for media services and publicity into democratic publicity, i.e. a form of public mediation that empowers the collective will through informed opinion-making of the citizens. Through mediatized democracy, the EU has a chance to correct its 'elitist bias' and to foster Europeanization also at the level of mass democracy. Filtered through the media sphere, EU representative politics will be more emotional and less rational, but also more popular and less elitist (Chambers, 2009). EU mediatized democracy will however not necessarily overcome the gap between EU representatives and citizens, but it will certainly turn it more salient, tangible and applicable. This again will increase the pressure on European political actors and institutions to invest not only in new techniques of public communication management but also in direct interactions with multiple publics of affected citizens. The role of online news and social media will expectedly become even more crucial in this process of creating public debates and visibility and early evidence confirms the potential of the online public sphere to act as a catalyst in EU contestation processes (Michailidou and Trenz, 2010). While EU actors and institutions have discovered social networking media as a means to create mass publicity, contesting citizens and social movements of political parties occupy them to challenge the legitimacy of the EU. EU mediatized democracy is therefore not detached from more direct forms of citizens' participation and voice but rather nourished by the many expressions of popular discontent. This also sheds light on a different interpretation of Euroscepticism, which is not simply to be seen as a side product of partisan struggles over voters' attention, but as a central component of the mediatized dynamics of contesting the EU's democratic legitimacy (de Wilde et al., 2013). Nevertheless, although the roles between attentive audiences and the positions between government and opposition are distributed, EU mediatized democracy has quite some way to go until its potential is fully realized.

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