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The Transnationalization of Public Spheres: Theoretical Considerations

Transformations of the state

The transnationalization of public spheres can best be understood within the context of more encompassing transformations of the state. Since the late 1960s and early 1970s the nation-states of the OECD world – among them, of course, the growing number of member states of the European Union – have been in a process of continuous transformation (Zürn and Leibfried 2005; Hurrelmann et al. 2007). It is unclear as of now whether this incremental change will develop into a new, relatively stable constellation of statehood in the twenty-first century, or whether change will be perpetual. What we do know at present, however, is that there are two main directions of transformation: internationalization and privatization. The four most basic normative goods that the OECD state has provided for so long – monopoly of force and taxation (resources), rule of law, democratic legitimacy and welfare – are today partly co-produced by international bodies and private agencies, or both. Of course, transformation in these four realms is uneven. While on the whole internationalization is more pronounced in the resources and legal dimensions, privatization is somewhat stronger, though not universal, in welfare production.

But what about democratic legitimacy? Are we witnessing the emergence of internationalized democracy? If so, to what extent and in what forms?[1] It is obvious that the development of the European Union and its legitimation processes offer a case in point here. The EU is by far the most likely candidate for democratic legitimation beyond the nation-state. And this is where the emergence of a corresponding *transnational public sphere* comes into play. The legitimacy of the EU (like any other body of international governance) not only depends on its institutional

arrangements but also on the degree to which, and the forms in which, it is discussed publicly. Public debate connects citizens and political institutions by involving them in a process by which common problems are identified, possible solutions are discussed, ideas are exchanged, decisions are justified, and support or opposition is signalled. Therefore, the emergence of a transnational sphere of public contestation has always been regarded as either an indicator or a normative prerequisite of democratic legitimacy both in the national and the international realm. Is such a sphere developing in Europe and if so, how and why? These are the questions we seek to answer in this book.

Apart from the direction of change, the extent and depth of transformation is important for assessing the degree to which states have changed in a globalized world. The nation-state has never been completely substituted by other bodies in guaranteeing the normative goods mentioned above. The transformation that has taken place complements rather than substitutes traditional forms of statehood. This is particularly true for the dimension of democratic legitimation, where internationalization has been more limited than in the other dimensions of statehood. The nation-state remains the central focal point and anchor of democratic legitimation (Schneider et al. 2006; Hurrelmann et al. 2005) but it is complemented to some degree by international bodies such as the EU. Legitimacy claims are increasingly addressed to the EU, and the EU responds to such claims at least on the level of public pronouncements and political strategy, if not yet in practice (Commission of the European Communities 2006; Brüggemann 2008). The political and academic debate about the EU is characterized by a widespread (but not wholesale) perception of a lack or deficit of legitimacy. Whatever the merits and justifications of this perception, it can serve at least to indicate that the internationalization of governance functions can be out of sync with the internationalization of societal legitimation processes.

Empirical and normative questions intersect here. Whereas the EU's need for democratic legitimation must be determined primarily on the level of normative institutional analysis and normative theory, the synchronicity or asynchronicity of governance and legitimation processes pose an empirical question. Thus, if we strive to understand the transformations of the state with respect to its democratic legitimation we must also seek empirically to understand the transformations of public communication. This is because, from an empirical perspective, legitimation is a communicative process between society and state or, to be more precise, between actors and collectives in both realms.

Beyond the direction and the extent of change we must also identify the actual object of transformation. Legitimation processes comprise at least three different basic elements. First, legitimation (or delegitimation) is achieved by *legitimacy judgements*, that is, convictions as to the legitimacy of political decisions, actors and orders circulated in public debate and held by citizens. Second, democratic legitimation depends on certain forms of *participatory procedures and behaviours*. Democratic elections and referenda, citizen or expert participation in decision-making, civil society mobilization for or against a certain cause are all examples of participatory processes that bear on the democratic legitimacy of decisions, actors and orders. Third, both political participation and legitimacy judgements depend on *socio-cultural conditions,* an infrastructure that ensures the free exchange of opinions and claims. This infrastructure is commonly called the public sphere and it constitutes the central focus of this book. All three basic elements of democratic legitimation processes change to some degree in the course of the dual transformation of state and society. In comparison, a possible transnationalization of the socio-cultural conditions of legitimation, that is of public spheres, constitutes a profound, structural type of transformation. If the socio-cultural infrastructure of democratic legitimation were to become more internationalized, we would witness a far-reaching transformation of one of the central pillars of modern statehood. Public sphere research therefore speaks to the larger debates about transformations of the state.

Before we can assess the extent of such structural change, however, we have to spell out exactly what we mean by the term 'public sphere' – a concept that has indeed been used in many different ways, again involving both empirical and normative connotations. Consequently, we follow a two-pronged approach here. In the following section we introduce an analytical model of the public sphere and sketch the empirical complexity of contemporary public spheres. We then extend this empirical-analytical perspective to the main topic of this book: the transnationalization of public spheres: What are the most important dimensions of transnationalization, and how can the degree of transnationalization of public spheres be assessed? At this point we introduce the indicators that we use in our empirical analysis and that are analysed in the following chapters. In the final section of this chapter we turn to a normative consideration of transnationalization by discussing the normative standards for a Europeanized public sphere that have been proposed in the literature and condensing them into distinct normative approaches towards a Europeanized public sphere.

The public sphere, news media and public discourse

Among the many metaphors that have been used to describe the public sphere the most useful seem to be the metaphors of the 'forum' and the 'arena' as developed by Ferree et al. (2002). In an *arena* a number of *speakers* communicate with each other, observed by an *audience* seated in the gallery. Apart from speakers and members of the audience there are *mediators* (that is, journalists) who organize the exchange between speakers and at times inject their own opinions and interpretations, thereby partly acting as speakers themselves. In the catacombs below the arena is a *backstage area* in which speakers and mediators prepare their communications and seek advice, for example, from public relations coaches. The entire complex of arena, gallery and backstage area can be called a *forum*.

Contemporary societies display a multiplicity of forums, of which the mass media forum (that is, the forum constituted by the mass news media) is the least specialized and the most far-reaching. This is why the news media dominate public spheres in modern societies, and why media-related research dominates the academic study of public spheres. Topics and opinions from other, more specialized forums, such as the political party forum, the social movement forum, the scientific or legal forum and so on are continually fed into the media forum. Of course, the mass media forum is internally differentiated into smaller forums revolving around more specific media offerings, lifestyle groups or interest communities. Today, however, the mass media forum is still dominated by a small set of leading news media such as national newspapers and news magazines and television news and discussion programmes. These media outlets constantly observe each other, partly converge in their choice of topics and are, in turn, observed by other, less dominant news media (for example regional or special interest media) that pick up cues from them. The mass media forum must therefore be seen as a network of smaller or more specialized forums that are interpermeable to some degree.

In the mass media forum speakers bring up issues and express opinions in the framework of public discourses or debates about topics of more or less interest to the audience (agenda-building). The mass news media structure these debates through their own particular mechanisms of selection and construction (news factors and framing) as well as through their own contributions to the debate (commentaries, interpretations). The audience informs itself about relevant issues by observing the debates (agenda-setting) and forms opinions by listening to the opinions

expressed (Neidhardt 1994; Hilgartner and Bosk 1988; Ferree et al. 2002).

The mass media forum constitutes an *integrated* network precisely because issues and opinions constantly circulate between various sub-forums and because the leading media exert a structuring effect on public debates. But integration is not tantamount to homogeneity. In fact, a good degree of variety in issues, opinions and ideas expressed throughout the mass media forum is vital for democratic public debate, as can easily be demonstrated by contrast with autocratic media systems. Finally, public communication also occurs outside the mass media, for example, in informal encounters or public meetings, in public protest or online discussion forums (see Gerhards and Neidhardt 1990). For the time being, however, the print and electronic mass media are the most important and the most consequential pillars of public spheres because entry thresholds for audience members are particularly low and societal reach is exceptionally large.

Beyond this fairly standard description of the elements and processes of mediated political communication, public spheres and public discourses are characterized by a number of less obvious and less well researched features.

(1) Each mass media forum has a specific *socio-spatial scope* that distinguishes it not only from other more specialized forums, as mentioned above, but also from mass media forums in other countries (see Peters and Wessler 2006). Historically, the nation-state has evolved as the dominant point of reference for mass media forums and, thus, for public discourse. Karl W. Deutsch, in his classic work, *Nationalism and Social Communication* (Deutsch 1953), has pointed to the foundation of nations in communicative patterns. In this view, a nation is a political community sustained by intensified communicative interaction. For Deutsch the defining feature of a nation is neither a common language nor shared memories or history, but the ability of its members 'to communicate more effectively, and over a wider range of subjects with members of one large group than with outsiders' (Deutsch 1953: 97).

National public spheres, sustained by national news media, constitute the social sphere in which such communicative exchange takes place. The topics addressed originate more often from within a national forum than from the outside; and the exchange of opinions is denser within the national forum than between it and the outside. The contributions of speakers in a national public sphere relate to an

implied audience that is socio-spatially defined as a national audience (although, of course, in practice not all members of a national society will be reached by a particular contribution). Members of the audience are implicitly or explicitly addressed in their role as citizens of a nation-state because traditionally the nation-state is the dominant place of political decision and legitimation. All of these features are usually taken for granted and not explicitly acknowledged. But they come to the fore when the question of transnationalization is posed and the established socio-spatial scope of topics and communicative exchange patterns, of media reach and implied audiences is at stake.

(2) Public discourses are internally subdivided into *camps* or *discourse coalitions*. Speakers not only hold a spectrum of different opinions, they also align themselves according to these views. Discourse coalitions can form around a specific issue, but they also have a more general dimension with speakers aligning themselves according to their general ideology or 'Weltanschauung' (Peters 2007). Empirically, such alignments can be captured by analysing the preferences that speakers voice with respect to basic principles of action in a number of fundamental conflict dimensions (Eilders et al. 2004: 135; see also Voltmer 1998) or with respect to a combination of ideas and policy preferences (Wessler 1999), or with respect to the justifications that speakers give for their positions (see Chapters 6 and 7 in this book). The degree to which speakers' frames of interpretation and policy positions are actually rooted in deeper ideologies is an empirical question that cannot be answered at this point. What we can say, however, is that the members of a discourse coalition generally know of each other and share some degree of common self-identification as well as identification of the opposing camp. Discourse coalitions share a history of conflict; their contributions to public discourse are made with respect to the opposing camp and acquire meaning in the horizon of the conflict as a whole. It is an open empirical question to what degree such conflictual discourse actually serves to integrate the community as a whole (Wessler 2002). But in any case cleavages in public discourses are not just objective divisions but constellations actively produced by self- and other-identification.

(3) Most recent empirical studies (including our own) work with media content analysis in order to grasp the structures and functions of public spheres. But public discourses are not free-floating; they have socio-cultural foundations that lie behind or below observable media discourse and exert a structural influence upon it (Wessler 2007).

To characterize these foundations we distinguish between production structures on the one hand and discourse cultures on the other. The *production structures* of public spheres comprise the structures of the respective media and political system (Hallin and Mancini 2004), the deeper social and political cleavages that manifest themselves in specific constellations of speakers and discourse coalitions, as well as the system of 'idea generation' including educational and research facilities, professional and intellectual circles and networks. These structural conditions produce differential 'discursive opportunity structures' (Ferree et al. 2002) for the various types of speakers (such as governmental and party representatives, civil society and social movement actors, experts, intellectuals and ordinary citizens), which give the different types of speakers different chances of being heard in public debate. *Discourse cultures* on the other hand comprise the dominant forms of public deliberation in the news media – with more commentary and advocacy-oriented forms in some countries and a stronger tradition of neutral, balanced reporting in others (Wessler 2007; Benson and Hallin 2007) – and national cultural traditions including particular affinities and animosities between different countries.

Many of these elements still await more systematic empirical study, particularly in a comparative perspective. For a theory of the public sphere it is important, however, to ascertain the degree to which structural and cultural foundations of public discourse serve as interlocking or synergetic infrastructures. While this question cannot be answered empirically at present, in this book we start out on the assumption that the interlocking nature of these components does create considerable inertia for any transformation of public spheres, particularly for their transnationalization. Production structures and discourse cultures of national public spheres are not easily and consciously produced on a transnational level and therefore act as structural constraints to any process of transnationalization. We will come back to this aspect in our concluding chapter.

(4) Finally, media debates comprise a large quantity of factual information: reports about events and happenings on the one hand and a smaller amount of actual discussion and argumentation on the other (Peters et al. 2007a; Wessler and Schultz 2007). It is this latter element of media debates that captures most clearly the original intuition of the arena metaphor, namely, that speakers interact and exchange opinions and arguments in front of an audience. In the print media such exchange is found, for example, in commentaries,

interviews, some news analysis and background pieces, in guest contributions and letters to the editor. Some newspapers also feature special debate pages. Likewise, on the radio and television specific formats are exclusively devoted to political discussions; talk shows (some including the possibility of audience participation) being the most salient example. From the perspective of the arena model there is a lot of plausibility, therefore, in the notion of reconstructing public discourse through the analysis of discussion and opinion-oriented forms of mass media content (see, for example, Eilders et al. 2004 as well as this volume). This focus on media debate in the literal sense is not, however, tantamount to an investigation of the actual degree of deliberativeness in such debates. Deliberativeness is a feature of mediated or non-mediated debates that tells us something about the level of openness, rationality and civility of such debates (Wessler 2007). But this is not the focus of this book. When we talk about 'public *discourse*' here, we refer to the opinion and argumentation-oriented layer of political media content, irrespective of its degree of deliberativeness. A discursive public sphere in this sense generates debate by constantly drawing on new ideas from a large set of different speakers. It thereby serves an innovative function for public communication to a higher degree than the mere reporting of facts.

The transnationalization of public spheres: empirical dimensions

If national public spheres are characterized by denser interaction within the sphere than between inside and outside, as Karl W. Deutsch has suggested, how must we conceive the transnationalization of national public spheres? A natural starting point would be to look for the respective mass media forum on the transnational level. Where in Europe, for example, do we find media that address a European audience with specifically European content? We address these questions in more detail in Chapter 5 below. It is clear from the outset, however, and this has repeatedly been pointed out in the literature, that there is no European media forum comparable to the national media forums with which we are familiar. Research has instead directed its attention to detecting trends towards Europeanization – or other forms of transnationalization – in the national media forums. Instead of a truly European public sphere (EPS), researchers have been studying the Europeanization of national public spheres (ENPS). With this book we also strive to contribute to

ENPS research.[2] On a basic conceptual level our contribution is three-fold. We analyse the transnationalization of public spheres as (a) a long-term process with (b) different possible socio-spatial scopes – European, transatlantic, global and so on – and (c) on a number of different dimensions.

Like all 'izations' the transnationalization of public spheres is a process – in this case a process in which national public spheres increasingly transcend national borders. Given the complexity of public spheres (described above), with a structured set of actors communicating in the foreground and production structures working from the background, the transnationalization of public spheres must be conceived as a process of *structural transformation* rather than episodic fluctuation. Of course, individual elements of a public sphere, such as media organizations or speakers or the composition or preferences of audiences, may also change independently, but public spheres as bounded wholes only change if the synergetic interplay between these elements also reaches a new state. While it is relatively easy to identify the two ideal types – the national and the transnational public sphere – the development from one to the other may be complex and uneven. Nor is it easy to decide when a new transnational constellation has been reached. However, it is obvious that the structural transformation of public spheres in the direction of transnationalization will be a long-term process. It will at best be in sync with (or it will be lagging behind) the broader internationalization of governance functions and legitimation processes that must themselves be traced over several decades. All of this suggests a rather long period of observation for any study of the transnationalization of public spheres. Most studies so far do not follow such a long-term perspective and therefore only offer snapshots of the longer process.[3]

Apart from a long time horizon and a view to structural transformations it is essential to take a third empirical element into consideration: the fact that the transnationalization of public spheres can have different *scopes*. Elements of a transnational public sphere may develop first in Europe, between the members of the European Union. And it is the Europeanization of national public spheres that has triggered the entire research field. But it is also possible that the emerging communicative space covers both Western Europe and North America, thus constituting a transatlantic public sphere of some sort. The development in this direction can then be called Westernization. Of course, other regional scopes are conceivable as well. For example, there has been much talk about the emergence of a pan-Arabic public sphere supported by the appearance of Arab satellite broadcasting in the 1990s (for example, Zayani and Ayish

2006). Finally, a further theoretical possibility lies in the emergence of a truly global public sphere, extending communication more or less over the entire globe (see Wessler 2004; Volkmer 1999; critical remarks in Sparks 1998 and 2001). Again, most of the studies in the field so far only look at Europeanization and are thus not able by way of comparison to disentangle the emergence of a Europeanized public sphere from other forms of transnationalization, particularly Westernization.[4]

A further analytical benefit can finally be reaped from the use of a comprehensive set of *dimensions* on which a possible transnationalization of public spheres can be observed. It is highly conceivable for national public spheres to transnationalize on one or a few dimensions while other dimensions lag behind or don't change at all.[5] This may lead to the detection of complex patterns of transnationalization rather than seemingly straightforward, one-dimensional trends that may actually be misleading in a wider perspective. It is fortunate that ENPS research has produced a series of different indicators in recent years, which we synthesize and complement here. The transnationalization of public spheres can thus be captured on four dimensions comprising ten sub-dimensions (see Table 1.1). They will be defined in descriptive terms here and problematized normatively in the following section.[6] Incidentally, the four dimensions capture all possible ways in which a national entity of any kind can be situated in relation to its environment. Thus, a national entity can be:

(a) related to a supranational entity (vertical-relational);
(b) compared to other national entities for similarities and differences (horizontal-comparitive);
(c) be enmeshed with those other national entities (horizontal-relational); or
(d) become part of and be absorbed into a larger whole (integrative-communal).

By including all four forms of relation in our study we avoid the pitfalls of 'methodological nationalism' (see Beck 2000b).

(1) National public spheres transnationalize, first, when European or other international *governance* processes become visible on the national level and can thus be *monitored* by citizens. This is achieved mostly through coverage and discussion in the national news media of decision-making processes in, for example, the European Union, the World Trade Organization or the United Nations. Visibility can be conferred upon the institutions and their representatives

Table 1.1 Four dimensions of the transnationalization of public spheres

Dimensions	Sub-dimensions
1. Monitoring governance	1.1 Visibility of political institutions
	1.2 Attention to policymaking
2. Discourse convergence	2.1 Convergence of relevance and problem definition
	2.2 Convergence of discourse coalitions
	2.3 Convergence of repertoires of justifications
3. Discursive integration	3.1 Mutual observation
	3.2 Discursive exchange
4. Collective identification	4.1 Acknowledgement of collectives
	4.2 Expression of belonging
	4.3 Expression of historical/cultural commonalities

(sub-dimension 1.1) and on the policies and the processes by which they are made (sub-dimension 1.2).

(2) While transnationalization in the monitoring governance dimension only provides a common supranational or transnational object or reference point for public debate, the second dimension, *discourse convergence*, also grasps whether national discourses grow more similar over time.[7] It sheds light on whether speakers in different national public spheres identify the same issues as important, accord them similar relevance and employ similar problem definitions (sub-dimension 2.1). National discourses also converge to the extent that discourse constellations become more similar over time. As we have seen above, discourses are commonly divided into two opposing discourse coalitions each made up of a particular set of actors who use specific justifications to bolster their positions. Convergence may involve either the membership of such discourse coalitions and thereby the nature and position of the cleavage line between them (sub-dimension 2.2) or it may concern the central justifications used by these coalitions (sub-dimension 2.3), or both. In the context of transnationalization processes, the discourse convergence dimension therefore enables us to ascertain whether certain overarching political cleavages (such as the left-right dividing line) become more relevant over time than national differences in discourse constellations.

(3) While the convergence dimension is about the question of growing similarity, it does not entail speakers from different

national public spheres actually talking to each other. This is captured by the *discursive integration* dimension. An integrated discourse across national borders presupposes, first, attention to political developments in other countries (mutual observation, sub-dimension 3.1) and, second, the circulation of ideas between speakers in various countries (discursive exchange, sub-dimension 3.2). At the core of discursive integration is the 'osmotic diffusion' of opinions and justifications between countries (Peters 1999: 662f.; Habermas 2001a: 120).

(4) We have seen above that communication in a public sphere always has an implied audience and thereby constructs a 'community of communication' (Habermas 2001a). Public spheres, therefore, also transnationalize to the degree that this community is a transnational one. The dimension of *collective identification* grasps different aspects of this process. Transnational collectives can simply be acknowledged (sub-dimension 4.1), speakers can express their belonging to such a collective by, for example, including themselves in a collective 'we' (sub-dimension 4.2), and they can, finally, characterize this community more elaborately by pointing to (or inventing) historical and cultural commonalities or by setting it apart from other communities, which are often devalued in the process (sub-dimension 4.3).

A Europeanized public sphere? Four normative approaches

A multi-dimensional description of transnationalization such as the one given above is something very different from a normative appraisal of these dimensions. A naive observer might think that the more, the better, that is, that the empirical values found on each of these dimensions and sub-dimensions should always be maximized in order to approach the ideal of a transnational public sphere. Some qualifications, however, are necessary and we will see that a logic of maximization is generally not appropriate. The discussion will lead to some revision of normative criteria and some prioritizing between dimensions and thus to the formulation of a set of four more complex normative approaches that help assess the normative desirability of transnationalization processes in European public spheres.[8]

The monitoring governance approach

The first of these normative approaches focuses on the democratic value of 'monitoring governance' for citizens. In order to develop legitimacy beliefs about the European Union and its decisions, citizens must be able

to inform themselves, reason about, and scrutinize EU institutions and EU policies, and thus acquire 'communicative power' (Habermas 1996) in the European multi-level system. The monitoring governance approach draws on the widespread assumption that European policymaking tends to diminish societal sources of influence while privileging national executives. Their privileged access to European information opens the way to strategically manipulating domestic policy debates (Moravcsik 1994; Zürn 2000). The monitoring governance approach therefore demands that the news media make such information accessible to citizens by discussing European institutions and their policymaking as part of their political news and commentary.

While at first sight this appears to be a straightforward demand, things become more complicated when we endeavour to determine the necessary level, development and qualitative features of such discussion. Just how much EU debate counts as an appropriate representation of EU institutions and EU policies in national public spheres? Is there an absolute quantitative threshold that public discussion about the EU must consistently exceed? Or is it enough if such a threshold is reached episodically in relation to important events such as EU summit meetings? Should EU debate increase continually over time? And if so, should it grow parallel to EU policy output or the increasing intrusion of EU decisions into citizens' lives? Finally, on which phases of the policymaking process should EU debate focus? Is it enough if it covers the implications of policy decisions after these have been taken? The existing literature has not always been clear on these points. We therefore propose a normative approach that combines the following three aspects.

First, in some parts of the literature there is a tendency to overstate demands for publicity with respect to the EU (for a similar argument, see Neidhardt 2006). While transparency of governance processes is an important normative requirement for democratic rule, not everything should be publicized at any point in time. Bargaining and decision-making processes sometimes require an element of invisibility to the outside. By this we do not mean active concealment or secrecy but functional opaqueness. In addition, Moravcsik (2002: 615) has pointed out that 'of the five most salient issues in most West European democracies – health care provision, education, law and order, pension and social security policy, and taxation – none is primarily an EU competence'. Majone (1998: 10) has also pointed to the legal and material limitations of EU policymaking: 'The Community has no general taxing and spending powers similar to those held by national governments; and with a budget of less than 1.3 per cent of Union GDP which, moreover, must always be

balanced, it can only undertake a limited range of policies.' All of this suggests that it would be inappropriate to expect a level of media attention for the EU that equals that of national governments. It would also be acceptable if media attention were lower for those policy fields in which the EU enjoys fewer decision-making powers. In fact, Koopmans and Erbe (2003) as well as Pfetsch (2004) record such a match between EU competencies in a specific policy field and the level of media attention, which seems normatively unproblematic. In any case, the normative standard for the level of monitoring EU governance should be lower than for the nation-state in order to account for the still somewhat limited scope of its policymaking powers.

Second, public discourse should not only reflect the peculiarities of the polity but also its development over time. The monitoring governance approach suggests that we should expect an increase over time in the level of EU debate because the competencies of the EU have been successively expanded. Several standards of comparison may qualify here, including the quantitative development of the legal output of the EU, the adoption of more conflict-inducing institutional arrangements (such as the strengthening of the European Parliament or the expansion of qualified majority decisions), and the adoption of more controversial policies, such as Eastern enlargement, that are likely to exacerbate distributional conflicts and trigger identity debates. All these developments encourage the normative expectation that the level of monitoring EU governance in national media should rise over time. Otherwise monitoring will fall (or has fallen) out of sync with the growing importance and impact of EU governance.

Finally, the monitoring governance approach will have to take into consideration the extent of domestication of EU issues, that is, the degree to which EU policies are reported with respect to their domestic effects only. In normative terms, monitoring governance implies that EU policymaking and decision-making processes are publicly discussed, rather than simply reported ex post facto. Otherwise no input legitimacy is conferred from public discourse on decisions taken at the EU level. While this may not be considered necessary for all decisions in all policy areas, a complete absence of the policy formulation and contestation from monitoring by the media would indeed pose a problem.

Once the national news media's discussion of the European Union is normatively evaluated in such complex terms, empirical analysis is unlikely to produce clear-cut results concerning the existence or non-existence of a European public sphere and a more nuanced appraisal becomes possible.

The discourse convergence approach

The second normative approach supplements the monitoring governance function of the national news media with different aspects of *discourse convergence.* It is not enough for the national media to discuss EU issues; rather, the same issues should be discussed simultaneously in several or all EU countries (see Eder and Kantner 2000: 315). According to the discourse convergence approach, national debates should thus be synchronized and homogenized with respect to the relevance criteria employed. The meaning of 'relevance' or 'relevance criteria' is, however, ambiguous. Habermas's original formulation, to which Eder and Kantner refer, reads: 'The core [of a European communicative context] is formed by a political public sphere which enables citizens to take positions at the same time on the same topics of the same relevance' (Habermas 1998: 160).[9] Here the relevance of topics, that is, the level of attention they arouse, is supposed to be equal or similar in the various national public spheres. Yet Eder and Kantner (2000) as well as Risse (2002), Tobler (2006) and others go a decisive step further: they require public discourses to look at such topics with similar *criteria* of relevance, that is a similar or identical framing or problem definition. For instance, in 1999, debates over the European Commission's corruption scandals were equally intense but framed differently in Germany and Spain. Trenz (2000) finds that Germans framed the issue predominantly as a moral problem, indicating the democratic deficit in the EU, whereas in Spain the issue was linked to the conflict between northern and southern member states over restructuring EU structural funds in the course of the enlargement process (also see the case studies in van de Steeg 2005). Such contradictory framing, it is argued, points to the absence of discourse convergence.

As with monitoring governance, these normative standards are ambiguous. The concepts of 'relevance criteria' or 'frames' carry an element of indeterminacy: the more specifically and concretely frames are defined, the harder it will be to find convergence; the more abstractly the frames are conceived, the more similarities will emerge, attended by the danger of overrating homogeneity. Furthermore, it is not entirely obvious why the same frames must underlie debates in different European countries at all. Is it not natural for public discourse on the same issue to take on different perspectives across countries, reflecting particular circumstances and historical experiences? To avoid applying an unnecessarily demanding standard, the possibility that individual countries diverge from the mainstream in their framing of an issue should be acknowledged as consistent with the discourse convergence approach.

A more realistic version of the approach should put stronger emphasis on the structural rather than on the deeply substantive aspects of national public discourses, evoking a standard of *completeness*: all frames that exist in national public spheres should be present in the other national public spheres as well (Peters and Wessler 2006). Frames may enjoy different prominence in different national contexts, but national media should take note of frames used in other countries.[10]

A similar argument applies to the similarity or dissimilarity of the national *discourse constellations*. As we have seen above, discourses are commonly divided into two opposing discourse coalitions, each made up of a particular set of actors who share the same general interpretation or ideology, or use the same sets of arguments to justify their positions vis-à-vis the opposing camp. If such constellations of national discourses become more similar across countries, discourse convergence increases. This convergence may involve either the membership of discourse coalitions or the central frames or justifications used by them, or both. Again, however, the normative question is whether and why national discourse constellations should be maximally similar in the first place. Of course, given a certain similarity in the cleavage structure and in the arguments used by the coalitions, speakers are more likely to understand each other well across borders and engage in a truly common discourse. But an overdose of homogeneity also reduces the necessary variety of arguments available to the same coalitions in different countries. In normative terms it would seem more desirable for speakers from one discourse coalition to learn about new or additional justifications from their colleagues in other countries than that coalitions in various countries use an identical, limited set of justifications. Or for speakers to learn that in another country an identical issue is discussed with a different cleavage structure, thus learning about additional ways of looking at their issue. The normative merits of homogeneity are thus more limited than those of variety, innovation and learning, although, of course, discourse convergence and cross-border learning are not mutually exclusive or contradictory processes. But our emphasis on learning redirects attention to mutual observation and discursive exchange between discourse coalitions from different countries. This brings us to the third normative approach, which places the dimension of discursive integration centre stage.

The discursive integration approach

The discursive integration approach takes account of the socio-spatial scope that characterizes every public sphere. If a European public sphere

is to emerge, it must span the entire continent, or at least major parts of it (see Wimmel 2005; Peters and Wessler 2006; Peters et al. 2005b; Tobler 2006). In principle, monitoring governance can take place in 'separate compartments', constituting a segmented form of Europeanization, but truly European public discourses and the emergence of a common European process of opinion formation presuppose mutual observation between European countries, as well as actual discursive exchange across borders. Discursive integration includes opinions and justifications from other European discourses in domestic discourses, where they can serve as reference points for the formulation of one's own positions. This is normatively desirable for several reasons. First, Koopmans and Erbe (2003: 4) rightly point out that 'in an intergovernmental polity, it may matter a great deal who wins the elections in another member state, or what kind of new policy another member state develops in a particular policy field'. Thus, opinions expressed and decisions taken in one European country can become consequential for other countries and for the EU as a whole, as was amply demonstrated by the French and Dutch rejections of the European Constitution in 2005. Second, ideas and arguments from other countries can enrich public discourse by injecting 'fresh blood' into sometimes rather predictable national debates, thus supporting discourse innovation. Third, knowing about opinions and arguments from other member states can, under favourable conditions, foster mutual understanding, a reconciliation of interests, the willingness to compromise, and cross-border solidarity. Thus, discursive integration helps overcome national solipsism and self-centredness (compare Scharpf 1999: 688).

But, again, the normative standard of discursive integration need not and should not be taken to its logical extreme. An extreme criterion would entail that, regardless of where a particular media outlet is located in the transnational sphere, the distribution of countries observed and speakers quoted in its content would not differ from those in other media located elsewhere. Obviously, such a standard is not only entirely unrealistic but would also disregard the normative merits of diversity already identified above in the context of the discourse convergence approach. We therefore settle for a standard of scope, namely that the countries observed and speakers quoted in each country span the entire sphere – in our case the EU member states – or at least major parts of it. In addition, we normatively expect that discursive integration increases over time because the political and economic interdependence between the countries of the European Union has intensified and expanded to more and more policy areas during the past decades. In order to keep up with this growing interdependence national media should increasingly

construct transnational discourses that are not restricted to speakers from two or three EU countries but tend to include all or most of them.

The collective identification approach

Common European identity elements are often considered a fundamental building block of democratic legitimacy. The fourth normative approach builds on this idea, supplementing mutual observation and discursive exchange with some degree of collective identification with Europe.[11] In doing so, the collective identification approach is not concerned with prescribing one particular substance of European identity as preferable to others but rather with the process of publicly identifying with Europe as such. Collective identities cannot emerge, persist and gradually change if they are not publicly displayed and discussed. They are, in part, constructed and reproduced through discourse about the 'collective self-understandings' that constitute an integral part of public culture (see Peters 2005: 92). As discussed above, the formation of collective identity has several aspects: Which community is addressed by communications? Which collectivity is invoked as the 'owner' of a problem and called upon to solve or handle it? And which values, historical experiences and traditions are evoked in public discourse?

Theorists disagree about the normative significance of the third aspect, and in particular on the degree to which the EU's legitimacy depends on a 'thick' collective identity with a strong sense of common history and a common purpose (see, for example, Kielmansegg 2003). Is an 'identity light', namely 'some minimum sense of belonging to the same community', adequate to the job, as Risse (2003: 8) has suggested? If transnational identity constructs develop, they do so under somewhat aggravated conditions because their historical depth has to be constructed with greater conscious effort. It is therefore unrealistic to demand historically rich identities from transnational public discourses; it is more sensible to expect a restricted sense of transnational identity related to a discourse community faced with common problems. Ultimately, however, the question of a normatively adequate European identity will depend on the extent and character of political competencies entrusted to the EU:

> What kind of shared identity would suffice to support a European political community with vastly extended political competencies depends on somewhat uncertain empirical estimates. This question cannot be settled by normative arguments. Probably only some

process of trial and error with a close watch on errors and more pos-itive experiences and an open mind towards both possibilities and limitations can be helpful here. The same is true for the relation-ship between national identities and a common European identity.

(Peters 2005: 114)

At the present stage of development, we settle for a more mod-erate standard of collective identification as our normative yardstick, focusing on notions of a problem-solving community rather than on a community engendering deep forms of solidarity across national borders.

Of course, our discussion and partial revision of the normative stan-dards found in the literature does not yield clear, quantifiable standards in all cases. In normatively evaluating our empirical results, there is still some room for interpretation and argumentation, and we will return to this endeavour in the concluding chapter. However, we wish to emphasize two things here. First, all four normative approaches pre-sented here point to important normative elements. We do not see any good reasons why normative debate about the Europeanization or trans-nationalization of public spheres should be restricted to monitoring gov-ernance only, or to monitoring governance and discourse convergence. Discursive integration and (modest) collective identification touch on important normative merits of public discourses that should not be dis-carded lightly. Second, the normative standards for all four dimensions need not – and should not – be taken to their logical extremes. There are good reasons why less-than-maximum levels of Europeanization or transnationalization on these dimensions are normatively justified. If one accepts this, one can indeed avoid creating deficit statements by default. Some seemingly incomplete forms of transnationalization may indeed do the job in a specific historical situation.

The road ahead: the chapters of this book

In the following chapters we will build on the theoretical outline pre-sented here and develop our empirical study step by step. Chapter 2 details how we empirically measure the transnationalization of public debates across the four dimensions and 10 sub-dimensions distinguished above. It describes the methods used in our study – the cross-issue con-tent analysis and the issue-specific case studies – and details our choice of countries and issues, the periods of investigation, and the sampling methods used.

Chapters 3 and 4 then present the results of our long-term, cross-issue content analysis of leading newspapers in Austria, Denmark, France, Germany and Great Britain. Chapter 3 looks at the Europeanization process diachronically, identifying as our main result a complex pattern of nationally segmented Europeanization with increases on some of our dimensions but not on others. In Chapter 4, the perspective is reversed from diachronic to synchronic and country differences in the levels of Europeanization are identified and explained by a complex set of both political and media variables. This results in a clearer picture of the leverage that media outlets have in determining their respective levels of Europeanization.

Chapter 5 provides a typology of transnational media in Europe – national media with a transnational mission, international, pan-regional and global media – and assesses the degree to which these media contribute to the construction of a European public sphere.

In Chapters 6 and 7 we present the results of our issue-specific case studies. Analysis focuses on the Europeanization of national discourses about military interventions from the Gulf war 1990/1991 through the Balkan conflicts in the mid-1990s to the Iraq war in 2003 (Chapter 6) as well as the debates about genetically modified food in Europe since the early 1990s (Chapter 7). These case studies provide an in-depth understanding of the similarity and (partial) convergence of national public debates, but also shed additional light on the dimensions of discursive integration and collective identification already analysed in the cross-issue study.

In Chapter 8 we summarize our empirical results and assess the pattern and process of the Europeanization of national public spheres in the light of the normative considerations presented above. In doing so we identify both progress made and persisting deficits in the Europeanization of national media. In conclusion, we position our own study vis-à-vis other approaches in the field and present an integrative heuristic model for the further study of the way in which public spheres transnationalize.

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