Editors:
Dejan Verčič, Betteke van Ruler,
Günter Bentele, Susanne Holmström,
Cees J. Hamelink

Proceedings of BledCom 2006
Democracy, Strategic Communication & Europe: Mission (im)possible

Volume II

7 - 9 July, Lake Bled, Slovenia
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Dear Colleague,

the 13th BledCom 2006 International Public Relations Symposium has entitled its reputation as the place to go to enjoy lively debates and exchange ideas that enrich the public relations profession and provide new insights into the communication discipline.

Acknowledged international speakers and participants from all over the world addressed the current topic of Communicating Europe: Diversity, Social Cohesion and Social Integration in Europe and Elsewhere: The Contribution of Public Relations and Social Communication, that was also the title of BledCom 2006 proceedings (vol. I).

On the following pages we present the second edition (vol. II) of BledCom 2006 proceedings that discuss Democracy, Strategic Communication & Europe: Mission (Im)possible. Authors are distinguished public relations theoreticians and practitioners that have first-hand experience and insight about the titled issue of the proceedings. We hope you will enjoy reading the proceedings as we did hearing them on the symposium.
Antonia Carparelli
Antonia Carparelli is an economist, with postgraduate education in economic history and in economic journalism and media management. She joined the European Commission in 1993, after several years of professional work as an economist. At the European Commission, she first worked in the Department for Economic and Financial Affairs (1993-1999), dealing with macroeconomic forecasting, exchange rate analysis and public finance issues. In 1999 she was appointed deputy head of the cabinet in the office of Commissioner Margot Wallström and was in charge of the environmental policy. In 2004 she was confirmed as the deputy head of the cabinet in charge of Relations with the Parliament and for the elaboration of the White Paper on a European Communication Policy by Mrs Wallström, who became Vice-President of the European Commission.

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Cees J. Hamelink studied philosophy and psychology at the University of Amsterdam where he received his PhD degree in 1975. He worked as a journalist, policy adviser and researcher in many different institutions and countries. He founded the People’s Communication Charter, was the president of the International Association for Media and Communication Research, was a consultant to several intergovernmental organisations and national governments and guest-lectured in 40 countries. He is emeritus professor at the University of Amsterdam, honorary professor of the University of Queensland in Australia and professor of human rights and public health at the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam. He is currently the editor-in-chief of the International Communication Gazette and president of the Dutch Human Rights Federation. He published 17 books on communication issues and numerous other academic writings. His forthcoming book is on Political Ethics and Communication.

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Julia Hoffmann (M.Sc.) studied Communication Sciences and International Relations at the Institute of Journalism and Communication Science, Hanover (Germany), Hong Kong University (Hong Kong) and the University of Amsterdam (The Netherlands). Since 2003 she has been working as a research and teaching assistant at the Communication Science Department of the University of Amsterdam, which she will join as a junior lecturer in August 2006. Currently, she is working on her PhD dissertation on the role of Communication Rights in the democratization process of the European Union while pursuing a LL.M. in International and European Law.

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I. Introduction

“This book appears at a time of increasing concern about the ways politics is communicated to the public. Such concerns have been expressed by media researchers and other academics engaged in the study of politics, as well as by some media professionals and politicians both in the US and in Britain...and elsewhere, in many other liberal-democratic societies. It would be no exaggeration to describe this state of affairs as a crisis of civic communication.” Thus begins the much-discussed book by Blumler and Gurevitch (1995: 1, emphasis in original) on “The Crisis of Public Communication.” The authors’ observations about political communication in Western-style nation states in general are even truer of communication in transnational entities like the European Union.

According to many experts, the European Union is moving toward realization of its vision at least two different speeds. What is truly shocking is that there has been very little progress with respect to either analyses or problems since the early 1990s. “While the process of economic and political integration has made great strides, the development of a European public is lagging far behind” (Burton and Drake 2004: 15) observed in their practical handbook on media relations in Europe. “In fact, the idea of a ‘European media landscape’ is in itself a misnomer: nothing much links the sensationalism of Albania to a British broadsheet or a long French analytical feature.”

With respect to PR theory, van Ruler and Verčič (cf. 2004a) demonstrate in their excellent anthology how differently the science of public relations is approached in different European countries, as well as how helpful this can be for a productive exchange. “Nevertheless, little is known about typical aspects of public relations in Europe and to date, there has been little exchange of knowledge” (Ruler and Verčič 2004b: 1). Bentele (2004: 492) sees this topic as “a starting point to compare different traditions, structures and problems of public relations practice and public relations research in various European countries. At the same time it can be seen as a contribution to an as yet underdeveloped subdiscipline of public relations research: international comparative studies in public relations or communication management.”

One of the most important aspects of the practice and science of public relations, although it is no longer the central one, continues to be the field of media relations. In order to address the issue of “Europe as a communication challenge” (cf. Verčič et al. 2006) from the perspective of PR experts, it is essential to have some fundamental knowledge of both the differences and the shared features that exist in the media or more concretely, in the social system of journalism in the various EU member states. The aim of this article is therefore to offer a brief heuristic introduction, but also a systematic comparison of “European journalism.” It is based on an extensive treatment of the subject by the author (cf. Sievert 1998) which has been updated and used for drawing a historical comparison. The phenomenon mentioned at the outset is alarming: the basic problems of European communication have changed only slightly over the past decade. While the real challenges have been clearly identified at least since the early 1990s, we unfortunately cannot report that there have been successful efforts at finding a solution.

2. Methodological framework for the analysis

In order to analyze “European journalism”, we first need an adequately differentiated heuristic working model. Here the author has chosen a model that reflects system-related theoretical considerations within the German-speaking world (cf. Sievert 1999). It begins with the idea of a territorially differentiated social system called “journalism” whose function involves the “self-observation of society” based on the code “currently worth publishing/currently not worth publishing.” The relevant medium is described by the dual term “public/publishing sector.” Intra-systemic relationships have been described, following Weischenberg, in the sense of a multi-perspective theoretical approach using four interrelated contexts.

In his article, Weischenberg differentiates according to journalism’s normative, structural, functional and role-related contexts, which relate to the media’s systems, institutions, messages and actors (cf. Weischenberg 1992: 67-70, 1994: 431-432 and Figure 1 in the present article). He describes these contexts as an “onion” in order to highlight the areas of interdependence and the reciprocal effects they have on one another. The external framework of the journalism system (or the outer “peel of the onion”) is the standard context. This involves the recognized standards of a media system, including general social conditions, historical and legal foundations, influences from communication policy, as well as professional and ethical standards. The structural context develops within this standard context. The structural context en-
comprises the economic, political, organizational and technological imperatives facing media insti-
tutions. The system and institutions in turn affect the media message, which Weischemberg assigns to
the functional context. The functional context involves issues of information sources and refer-
ence groups, patterns of reporting and presentation, effects and repercussions — in short, the
concrete ways in which the media construct reality. Media actors, who are observed in the context
of their roles, find themselves confronted with all of these contexts, which affect their specific and ultimately subject-dependent professional actions. Demographic characteristics of these actors are of interest in studying journalism, as are their social, professional and political attitudes and the course of their conventional training as well as

Figure 1: Journalism as a “social system”
can be described with the metaphor of an “onion”

their lives as a whole.

In the following pages, we shall analyze heuristically the respective international synchronicity within the framework described above. The term “international synchronicity” is used broadly, referring to all four con-
texts that were examined. Of course, we analyze the presence of simultaneous media content in various aspects of the journalistic system within the nation state and its reciprocal effects, in particular by examining re-
ports on the European Union. In addition, we address the issue of synchronicity of media systems, institutions and actors, i.e. the structures in this area that can be observed at the present time, or “synchronically”, and hence ultimately the issue of similarity among these contexts during the 1990s. Given a systemic under-
standing of journalism, in which journalistic messages are not produced in a vacuum, this examination ap-
ppears to be absolutely essential.

Formally, we can distinguish between two types of international synchronicity which we shall here
term formal synchronicity and content synchronicity. A given feature is formally synchronous if it
is found in all countries analyzed, but is funda-
mentally different in its substance. One example
would be the fact that the media in all countries
report primarily on their own countries, but that
country is a different one in each case. A feature
can be said to exhibit content synchronicity if it is
found in the same concrete form in each analyzed
country. For example, all EU countries report with particular frequency on the three largest
EU countries, Germany, France and Great Britain. Formal and content synchronicity together con-
verge into another feature which we call general
synchronicity. This feature reflects the fact that it
is often impossible, in practice, to make a clear
distinction between the two first types of syn-
chronicity, and it is not necessary to do so for the
general comparison at issue here. Note that a
feature with a high degree of formal synchronicity but little content synchronicity by no means guar-
antees a high likelihood of successful communica-
tion, but rather an average likelihood.

In concrete terms, our aim is to determine the degree of international synchronicity for the contexts and features referred to above, as well as — since we are dealing only with EU
countries — the resulting degree of European-
ization of individual aspects of the four defined contexts. It is clear that the term “Europeaniza-
tion” is limited here, since we have had to con-
centrate for reasons of focus and research con-
straints on countries within the European Union.
It is equally clear that international and European
synchronicity are two separate phenomena, if we see “European” as reflecting a certain quality. Ini-
tially, however, the term is used primarily in a geo-
graphical sense, which nonetheless ultimately has substantive implications. If all EU countries exhibit similar functional structures in a specific aspect of the differentiation of their journalistic systems,
this increases the probability of successful com-
munication among them, almost regardless of
whether that feature is specifically European or not. Thus the issue of the international synchron-
icity of the journalistic system in the European
Union ultimately also involves the issue of their European synchronicity. Accordingly, we shall not
distinguish below between these other forms of synchronicity.

Thus the difficulty of the study described below
lies not in the distinction between general inter-
national and specifically European synchronicity,
but in two other interrelated areas. First, subjects like general social conditions, legal foundations or the professionalization of media actors are specif-
cific and individual phenomena that need to be
given proper examination and consideration, as
we shall do below. Of course, the extensive re-
marks relating to the empirical part of this article,
underscoring that data and features included in a transnational comparison need to be function-
ally equivalent, apply to this chapter as well. In
cases where this equivalence is not necessarily apparent, particularly with respect to empirical
studies and statistics (cf. Hofmann 1992: 105f.),
further methodological consideration is needed
to ensure the desired degree of international comparability. Furthermore, it is difficult to select the countries to be analyzed in connection with a certain feature, particularly since there is a seri-
ous lack of truly comparative literature, hence the
countries chosen vary from one of the following subchapters to another.

It is crucial in carrying out this sort of overarching theoretical and empirical study to define a com-
parative measure that can be explained at least heuristically, and one that allows for a compre-
hensive overview of the study’s results. The de-
grees of Europeanization as defined in Table
1 have been formulated to meet the need for a
heuristic comparison. The first step was to iden-
tify four comparative levels of general interna-
tional synchronicity within the journalistic system
in Europe: no or hardly any, low, medium and high
international synchronicity. Owing to space limita-
tions, we shall describe their use schematically for
the purposes of argument and illustration, using
existing material, but analyzing it here for the first
time in this form. The four comparison measures
listed above are identified as degrees of Euro-
peanization from 1 (no or hardly any international synchronicity) to 4 (high international synchronic-
ity). At least in the case of the respective summa-
ries, the formal distinction between functional and content synchronicity converges in the measure of general synchronicity, without any further ex-

Table 1: Degrees of Europeanisation can be identified for individual “skins” of the onion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree of Europeanization</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>No or hardly any such structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2a</td>
<td>Such structures are present in connection with individual aspects of a feature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2b</td>
<td>Such structures are present in several central aspects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3c</td>
<td>Several central aspects identify only EU-wide transnational structures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4b</td>
<td>EU-wide transnational structures are present in connection with individual aspects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>of a feature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(e.g. &quot;a&quot; (no or hardly any such structure), &quot;b&quot; (such structures are present in connection with individual aspects of a feature) or &quot;c&quot; (such structures are present in several central aspects))</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Expenditure differences.

In addition, we consider the question of whether the feature at issue contains “genuine”, in particular legally and/or institutionally determined EU-wide transnational structures. This includes, for exam-
ple, arrangements applying to all member states that are based on EU guidelines. This criterion is taken into account by attaching to the degrees of Europeanization from 2 to 4 the letter “a” (no or hardly any such structure), “b” (such structures are present in connection with individual aspects of a feature) or “c” (such structures are present in several central aspects). If the analyzed feature contains only EU-wide transnational structures, it is assigned the highest degree of Europeanization, “5”. This grid is so complex that we cannot do proper justice to it in the following analysis, given space limitations. However, we present it here in the
interest of completeness.
3. Selected results concerning the degree of Europeanization of individual journalism contexts

Let us turn now to a closer examination and analysis of the various “layers of the onion” based on the degrees of Europeanization outlined above. Obviously this can only be done in outline form, within the limited scope of this article. Accordingly, we shall focus on media content and media actors, giving only brief consideration to the degrees of Europeanization of media systems and institutions and focusing on results (for more extensive information, see Sievert 1998: 72-111).

3.1 Standard and structure context

In the case of the general standard context of media systems, we can assume a medium level of international synchronicity. This applies particularly to general social conditions, which are those of a Western democracy in all of the EU member states; however, there are substantial differences in the political and social contexts, particularly since the expansion of the EU to the south and east. This is clearly apparent in the area of media use: for example, in 1991/92 daily newspaper circulation per one thousand inhabitants was only 39 in Portugal and 83 in Greece; Germany and Great Britain occupied a middle position with 324 and 351 respectively; and Sweden and Finland were at the top of the scale, with 490 and 512 respectively; and Sweden and Finland were at the top of the scale, with 490 and 512 respectively; and Sweden and Finland were at the top of the scale, with 490 and 512 respectively; and Sweden and Finland were at the top of the scale, with 490 and 512 respectively.

The highest degree of international synchronicity within the “onion” is seen in the structure context of media institutions, and it is even higher for print media than for audiovisual media. In both cases this is due not least to the effects of the EU role in regulating economic affairs. In fact, this was the first and only case in our analysis in which something resembling EU-specific structures was identified in the private media industry.

As a recent paper issued by the Commission of the European Union (2005: 5) put it, “[T]he future role of public policy is to create favorable conditions for the industry and support a posture of vigilance and innovation into the future. This will help European publishing to realize its full potential in the digital economy, by maintaining and enhancing its competitiveness. Maximizing the potential of publishing will also promote the diversity of opinion and culture that the people of Europe need in order to derive the richest benefits from the information society.” While synchronicity in economic, organizational and technical matters is thus equally high in the realm of print media, only a medium level of synchronicity can be observed for the latter two aspects in the audiovisual context. This can be accounted for in part by the more complex legal regulatory environment governing audiovisual products in the various EU countries, a factor that was mentioned in the context of standards. At the same time, it should be noted that despite efforts and some progress in this regard, basic technical standards continue to lack uniformity within Europe.

3.2 Function context

We shall look more closely at the next layer of the “onion”: the function context of media content. In carrying out the relevant content analysis, the author referred to his own 1996 study of ten print newsmagazines from five countries as well as more recent and longitudinal results from the Media Tenor research institute (regarding methodological design and its limitations, see Sievert 1998: 159-207 and Media Tenor 2005: 87). For reasons of topic and space, we shall deal in our analysis only with materials that explicitly focus on the European Union. Out of a total of 8,704 articles appearing during the first half of 1996 that were at least one page in length and which indicated in their headings, lead texts, graphics, photographs or photo captions that they concerned the topic of the European Union, there were 204 articles appearing during the first half of 1996 that were at least one page in length and which indicated in their headings, lead texts, graphics, photographs or photo captions that they concerned the topic of the European Union. Out of a total of 8,704 articles from the above-mentioned newsmagazines, there were 204 articles appearing during the first half of 1996 that were at least one page in length and which indicated in their headings, lead texts, graphics, photographs or photo captions that they concerned the topic of the European Union. Out of a total of 8,704 articles from the above-mentioned newsmagazines, there were 204 articles appearing during the first half of 1996 that were at least one page in length and which indicated in their headings, lead texts, graphics, photographs or photo captions that they concerned the topic of the European Union. Out of a total of 8,704 articles from the above-mentioned newsmagazines, there were 204 articles appearing during the first half of 1996 that were at least one page in length and which indicated in their headings, lead texts, graphics, photographs or photo captions that they concerned the topic of the European Union. Out of a total of 8,704 articles from the above-mentioned newsmagazines, there were 204 articles appearing during the first half of 1996 that were at least one page in length and which indicated in their headings, lead texts, graphics, photographs or photo captions that they concerned the topic of the European Union.
about the direction Europe should head for in the future. But just to the contrary, the visibility of European politics has decreased notably in the summer of 2005 – and not only in pre-election Germany. Soon after the Eastern enlargement of the European Union, things started to come apart visibly. ‘...a broadly public debate about the draft constitution for Europe prepared by the European Convention might have been a good chance to revive the discussion about the common ground in European politics. At least in German TV news European affairs loomed larger since the second quarter of 2004.’

Also of interest are clear national differences in the question of which EU institutions or other bodies are the specific subject of reporting. Our coding was based on the most prominent instance in which the EU was mentioned, i.e. on which EU institution was first mentioned in the article. Overall, references to such institutions were identified in 75% of the cases we analyzed. Figure 4 shows the distribution of references to various institutions in all of the relevant articles. The European Court of Justice and the Court of Auditors do not play a prominent role in such reporting. These results hold true for the relevant articles as a whole, but the picture is more complicated for the individual countries in which those articles appeared (cf. Figure 5). Here, too, there is unanimity among the five countries studied with respect to a preference for certain topics, with the European Commission at the top of the list. Thus we can conclude that there is a high degree of international synchronicity, although the results differ somewhat, ranging from 38 to 52%. However, when it comes to the second most frequent subject of journalistic reporting among the EU institutions, there are two different camps. While Austria and Germany frequently report on the European Parliament (39 and 23% respectively), in France and Spain it is the Council of Ministers that takes second place (in Spain, tied with the European Council). In the Netherlands, both institutions are approximately equal in terms of their coverage. Again, the Court of Justice and the Court of Auditors play no significant role, or even none at all, when the results are examined individually by country. A positive aspect of these results is that overall, as well as in three of the five countries individually, as much or more attention is given to the European Parliament, which the media are said to scorn, than to the European Commission. Still, the Commission’s position as the focus of reporting remains unrivaled. If we set aside the unusually high results in Austria, which can be explained in terms of current events, the number of articles on the European Parliament is at best half the number dealing with the Commission. The Media Tenor data we examined for purposes of comparison, which unfortunately deal only with Germany, confirm our results for Germany (cf. Figure 6). However, certain changes were apparent over time with respect to the question of which EU institution was the subject of particularly comprehensive coverage. ‘The biggest deficit in EU coverage stems from the lack of truly European parties and the ensuing deficit of communicative power for the European legislative’, concluded Media Tenor (2005: 86) in interpreting its own data. ‘Only 5.3% of all descriptions dealt with the EU Parliament and solely in the context of the European Elections in 2004 did the share of media awareness of the legislative body exceed the mark of 10%. On the other hand about 30% of the EU coverage in German media focused on the European Commission and another 10.7% on the European Council including its Presidency. The European Council loomed larger in the media than the Parliament in every single month since January 2004.’

3.4 Role context

At the time that the first paper – mentioned several times above – was written, there was a real dearth of research involving internationally comparable journalism surveys. It took a great deal of work to compile and analyze data on only three countries (cf. Sievert 1998: 132-150). Later on, the author himself, together with Weischenberg, made a modest contribution to this effort (cf. Weischenberg/Sievert 1998). Truly groundbreaking, however, was the anthology The Global Journalist by Weaver (1998a), which brought together studies from 21 countries and territories. Weaver’s own concluding chapter in particular (Weaver 1998b: 457-458 and 466-467) made it possible to compare and contrast journalism in the European countries, as shown in Table 2.
in Europe

In the preceding section we described how different, as well as how similar, the journalistic system is in the various countries of the European Union. But is it feasible to group these differences in the form of different models? We shall describe two attempts to do so, both of which are interesting in their own ways and at least one of which has found international resonance.

In their book entitled “Comparing Media Systems”, Hallin and Mancini developed three models of media and politics. They examined the influences of the market, the political parties and the state on the media, along with newspaper and television use and the professionalization of journalism in 18 Western countries. Within those countries assigned by the researchers to a specific media-system model, the respective national professional culture is similar as well. Analogously, these journalistic cultures differ substantially from countries, classified as belonging to a different media-system model. This holds true despite the fact that some of these countries have long been associated with one another within the political context of the European Union; the country-specific journalism culture remains evident.

Table 4 provides an overview. For countries like France, Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal, the authors developed a polarized, pluralist model. In these rather controlled political contexts, newspaper circulation figures are low, and the media are closely linked to a very polarized political setting; journalism is opinion-oriented, less professionalized and easy to instrumentalize; the state actively intervenes in the media and subsidizes the press. The liberal model is followed in Europe by Great Britain and Ireland and internationally by the United States and Canada. The market plays an important role, circulation figures are fairly high, and there has long been a commercial, relatively neutral mass press. Journalism is strongly professionalized, self-regulation is at least institutionalized, if not particularly strong, and the media distance themselves from politics and are strongly involved in investigative journalism. The researchers classify the media systems in Scandinavia, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany and Switzerland as part of the democratic-corporate model. Newspapers have a high circulation, the mass press developed early on, the party press has historically been very important, but a neutral, commercial press has come to be pre-dominant. Journalism is very much professionalized and its self-regulation has been institutionalized in these countries.

A second approach we should like to touch on here is that of Blum (2005). Based on his observations, he differentiated according to six models; the “Eastern European shock model” and two non-Western models are of particular interest. Przing (2006: 11) offered extensive comments on his work, particularly with respect to three new models: “The Berne researcher” has introduced three additional models. In the Eastern European shock model (Russia, Turkey, Iran), the state is strong and repeatedly and suddenly interferes with media freedom, which in some cases amounts to censorship. Journalists show partisan-ship in their reporting, write in a narrative style, and, with the exception of some few individuals, are rather subservient in their attitudes toward the political elite; professionalism tends to be weak. In the Arab-Asian patriot model (Egypt, Yemen) the governmental system is authoritarian, as is the political culture. In the Asian-Caribbean model (China, Vietnam, Burma, Zimbabwe, Cuba) journalists work within the confines of totalitarian systems. Basically, their only task is to disseminate the ruling ideology, while anything else is subject to censorship. The media belong to the state or are in the service of social organizations – even in China, where they are financed to some extent through the market.”

5. Conclusions

The aim of this article was to present a general, theoretical and empirically based conceptualization and analysis of journalism in the countries of the European Union, motivated by the observation of a crisis of political communication within the EU. Particular attention was directed toward media communication regarding the EU and its institutions. The expectation expressed at the outset was confirmed: there is no single type of journalism in Europe or in the European Union in terms of formal or structural uniformity; it is important to differentiate in a number of ways. Two types of differentiation appear to be of critical im-

Table 2: Journalist are quite similar in basis figures, but different concerning the “role model”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Austria</th>
<th>Britain</th>
<th>Portugal</th>
<th>France</th>
<th>Germany</th>
<th>Italy</th>
<th>Greece</th>
<th>Spain</th>
<th>Sweden</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Media content only has a low degree of Europeanisation, other contexts are different

Table 4: Three different “models” within European journalism have been proposed

- **Domestic context media system**
  - Liberal market model
  - Polarized pluralist model
  - Democratic-corporate model

- **Political context**
  - Federal democratic model
  - Strong state intervention
  - Weak state intervention

- **Media system type**
  - Market dominated (except strong public interest)
  - Strong state intervention

- **Journalism type**
  - Opinion-oriented journalism
  - Commentary-oriented journalism
The first differentiation is a territorial one, and concerns journalism as a social system. The function of this system involves society’s self-observation based on the code “currently worth publishing/currently not worth publishing” within a heuristically formulated, symbolically generalized medium of communication described by the dual term “public/publishing sector.” In the sense of a multi-perspective approach rooted in the dualism of the structure concept, we can distinguish within the system among various contexts that affect standards, structures, functions and roles. Journalism is a functional system in world society that can be uniformly divided into categories according to this code, although it does not yet exist throughout the world in a completely differentiated form. However, such differentiation as an independent system does exist at least for all of the Western democracies, and hence also for all EU member countries. At the same time, there are internal and territorial differences within this system of journalism, which is predicated on the idea of a global society.

The different European journalism models put forth by Hallin and Mancini can help not only to identify differences, but also to group them in an analytical way.

The second differentiation is related to the EU itself, and primarily concerns the function context of media messages as part of the territorially determined internal differentiation of the journalistic system, insofar as the latter deals with the EU and its institutions, quasi as “EU journalism.” The analysis presented here in excerpt form has shown that the assertion of a crisis of political communication cited in the introduction has merit in its context discussed here, and we shall address them once more in this conclusion. These are differentiations of a very different quality, with the second attributable to some degree to the first.

The different European journalism models put forth by Hallin and Mancini can help not only to identify differences, but also to group them in an analytical way.

Based on these inevitably heuristic analyses, EU journalism can be concluded to be a doubly differentiated system, first in terms of territorial and system-immanent factors, second in terms of EU content and function. The question remains open as to how to view this dual differentiation with respect to the crisis of political communication within the European Union, described above.

How this analysis is viewed depends on one’s position with respect to the general process of integration within the EU, and in particular the process of communicative integration. In formal terms, two concepts can be distinguished in this context:

- If we base our conclusions on the perspective taken by those who support the concept of a uniform process of communicative integration as outlined in this article, we are forced to take a critical view. From this perspective, the territorial differentiation of the functional system of journalism analyzed here stands in the way of a (somewhat) uniform, truly European public; moreover, a fundamental change in this situation is not in sight. Following this line of argumentation, the development of the journalistic system is generally seen in the context of economic as well as political developments.

- Alternatively, the author would like to suggest the concept of a differentiated communicative process of integration as a standard for evaluating the differentiation described above.

The point of departure here is the question of whether communicative integration really should compete directly with economic and political integration, or whether it should instead be seen as part of a cultural convergence with its own separate standards. In the view of the author, the journalistic system does not require a uniform European “public/publishing sector” of some kind, but the competent Europeanization of a nationally differentiated “public/publishing sector” while maintaining fundamental national differences.

Based on the arguments presented here, of necessity in shortened form, the proposed concept of differentiated communicative integration appears to be far more sensible, feasible and sustainable than trying to insist on the often schematic idea of unity too quickly and too forcefully. “The discussion of various models of a European public demonstrates that the Europeanization of national publics is more in keeping with comprehensive inclusion and deliberation than the models of a pan-European public and topic-specific transnational publics”, as Elders and Vollmer (2003: 250) put it. Europe needs to become increasingly part of a process of territorially differentiated self-observation, but it cannot replace such observation. A uniform communicative region of Europe is not desirable, in the view of the author, but Europeanized national and regional areas of communications would be beneficial. In concrete terms, this might mean offering more European areas of competence to journalists within the territorially defined differentiations of the journalistic system. Ruß-Mohl (2003: 214) is quite right in observing that “[o]n the other hand, there is some reason to be confident: the network of European initiatives and institutions serving the improvement of journalism can still become denser; we can improve the communication between researchers and practitioners; and thus we can contribute our share towards creating a more European journalism culture.”

This awareness of European diversity in the context of journalism is, in turn, very important for public relations theory and practice. Only if the sphere of public relations is aware of specific cultural factors involved in European communication, or even better — in national communication within the European countries, will it be able to analyze appropriately and enter into a helpful dialogue with its various stakeholders with a view to strategy-oriented practice. European communication management implies managing diversity within a framework of diversity.

References


Abstract

The recent rejections of the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe are but the latest symptom of a failure to tackle a fundamental challenge, widely referred to as the “democratic deficit”, inherent in the emergence of the European Union. It has become clear that the “permissive consensus” amongst European citizens has not endured the fact that integration has long been top-down and elite-driven - intergovernmentalist decision-making in the tradition of classical bargaining diplomacy is no longer sustainable or compatible with the nature of the European polity.

While the modern nation-state has served as the cradle for civic solidarity and identity, our conceptions of which have formed the basis of our democratic convictions, the organizational structure of the European Union has generated novel challenges to traditional notions of democracy and legitimacy. This requires scholars of international relations to question their paradigms and everyone to restate the normative principles on which the newly emerging modes of governance ought to be grounded.

Introduction

From the time of Herodotus, “Europe” has always been more than merely a territorial space of economic cooperation. It is first and foremost a cultural construction that has become primarily an experiment in peaceful cooperation and the pursuit of common, often normative goals since the end of WW II. The question of its territorial, cultural and ideological demarcation is accordingly essentially a philosophical one that needs to be jointly addressed in order to give meaning to the present enlargement and integration process.

The novel political construct of the European Union has largely failed to address this element of meaning in the past decades while simultaneously creating powerful supranational institutions and procedures that take the process of will-formation and decision-making far beyond the threshold of traditional concepts of democracy as applied to the nation-state.

Some of the most basic presuppositions made by those concepts of democracy can hardly be applied to the European Union, while it is a historical reality that its competences and decision-making powers go beyond any known form of mere intergovernmental cooperation. It thus requires broad democratic legitimacy if it is not to compromise the constitutional traditions of its Member States, imperil its achievements in democracy, the rule of law and human rights and ultimately alienate its constituent subjects: European citizens. The most recent referenda stalling the ratification process of the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe must be seen as but the latest indication that the “permissive consensus” of just those citizens has not endured elite-driven integration from above.

The major challenge to the European project is therefore the elevation of its democratic aspiration beyond the nation-state without compromising legitimacy and thereby losing the loyalty of its citizens on the way. A major hindrance to this goal is the lack of commonly shared ideas about what it means to be European and what has been called a “sense of belonging” that could foster the idea of a European common good among a European citizenry. Vitaly important institutional reform - such as the strengthening of the European Parliament and more openness at the level of all institutions including the Council as well as the institutionalization of civil society actors in deliberations inside those bodies - has to be supplemented by broader inclusion of citizens to regain the intellectual ownership of the ongoing open challenge of “Europe”.

The implementation of human rights relating to communication - further referred to as communication rights - are therefore regarded here to be extremely important especially in the context of the challenges the European Union has to deal with and should thus be put into the larger context of post-national conceptions of citizenship and constitutionalism.

1. Democracy beyond the nation-state?

a) The sources of Europe’s democratic deficit

The materialization of supranational modes of governance has generated questions about the legitimacy and democratic content of a system that seems to be moving beyond traditional democratic control mechanisms. As it does not fit into existing categories of international relations theory, explaining and defining the nature of the European Union for analytical purposes has proven to be an extremely difficult and contested issue and is likely to remain on the research agenda for some time to come (Eriksen & Neyer, 2003; Pollack, 2001).

There are several approaches from international relations theory to explain and locate the source of the European democratic deficit that centre around different aspects of its decision-making structure. They vary largely in their assumptions about the feasibility and desirability of institutional reform in order to make the Union more democratically controllable and accountable. Generally, the interaction among nationally legitimated actors and their relation to the supranational power structure are still the main points of attention - be it from an intergovernmentalist’s, globalisation or multi-level governance perspective. Those approaches share a focus on institutional aspects of the EU edifice, thereby neglecting what has been termed the “socio-psychological dimension” (Chryssochoou, 2001, p. 5).

This may be explained by the fact that the emerging systems of power and authority are less simple and more distant from citizens - a fact that is deplorable but realistically inevitable. However, this fact makes it even more important to ensure...
mechanisms of public accountability by exposing decisions taken to public scrutiny and to facilitate a broad understanding of complex issues at stake, thus enabling active participation of citizens, which is so vital in making the European project anything more than an elitist exercise in market integration, discredited by its subjects and ultimately boycotted by increasing indifference and fatalism.

Such a normative approach fits into a constructivist perspective on the sources and possible cures for the democratic deficit of the European Union (which builds forth on the works of Wendt, 1992). From this perspective, identity and preferences are not given and rigid, but rather social constructions which are impacted and changed by the very process of European integration (Christiansen et al., 1999). The concept of citizenship here becomes of paramount importance, since the lack of a shared idea of a common good - also referred to as “civic we-ness” - is often seen as the root of the democratic deficit and thus the lack of legitimacy of European-level decision-making (Chryssochou, 2001; Bellamy, 2001). Among others, Gerhards (1993) attributes the European democratic deficit to the non-existence of any kind of democratic public sphere, which he considers a prerequisite for the emergence of a common European identity.

It is contended here, that if public will-formation as a foundation of democratic politics has always been vitally dependent on the free exchange of information and opinions in a public sphere, communication processes in the context of the European Union have become even more crucial as a tool for citizen empowerment and the nurturing of a civic culture that can exceed the nation-state. Where electoral legitimation is stretched to such lengths and the political feedback mechanisms defy accountability while decision-making procedures remain too obscure as to answer to minimum standards of transparency, the basic assumptions of liberal democracy cannot be held. The project of European integration has thus gone beyond the threshold of traditional notions of democratic decision-making without providing a discrete alternative model to safe its noble initial aspirations of securing the rule of law, democracy and human rights in the Union.

European institutions are perceived as “remote” from everyday life by its citizens, who feel inadequately informed about European issues and are generally rather uninvolved as mirrored in traditionally low and falling turn-outs for European Parliament elections. It is important to realize that whereas much of the critical discussion about the European Union has evolved around the insufficiency of democratic representation, accountability and citizen participation, and on the lack of transparency and thus legitimacy, “opinion polls disclose that the majority of citizens do not seem to be bothered by these issues, if indeed they have ever heard of them” (Stein, 2001, p. 521).

In fact, many Europeans lack basic knowledge about European institutions and functioning, while not realizing the significant impact which decisions at that level have upon their lives. In this sense, a fundamental information deficit can be detected at the root of the democratic deficit. Tackling this deficit, however, constitutes but the first step on the way to attain more democratic legitimacy of a system in which opaque, indirectly democratic decision-making structures will still have to be supplemented with public debate about decisions that includes potentially all those affected.

The wide-spread civic apathy and the subsequent lack of engagement with the integration process can only be addressed by facilitating broader citizen participation in European democratic processes. Attempts to tackle this will have to include not only the lack of information and awareness, but aim at the interactive facet of the deficit: the deficit of communication among the peoples of Europe horizontally and the peoples and EU institutions vertically that can nurture deliberative democracy.

Accordingly, the protection of existing and the pro-active creation of new European-wide communicative spaces is to be seen as a precondition for deliberative elements that can legitimately elevate democracy beyond the limits of the nation-state.

In this light, the negative outcomes of two of the ratification attempts of the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe are illustrative. The kind of mobilization necessary to include citizens into the shaping of their common future should have taken place prior to the constitutional referenda in the process of deliberation and agenda-setting, - not only after politicians had already agreed on some common ground, seeking a posteriori approval of an ill-informed citizenship, stripped of participatory opportunities to influence the preceding debate. After all, the European Union is not a “branded product” that has to be advertised and sold to citizens, but aspires to be a pluralistic democratic enterprise, which ought to be a product of its citizens’ will to build a community above the nation-state and that “citizens may decide not to like, even if they are properly informed” (Kurpan et al, 2004, p. 3, italics added).

b) Deliberation as a constituent capacity of citizenship

“... the most celebrated property of democratic citizenship both as a social construct and as substantive public engagement is the range and depth of participatory opportunities, deliberative or other, for citizens to engage themselves in the exercise of political authority.”

(Chryssochou, 2002, p. 764)

In the modern liberal conception of democratic legitimacy, which is the foundation of most European states, more than free elections and majority rule is required from political systems. State power is restrained by claims of individual citizenship rights and the concept of constitutionalism becomes a central feature of democracy (Stein, 2001, p. 493).

Beyond this notion, Bellamy (2001, p. 15) distinguishes juridical from political constitutionalism. The former includes the rule of law, protection of basic rights and the separation of powers between institutions. The latter centres around the “constitutive role of citizenship” which emphasizes the active role citizens play in constituting themselves in an ongoing process of disagreement, dialogue and compromise. The latter is of prominent importance for thinking about how a European democracy could come about and implies a rights-perspective on citizenship that goes beyond mere negative, protective rights against state interference to include positive rights of inclusion and participation that may demand obligations to act rather than merely to refrain on the side of public authority.

Conceptions of democracy that focus on enhancing participatory opportunities postulate open public deliberation in search of a consensus as the basis for democratic decision-making while access for citizens to all levels of public institutions is placed at a central position (Nanz & Steffek, 2003). Strengthening elements of deliberative democracy is then an approach to counter Europe’s democratic deficit by legitimizing the exercise of power through including citizens in the process of decision-making, nurturing a sense of European civics and exposing decisions to public scrutiny. Due to the limited scope of this paper, considerations will be focused on the discourse theoretical model of deliberative democracy, which is considered to be most suitably applied to the argument in case of the European Union since it goes along quite smoothly with supranationalism: (...) as it decouples citizenship and nationhood and conceives the constitution as a system for accommodating difference. In this way discourse theory departs from both republican and liberal conceptions of popular sovereignty and democratic legitimacy. Whilst “liberals” (or rather, social choice theorists) conceive of the individual as bearer of rights and democratic legitimacy as a question of a fair aggregation of preferences, the republicans locate popular sovereignty in the public assembly of citizens. Discourse theory, in contrast, launches a de-substantialized and intersubjectivist concept of sovereignty and locates it in the anonymous and dispersed forms of communication in civil society - in the public spheres (Eriksen, 1999).
This approach “disconnects collective will-formation in modern politics from the notion of a pre-existing system of common values and affiliations”. In this perspective, there is subsequently a separation of “politics and culture, of citizenship and nationality, of ethnos and demos” (Eriksen & Neyer, 2003, p. 8). The subsequent interrelationship between political constitutionalism, citizenship and legitimacy deserves more detailed elaboration here.

Instead of focusing on the existence of a predefined “community of values” or uniform identity, the binding element of supranational citizenship must be found in the self-constituting opportunities it provides. If European citizenship - legally introduced into the quasi-constitutional structure of the EU by the 1992 Maastricht Treaty - is not to remain a hollow concept, even the fairest and most deliberative procedures that are constrained to participants within EU institutions will not suffice. This focus mandates a rights-based approach to citizenship (as advocated by Eriksen, 2005). So far, those citizenship rights are exhausted in the right to vote for the European Parliament, the freedom of movement within the territory of the Member States and the right to diplomatic protection by EU Member States. In order to reach the full democratic potential of a polity, “civic competence” is a mandatory feature of citizenship: the institutional capacity of citizens to enter into the realm of political authority on a socially equal basis with a view to sustaining a vital democracy.

Critics on deliberative democracy are numerous (Chalmers, 2003). First of all, it can be argued that the ideal of deliberative democracy constitutes not so much a “discrete model of democracy as much as a mechanism for resolving and legitimizing public decisions” (McGrew, 2002, p. 505). This point, however, does not diminish the intrinsic value of this approach for the debate about a possible amelioration of Europe’s democratic deficit even within its current institutional framework. Another point of criticism is revealed by Chalmers (2003). It is argued that to rely on communication per se is simply naïve, since experience shows that deliberative modes of decision-making can in fact lead to quite undesirable outcomes that even tend to marginalize underrepresented groups even further. He correctly argues the paramount importance of the right “institutional setting” as well as “performative” and “epistemic context” for deliberation of multiple actors in political fora to take place. Nonetheless, as most other critical thoughts, Chalmers’ lucid analysis of the ideals, conditions and criticism of deliberation seems to stop at the doors of institutions in which decision-making takes place without considering the necessity to take along “ordinary” citizens on the “unfinished journey” of democracy at EU level in order to establish identification with a common European good and democratic legitimacy on a broad basis.

c) Can there be a European public sphere?

Moreover, critics of the deliberative approach (inter alia Grimm, Schlesinger; Scharpf) reproduce doubts expressed in the context of the feasibility of a transnational public sphere transcending heterogeneous linguistic communities. They claim that problems with language and cultural diversity will generate irresolvable dilemma.

Two main arguments re-surface in their works that seem to indicate that a European public sphere - and by analogy alleviating the democratic deficit by means of public deliberation - must be a pointless endeavour. Firstly, the large variety of languages and subsequent variety of frames of meaning are seen as a major obstacle for a pan-European public sphere (van Steeg, 2002). Secondly, there is the “no demos” claim, which denies the existence of a European polity, based on a common identity and values, which in turn is regarded as a prerequisite for the feasibility of a European public sphere. Accordingly, Grimm (1995) sees true self-determination as dependent on the existence of a demos (since there is no European demos, there can be no democracy) - while Scharpf (1999) maintains that democratic self-government is dependent upon a high degree of cultural homogeneity.

Essentially, this argument focuses on the above mentioned consensus in that so far; there is no such thing as a European demos and that neither the Maastricht nor the subsequent Amsterdam and Nice Treaty amendments with their technical points succeeded in extending citizenship loyalties to the European level, while “inviting a sacrifice in democratic input for greater efficiency in output” (Chryssochou, 2001, p. 20). The two stands of argument both lead to the seemingly inevitable conclusion that “the public sphere is delimited by the state’s borders” (van Steeg, 2002, p. 505). This conclusion is however based on the overly simplistic assumption that a European public sphere will have to be comparable to and look much like the national public spheres. The early work of Habermas has frequently been criticized for a similar logical error, when he idealized the national polity as a single national public sphere (Schlesinger, 1999, p. 265).

As van Steeg (2002) argues, however, all the above stated critical arguments can easily be applied to the nation-state setting: linguistic problems, cultural differences that complicate communication and understanding, technical problems and a variety of identities within the sometimes rather arbitrary boundaries of nation-states. Those problems, however, do not seem to be considered as an insurmountable obstacle for the emergence of a public sphere and the development of a discourse under conditions of national plurality.

Furthermore, it should not be forgotten, that also the nation-state is a rather recent product of long historical, sometimes painful developments. As Habermas points out, it would be false to confuse a “nation of citizens (...)” with a community of fate shaped by common descent, language and history - such a misconception would underestimate the “voluntaristic character of a civic nation, the collective identity of which exists neither independent of nor prior to the democratic process from which it springs” (2001, pp. 15).

Also, as Weiler argues (1999, pp. 238), the principled precondition of homogeneity of ethnocultural polities as tribe-like entities is caught up in an overly simplistic vision of Volk and Staat, which generally precludes any possibility of an international system of democratic participation emerging, and thus the democratisation of the European Union.

In suggesting that linguistic and cultural homogeneity is a necessary precondition for any kind of democratic legitimacy, Esser (2003, p. 20) emphasizes that the sceptical authors ultimately base their claims on a paradoxical vicious circle: on the one hand, the deficit of the public sphere results in the democratic deficit since there is no common linguistic background, no collective identity and no pan-European media system. On the other hand, the very fact that there is no public sphere is also a result of the democratic deficit, because governments and not citizens vote for or against laws, which should be dealt with discursively in the public sphere. Such a claim could easily lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy and inaction since both deficits cause each other
In Habermas’ original construction of the public sphere, politics would become the implementing tool of a collectively agreed upon consensus that results from deliberation. This ideal type has, however, been adjusted by Habermas himself, while he acknowledges that “discourses do not govern”. They generate a communicative power, which cannot substitute, but merely influence the administrative one. (1990, p. 44, translated by the author). Since the mid-nineties a further adaptation of H Habermas’ initial ideal can be distinguished (among the most prominent proponents of the perspective are Eder et al. 2000; Eder & Trenz, 2004; van Steeg, 2002). While Eder et al. take over the definition of a public sphere largely from Habermas’ initial notion, from their perspective it is not considered to be crucial that similar opinions are expressed or even that consensus is eventually reached (Eder et al., 2000, p. 8). They argue, the fact that participants in communication dissent cannot be an indicator of them not sharing the same public sphere. In fact, as Risse (2002) remarks, dissent can itself become an identity-conferring factor and must be seen as an indicator for the existence of a public sphere, since arguably there can be no dissent without prior communication. Nonetheless, the aim of deliberation is not necessarily a consensus, mutual, societal learning is considered to be a crucial outcome, making mutual understanding the key function of the public sphere (Eder, 1999; Eder, 2004). In accordance with Bellamy’s notion of political constitutionalism, the public sphere is understood to be a tool for common identity construction of a nascent European community (Eder & Kantner, 2003).

Conceptually, a European public sphere in the sense of the discourse-theoretical notion remains a necessary element not only to come closer to the ideal of deliberative democracy; but to revive, intensify and broaden the normative debate about a common path of development and thus to build a democratically more legitimate European Union. It must be seen as a means to communize the intellectual and emotional ownership of “Europe” that could revive the visionary, peaceful spirit of its early heritage as a “set of political beliefs to which any state or political system can accede rather than simply being a hollow space between the Atlantic and the Urals” (Chalmers, 2003, p. 188). The realization of deliberative democracy in the case of the European Union thus implies the cultivation of transnational deliberative fora in which there can be genuine, non-hegemonic dialogue between agencies of public governance and those affected by decisions as well as among citizens in order to negotiate outcomes and the underlying values of their common life.

In the end, focusing on deliberation in the structures of the EU makes the notion more than just a means to justify policies and seek a way to externally legitimate decisions taken. It could in fact become a means to construct a common European ideal based on an enlarged understanding of citizenship beyond the ties of national belonging and rights toward the state. Such an ideal could subsequently serve as a yardstick against which to measure the practical performance of European institutions. Deliberation could become a “cipher for each political community to construct its own polity, solutions to problems and membership rights” (Chalmers, 2003, p. 130). Since a great amount of responsibility rests on the shoulders of citizens, this model of democracy requires a highly interested, active and well-informed citizenship, as well as “the vigorous promotion of those rights and conditions necessary to their empowerment” (McGrew, 2002, p. 505, italics added).

2. Implications of deliberative supranationalism

“The demand for new rights of association, participation and access is part and parcel of the creation of new types of governance that supplement, cut across occasionally subvert and supplant current systems of representative democracy in order to create a European public sphere.”

(Bellamy, 2001, p. 35)

Considering the immense importance that is ascribed to the emergence/existence of a European public sphere for the democratic legitimacy of the European project, it is rather surprising to note that subsequently hardly any attention is paid by most authors to the necessary preconditions that regulatory regimes would have to create in order to enable and protect public deliberations in such a public sphere in the first place.

As Padovani notes, most research has been conducted on what she terms “first order governance”, referring to the day-to-day management, problem-solving and opportunity creation of supranational governance structures (2003, p. 7). However, if we state the need for a mode of governance that guarantees the full expression of civil society, participation and inclusion of
the broad citizenship into deliberation about a common, European project and future, both the institutional settings - the “second order of governance” - and particularly the “third order” which entails the normative aspects of governance, should be devoted to deeper reflection. It would be false to conclude from the limited formal mandate of the European institutions that they had solely technical tasks of fixing problems eclipsing any normative responsibilities.

a) Who deliberates where? - Mediation in the public sphere

While a deliberative approach to democracy has been adopted at least theoretically in some of the decision-making bodies of the EU, in order to alleviate the wide-spread detachment and apathy of citizens, including yet another non-governmental elite or group of external experts will not suffice. After all, civil society actors as well still represent specific interests, their democratic legitimacy is often more than questionable, and high access barriers (such as technical expertise) often limit broad participation. As Hamelink puts it, also among NGOs “a lack of public accountability and democratic structure [can be found] that competes with authoritarian government institutions” (2000, p. 76). If European citizenship does not translate into more direct and ultimate participation 20 (Koopmans & Erbe, 2003, p. 1f.).

b) Communication Rights as Citizenship Rights

Obviously, for deliberation to deliver all the benefits for a democratic, constructive polity, certain conditions have to be met in order to facilitate full and equal participation, which must be rooted in a normative approach to policymaking. The mass media as the overarching construction that must support parliamentary structures in modern democracy is made an issue only within a small elite of national Members of Parliament, Members of the European Parliament (MEP) and academics, while being blacked out by most political rhetoric with the consequence that the opportunities of popular participation by means of public access to communication media is woefully absent from broad, public debate (Ward, 2004, vii). Evaluating European-wide initiatives after the disastrous experiment to set up a pan European broadcaster in the 1980s, European institutions have been reluctant to actively regulate to that aim and seem complacent to leave the task of building transnational communicative spaces over to the private sector (idem).

It is argued here that since mass media are such important societal systems - in the absence of direct communicative links between European decision-making fora and the citizens they are, cornerstone of the public sphere - their governance will have to be based on widely agreed upon standards that can provide for the fullest possible employment of communication media for the sake of democratization, legitimation and ultimately the determination of what it means to be “European”.

In this context, human rights instruments such as the European Convention on the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms are an obvious choice, since they emanated from common traditions and firmly enshrine the very principles assumed in an ideal speech situation enabling public deliberation. At the same time documents such as the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union 21 made up in the EU framework into the constitutional edifice of Europe. Taking existing communication rights - as codified in the above mentioned instruments - seriously results in the formulation of direct and implied requirements for their efficient exercise. These include pluralism of the media landscape (beyond the number of outlets to include the broadest spectrum of content possible to give voice to all points of view), the guarantee of freedom and independence of the press, access to information as well as procedural rights such as the access to means of legal redress.

It has then to be clearly recognized that communication rights ought to be conceived of not only as basic human rights, but also as fundamental citizenship rights in newly emerging supranational governance modes. The European Union as one such novel structure faces its biggest challenge in its democratic deficit that not only imperils its formal democratic nature, but is also at the root of the failure of a European demos to emerge that could eventually legitimize policymaking on the supranational level. European citizenship thus remains a shallow buzz-word while the peoples that make up the Union continue to be largely apathetic and ignorant about European decision-making structures and their content. Through the means of communication, primarily the mass media, including and participation in this common project could materialize and European citizenship could become more than a dead letter, created to a posteriori legitimize historical realities from above.

Possibly, the European Union does not require a homogenous nation state-like polity, but can strive to expand the cumulative 22 aspect of European identity on the cost of its traditionally more exclusive 23 characteristic, as they are still exploited by anti-European lobby's in Member States (this dualism of identities is taken from work of Duchesne & Fognotier, 2005).

In sum, there is not only an obligation to take human rights as a common European standard of achievement, but their importance is even further enhanced through the more specific issue of the democratic deficit and the lack of a European demos,
which makes it hard to tackle. In accordance with the discourse theoretical approach, communication is understood to include not merely the transmission of information, but as a fundamentally identity-confirming process that has the power to shape common meanings and even solidarity between groups and individuals. This is especially relevant to the multi-layered construction of European policy-making, since it lacks fundamental mechanisms of traditional constitutional democracies that could sustain inevitable tensions within its constituencies (Chalmers, 2003). The capacity to engage in communicative action is furthermore understood to be the primary supplement to voting rights of a European polity that confers on it the power to constitute itself in deliberation. The concept of deliberative democracy then ultimately requires more than mere non-restriction of the freedom of speech and goes further to imply the facilitation of communicative processes that include rights such as to access to information, the right to be properly informed and ultimately the right to be heard. Citizens’ empowerment thus depends on the protection and stimulation of communication, which in itself then becomes a fundamental political right.

3. New horizons after the referral

“Constitutional politics is often considered especially fundamental to a polity, since it enshrines the most basic values and ideals that identify the self-image and aspirations of a society at large, making it a touchstone for the identity of a given community. In Habermasian words, a constitution for Europe can be conceived as yet another step on the way of “learning how to construct new and ever more sophisticated forms of a solidarity among strangers” in a rapidly changing world that challenges many of the orthodoxies that have guided us along our beliefs about democracy, the nation-state and the nature and content of citizenship over the last centuries (2001, p.21). All this cannot possibly be imposed from above in the tradition of intergovernmental bargaining and closed-door diplomacy, but has to be worked out in community. The decision of at least two Member States’ populations to veto the progression of the process to ratify a constitutional document should be understood as a wake-up call on the part of national politicians as well as European level representatives.

The Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe was the latest, major attempt to constitutionalize the Union in accordance with its self-conception as a community based on democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Accordingly, if we conceive of the EU as being an enterprise in pluralist democracy, communication will have to be recognized as the means for establishing a civic space in which the peoples of Europe - consisting of Europe’s citizens - are enabled to constitute themselves in an attempt to transcend nation-state allegiances. Accordingly communication efforts ought not to be steered with the strategic aims of selling a pre-designed idea of “Europe”. Civic engagement cannot be substituted with a ready-made Euro-patriotism triggered by well-orchestrated propaganda for the sake of gaining points in opinion polls to justify pushing through with the Constitution in a later attempt.

Nurturing the civic solidarity on a supranational level will be the core challenge of European politics in the near future. Arguably, this is a huge task that requires a lot of courage, patience and, above all, vision on the side of politicians, who are partly still operating in national contexts that are often highly sceptical towards integration and where the temptation to capitalize on making the EU a scapegoat for unpopular decisions is great. Nonetheless, there does not seem to be an alternative if the idea of an integrated Europe is not to collapse and vanish into history books as yet another deluded utopia.

Thus, it is encouraging to see new initiatives being taken in the aftermath of the French and Dutch votes such as a White Paper on European Communication Policy, which contains some rather explosive language, boldly bringing the “right to be heard” back on the agenda of European policy-making. It can only be hoped, this will not prove a short-term panic reaction and will be picked up by the Commission at large and furthered by the commitment of the European Parliament, the Council and ultimately the Member States’ political actors.

It remains to be seen, if the well-known ambition to “reconnect with the citizen” will prove to be more than repetitive use of jargon and whether the European regulator will be willing and able to contribute to the emergence of new as well as the protection and enhancement of existing communicative spaces in order to improve the quantity and quality of deliberative processes among citizens beyond national boundaries.

In the end, the inevitable progress of transnationalism and therewith the questions of competing patterns of identity and legitimacy remains a fundamentally philosophical problem, which ought to be acknowledged and tackled commonly on a European scale.

Endnotes

Classical realist or neoliberal scholars have contributed surprisingly little to theorizing about European integration processes. This can perhaps be explained by the fact that the mere idea of an international cooperative, as close and far-reaching as the EU (continuing even after the breakdown of the Soviet Union and the unification of Germany) created some fundamental problems for the explanatory power of the traditional assumptions of anarchy, power play and relative gains that underlie the realist school. They have been challenged by the European Court of Justice ruling that the Community’s founding treaties itself already constitute a “Constitutional Charter” (idem).

2 In their view, the EU “rests on the separate constitutional orders of states” (Reinhard, 1999, p.13), however an argument has been made that the Maastricht treaty has been challenged by the European Court of Justice ruling that the Community’s founding treaties itself already constitute a “Constitutional Charter” (idem).

3 The constructive perspective has been criticized from a rationalist point of view for not articulating falsifiable hypotheses and for favoring an explanatory framework that is capable of making sense of any possible outcome. As Moscovici points out, “hardly a single claim […] is formulated or tested in such a way that it could, even in principle, be declared empirically invalid” (1999, p. 570). From a reflexivist point of view, Smith (1999) acknowledges the new fault line between rational-neoliberalism and social constructionism as a problem that creates the direction of future debate or EU integration within International Relations. While he also recognizes the potential benefits of social constructivism for EU studies, he emphasizes that “there is no single social constructivism, and that the current literature is more united on what is being rejected than on what is being proposed”, which may deter the making full use of the explanatory power of the perspective (Smith, 1999, p. 690).

4 Even concerning such an important document as the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe, an overwhelming number of people said they did not feel they had been informed enough to give their consent. According to the postvote Eurobarometer surveys, 51% and 49% of those (of Dutch and French citizens respectively) who abstained from voting name the lack of information as the reason for their abstention. In Italy, the lack of proper information about the issue explains 62% of those who abstained, but only 32% of those who theoretically felt well-informed but nonetheless decided not to vote. Those who did turn out to vote mostly confirmed having had all the information needed to make a decision.

The complexity of the institutional system and the lack of clarity of the European Union system can be called upon as two of the factors that contribute to the lack of interest in European policy-making and ultimately to the decline of European identity (Magnetis, 2007, p.152).

5 While there are a great variety of perspectives on this concept, most draw on the Habermasian concept of communicative justice as the cornerstone of democratic legitimacy.Deliberation then must be seen as a process of coming to mutual understanding that must satisfy the quality criteria of arguments used as well as its formal nature (Inclusion of all who are interested and a clear deliberation and the requirement that no point of view be a priori excluded from deliberations are examples of these criteria).

6 “Now” in this sense is the fact that the right to remain on another Member States' territory is a direct consequence of being a European citizen (in principle even if economically non-active on the basis of Article 17 EC) while before Maastricht, this freedom has been granted only to economically active individuals (on the basis of Article 39 EC).

The underlying normative assumption is that there is no way of a priori knowing which is the best or morally superior way of conducting policies. It is rather a means of ensuring that people with not only a plurality of interests and opinions, but also with a plurality of values can find a way to peacefully co-exist, having negotiated the underlying rules and underlying values that govern public life, while the opinions of all members must principally be respected and represented.

7 Also, it would be false to overestimate the stability and functionality of the abstract national public sphere, which is sketched as an ideal type by many pesimistic scholars to make their argument. Within national borderlines a large variety of heterogeneous discourses connect since national public spheres are not dominated by one newspaper or one television channel, either (Esser, 2000) while it may be argued that whether a common language makes people talk about the same things in Andalusia and Basque, Sicily and Milan or Bavaria and Savoy.

8 Consequently, involved in the discourse-theoretical notion of the public sphere is a distinction between opinion formation, which is the domain for public spheres, and decision-making which is the domain for decision-making units within the political system. Publics do not act as they possess no decision-making agency. In public spaces it is possible to deliberate and such forms of opinion about what should be done. In pluralistic and complex societies public opinion is “anonymous - it is “decentred” into the network of communication itself it is dispersed and has no power to govern” (Eckers, 2002).

9 From this perspective, a public sphere has already emerged, when issues are commonly accepted and discussed at the same time and within the same frames of relevance (Eder et al., 2000, p.8). It is assumed that a transnational public opinion is realized, as soon as citizens participate in the discussion about European issues, mediated by the national mass media, which they already consume in their mother tongues (Eder & Kautner, 2000).

10 Such as a European-American public sphere (considering the current war in Iraq for a Dutch or a Danish public opinion) (about dual citizenship in the aftermath of the murder of Theo van Gogh).

11 Some initiatives have been taken to include more “stakeholders” into those procedures, while the present approach has been described as “fused”, which menaces clarity and transparency of decision-making process itself already constitute a “Constitutional Charter’ (idem).

12 “Additionally, the powers of national and European administrations are commonly accepted and discussed at the same time and within the same frames of relevance (Eder et al., 2000, p.8). It is assumed that a transnational public opinion is realized, as soon as citizens participate in the discussion about European issues, mediated by the national mass media, which they already consume in their mother tongues (Eder & Kautner, 2000).”

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17 Also, it would be false to overestimate the stability and functionality of the abstract national public sphere, which is sketched as an ideal type by many pesimistic scholars to make their argument. Within national borderlines a large variety of heterogeneous discourses connect since national public spheres are not dominated by one newspaper or one television channel, either (Esser, 2000) while it may be argued that whether a common language makes people talk about the same things in Andalusia and Basque, Sicily and Milan or Bavaria and Savoy.
17. This function can be exercised by the mass media by making actors’ issues and policies relevant to Europe visible to the public, which is the only way to provide a platform for giving political response and legitimacy in the absence of unmediated communicative links with citizens.

18. This function refers to the channels of mass communication as the only source of information for European policy-makers about the preferences, wishes and worries of the European citizen, thus providing a platform for feedback and inspiration.

19. This function provides for the citizens’ possibility to make up their minds about the performance of the distant European institutions. Since personal, direct experiences with the complex system of governance are naturally limited, the dependency on presentation of “Europe” in the mass media becomes ever greater.

20. The last function finally refers to the capacity of the mass media to provide a platform of citizen participation in the European policy process through access to them. Since direct access to European policy-making is restricted to a small number of resourceful and powerful organized actors, even civil society organizations as a form of citizenship participation can only indirectly influence governance outcomes by way of the visibility, resonance, and legitimacy they may mobilize in the mass media.

21. The Charter should be understood to be - at least partly - a reaction to the sociological and political process of community building which is made easier by the limitation of the community, and is hence feeling, while this does not exclude the possibility to extend those loyalities to other “nested territories” such as the European Union (Duchesne & Frognier, p. 24).

22. It results from the sociological and political process of community building which is made easier by the limitation of the community and is hence fuelled by pointing out some significant “other” such as the European Union.

23. In the short term, the exact nature and extent of the actions of national leaders, who endeavor to preserve their power and decision-making space (“Duchesne & Frognier, p. 12).”

24. As has been recognized by the European Court of Human Rights on several occasions (see for example The Sunday Times v. The United Kingdom – 63874/97) ECHR I (26 April 1997).

References


Discourse and social communication: the case of “democracy” in the European integration discourse

By Józef Nižnik

Instead of an abstract

During the recent international forum in Cernobbio, the Czech president Vaclav Klaus, known for his notoriously euro sceptical comments suggesting a new name for the integrating Europe said: “Let us change the name: not Union any longer but European States Organization. I believe, the discrepancy between real Europe and political Europe is deepening. European Union suffers serious democracy deficit, therefore, we better change its aims.” Reacting to the Klaus’ proposal, former member of European Commission, Mario Monti responded: “I have an impression, that the citizen of the Czech Republic claim that the Union has reduced democracy. Without the Union your country would not be democratic.”

This episode in the constant debate over the nature of European integration seems to be very instructive for my present task. It shows, first, that it is possible to use the same words and operate within different discourses. Next, it clearly demonstrates that the concept of democracy may play an organizing role in the European integration discourse - it certainly does in the discourse Vaclav Klaus has operated in. And, finally, it makes obvious, that the discourse is not only a matter of communication but is an important part of politics itself. In the current paper I will attempt to develop these observations further suggesting that what has been identified as a “democracy deficit” is in fact the failure of a social communication in the EU. Therefore, I will conclude with the postulate regarding social communication in Europe.

Democracy has become a problem in European integration as soon as this process gained a clear political dimension. Accepted in most of the world as a necessary principle and most desirable practice in the organization of political and social life, democracy has been - in a way - elevated to the position of a "political technology" of our time. In fact “democracy” has come to mean “civilized”, “acceptable”, as opposed to all other “non-democratic” political regimes. This is why autocratic regimes, including totalitarian, communist ones, pretended to be democratic, and even more, to be the only true democracies, that is, “people's democracies” as opposed to “bourgeois democracy”.

That way the idea of democracy became an organizing principle in our thinking about the right political order in any plausible contemporary polity. Although the idea of democracy has been designed and practised mostly in nation-states it has been assumed that it is an obvious, primary condition also in the European Union. I will attempt to inquire whether this assumption is well-founded. The present considerations will focus on the role of language in establishing democracy in this position and on its power to steer human perception and behaviour in the area of politics and within it European integration. It is clear that full awareness of this power of language is needed to make social communication in Europe effective. The results of referenda in France and Netherlands over the European constitution are one of the main objectives of the whole process of European integration. It seems that the last enlargement which brought into the Union Central European post-communist countries had also its impact on this process. After all it was at this occasion that democracy, a tacit principle of political life in Western Europe, became one of the essential conditions for the new countries' membership. Of course, the issue of democracy in the EU has been discussed much earlier but only recently it took a central place in political debates in Europe. In a sense, enlargement increased awareness of a new conceptual environment that has been created by a clash of the ideal of democracy and the process of European integration. Traditional linguistic instruments, sometimes centuries old, when applied to the unprecedented political experiment (as European integration is) made the ambivalences mentioned above especially acute. We tend to miss the fact that although we still use the well known linguistic categories like “democracy”, “sovereignty”, “citizenship”, “state” and others, none of them has preserved its meaning unchanged. In fact each became a part of a completely new discourse, which has not necessarily been recognized sufficiently quickly as new. As never before, social communication and the language used appeared to have direct practical and political significance. This new situation well confirms and illustrates William E. Connolly's observation that discourse “is not a prelude to politics but a dimension of politics itself”.

In this conceptual environment European integration discourse underwent a reorientation which unveiled a troublesome aspect of the issue of democracy in the European Union. Within this discourse the principle of democracy appeared as a practically unsolvable political problem: European Union can either save democracy by expanding its communal, federal tendencies - an option which does not receive enough public support - or maintain the present intergovernmental model of governance, which excludes any chance of a radical improvement of its present decision-making system, which does not receive public support exactly because of the democratic deficit. The network of concepts involved, many of which refer rather to the historical experiences.
of different nations than to the newly emerging common, supranational political entity, does not offer any coherent conceptual instruments. The analysis of the role of the concept of democracy in the European discourse may help to initiate a revision of the very principle of democracy in general or - at least - point out to the need for an alternative design of the whole European integration discourse organized around a different concept.

In order to clarify the above thesis I will have to explain several points. First, the concept of discourse I use and the role of specific concepts in the discourse. It appears that some concepts turn out to be organizing elements of a specific conceptual network. Next, I will discuss the relationship between discourse and political practice. Finally, I will move to the European integration issues discussing the place of the concept of democracy in the political discourse involved.

1. The concept of discourse has been widely used in different disciplines of social sciences and humanities in a number of meanings. Also, there are numerous methods of discourse analysis. In the present study I understand discourse as a network of concepts, which are semantically linked and together reflect the way in which a specific object of reflection is grasped in social communication. In most cases discourse is expressed in the form and meaning of complex linguistic messages and seems to be responsible for the general structure of sense that determines ways of apprehension of reality including its social and political practice. “The language of politics is not a neutral medium that conveys ideas independently formed - suggests William E. Connolly - it is an institutionalised structure of meanings that channels political thought and action in certain directions.” Institutionalised structure of meaning is exactly what makes the set of concepts - a discourse; an interlinked conceptual network which appears to the language users as a condition imposed on them from outside.

Michel Foucault is one of the authors whose contributions to the theory of discourse seem the most useful for our present area of study, although it is clear that some of the details of his theory go beyond my present approach. But European integration offers excellent illustrations supporting some of the basic assumptions of Foucault's Archaeology of Knowledge. One of them is the problem of continuity and the lack of continuity, the problem with which Foucault starts his discussion of “the unities of discourse”. European integration is certainly a case of a break in a certain continuity, a continuity which used to be reflected by the evolution of a political form of states and relations between them. In consequence, European integration also breaks the continuity of specific political discourse, something that should be followed with a revision of our conceptual apparatus, with a break in a certain continuity; a continuity which used to be reflected by the evolution of a political form of states and relations between them. In consequence, European integration also breaks the continuity of specific political discourse, something that should be followed with a revision of our conceptual apparatus, with a break in a certain continuity; a continuity which used to be reflected by the evolution of a political form of states and relations between them. In consequence, European integration also breaks the continuity of specific political discourse, something that should be followed with a revision of our conceptual apparatus, with a break in a certain continuity; a continuity which used to be reflected by the evolution of a political form of states and relations between them.

2. Our object of interest in this text is European integration understood both as a process of political transformation in Europe and as social and psychological changes caused by this process. In fact this is how European integration is usually apprehended in writings and discussions on popular perceptions of European political reality. Therefore, I will take into consideration - first of all - common thinking, which is usually expressed in the every day application of political ideas in communication by members of society but to a great extent also in the language of journalists and politicians. Theoretical reflection on European integration, including a variety of “theories of integration” in most cases appears to be a case of theorizing ex post, in which already accomplished integration is being analysed and explained. The discourse involved is made up of many concepts which are constitutive for the political life of contemporary societies. But each of these concepts has its origins, history and its own place in social consciousness. Some of them - like the concept of power - are mostly an instrument of description, while others - like the concept of sovereignty - function in social consciousness mostly as a value; moreover as a value which is autonomous and fundamental. Although all are susceptible to a continuous evolution of their meanings, this fact in most cases escapes attention of the average user who acquires those concepts in a process of socialization and accepts them as a part of reality. Such “inertia of concepts” is usually empowered by tradition, mythology and literature. Our present area of interest is close to the field which has been called by Terence Ball a “critical conceptual history”. However, there is at least one difference. Ball is fascinated by the relationship between the institutions of public life and the understanding of basic concepts of politics; he believes that evolution of institutions leads to the changes in meaning of given words as in his example of the institution of a state and the concept of power. He seems less interested in the changes of politics which are so much faster and - in addition - unprecedented, that the concepts used to describe them are unable to reflect the essential difference in political reality. And this is exactly the case of European integration. There is no doubt, that also in this case the
changed political reality of Europe will slowly transform connotations of the concepts used in political language, sometimes already for centuries. But before that moment comes both the theory and the practice of politics have to face the inertia of meanings that have been inherited from the past. So far this situation is the source of a troublesome inadequacy of European integration discourse and of the political process that goes on in integrating Europe. The problem with democracy in the EU is part of it. Observation of the political behaviour of people who are directly embraced by European integration allows us to see that a successful process of integration requires changes that go beyond material, legal and institutional spheres. As important, if not more important from the sociological point of view, are the changes in the conceptual environment which constitutes political discourse. Significance of this environment is especially clear when taking into consideration some of the distinct features of European integration.

First, European integration is to a great extent the project of elites who have a continuous task to attract to their idea “the masses”. At the bottom of this view there is an assumption that the masses have not much to say and, therefore, the whole process has failed to observe the principles of democracy. Second, some aspects of the process of integration have become an object of electoral rhetoric which does not care about clear language or the meanings of basic concepts. On the contrary, from the semantic point of view some concepts may be consciously used in a wrong way if such a step happens to be instrumental for political aims. Quite often politicians or journalists refer to meanings that are established in the social consciousness even if they know that those meanings are inappropriate for the description of the contemporary social and political processes. Third, many of the concepts, essential in any political discourse, have been created in the remote past and their present applications carry almost inevitable misunderstandings. These three observations indicate a quite specific social dimension of European integration which links the discourse and the substance of this process; it is indeed the case of discourse which is itself politics. These observations are also most relevant when discussing the issue of democracy in the EU and social communication involved. Therefore I will devote now a few more words to them starting with the first one.

3. Like many other theses in the area of European integration the suggestion that this process is elite-driven and by the same token undemocratic, is also debatable. Its opponents point out that after all the whole process is under the control of democratically elected national governments. Supporters, on the other hand, stress that the very idea of democracy has been increasingly becoming an abbreviation for procedures which do not have much to do with the will of “masses”. In general, however, there is no doubt that the elite-masses or elite-public division leads us directly to still more difficult aspects of democracy in the EU. In fact one can say that the idea of democracy can hardly be applied to the European Union. The problem is that all cases of democratic systems known earlier have been applied to states, and were closely linked to their systems of governance. The European Union appears to be an exceptional political entity earlier unknown. In addition to a number of other differences, it tends to assume a uniting system of governance while separate governments of the participating states are in place. Democracy is supposed to be the core principle in both of them but, in both of them this principle seems to be violated by the process of European integration. While the EU is accused of a democratic deficit it constantly gains more and more impact on the legal framework of member states governed within the scheme of parliamentary democracy. The suprenacy of a Union law over national regulations (established by democratic procedures) in effect also limits democracy in all participating nation states. Let us however take for granted the thesis that European integration has been so far accomplished in accordance with accepted democratic procedures. But even then the issue of the role of the political elite remains an important question. Democratic procedures mean that in societies embraced by integration there are two categories of members:

1. Those, who due to their legitimate power are in a position to create political and economic projects that determine the continuity or development of their societies, states or territorial units and

2. Those, who are later subjected to those projects. Among the first group there are members of parliament, leaders of political parties, members of governments etc., in other words - the political elite. The second group is comprised by “the masses” or “the public”. It is true, that decisions of the elite are based on their mandate received in democratic elections. But it is well known, that - for variety of reasons - the opinions of European societies about important issues of European integration differ from the opinions of the political elites of those societies. The idea of the citizen’s engagement that makes the sense of the civil society concept, does not eliminate the problems that have appeared with the elite - public distinction. There are many indications that the conception of civil society in many cases functions as a substitute for participation in decision-making. A variety of nongovernmental organizations, social movements and associations offer a field for action to those who are in need of such activity, but their impact on the political decisions that are made by members of the government is in many cases illusory, or anyway very indirect. Murray Edelman formulated this in a very good way saying that “(i)t is therefore political actions that chiefly shape men’s political wants and ‘knowledge’, not the other way around.” In many cases equally illusory are the control functions of civil society since the different aims and values of different organizations effectively neutralize their real impact on political decisions. Members of the political elite and the public have at their disposal a conceptual apparatus which may be used both to design political conceptions and to transmit them to the public in a process of social communication. In the second case an apparatus based on the possibility of the public to receive political conceptions is put to work. However, such conceptual apparatuses may only appear to be the same in both instances and in reality refer to different discourses. The effectiveness of the link between civil society and “the communicative structure” of society assumed in Habermas’ idea of a deliberative democracy may be very misleading. All institutional innovations in the realm of politics - including the very idea of the European Union - have to be described not only in the language of international treaties but also in language that can be understood by all participants of a common discourse. Usually, when innovations come into being such language already exists. But the authors of those innovations - who, most often are the members of a political elite - consciously or unconsciously modify the meanings of traditional concepts and step by step change the whole discourse. Those changes - however - are not so obvious to the rest of society, that is to the “masses” or “public”. In effect, the elite-masses divide has been reflected also in the mode of participation in a political discourse. Depending on the context political elite may adopt different strategies in its communication with the public: it may either attempt to disclose conceptual modifications or to camouflage them. Also, there is no lack of examples of such uses of political language in which traditional meanings are alternately used with new ones, more adequate to the changed political reality, if such a practice proves to be instrumental for supporting certain arguments. Cases of such behaviour make the division mentioned...
above, that is division between those who create the discourse and those who are only its users (participants), only more evident.

Involuntarily, the whole system of education also contributes to this state of affairs. Education has to refer to certain canons of knowledge which are very resistant to change, and their modification usually requires a long process which inevitably lags behind social or political change. Transmission and internalisation of the meanings of basic elements of political language, and in effect of a certain discourse, goes on in a continuous process of socialization. Therefore, people face political reality, including European integration, with the help of conceptual instruments created in the past for completely different theoretical and practical aims. During the centuries, with the help of those instruments, historical events important for the group have been apprehended, framing the mode of perception of significant areas of social life and a structure of values that have been transmitted from the generation to generation. The current process of European integration has no reference neither in individual experience nor in the collective memory of the European societies. This does not mean, however, that it has not been apprehended conceptually. As Murray Edelman expresses it: “People read their own meanings into situations that are unclear or provocative of emotions.”

Of course, those meanings have their own genealogy and unsettlingly locate new political events and institutions in the familiar contexts known from the past. Hence European integration discourse is far from being a common communication framework for all Europeans. In other words, this may be the most difficult barrier for the emergence of a European public sphere, that is “a space of communication within the EU are fully visible. Most of the participants of the debate over this issue indicate the absence of a European public sphere as the reason for a fundamental ineffectiveness of social communication in the integrating Europe.”

At first glance one tend to believe that deficiencies of communication within the EU are fully visible. Most of the participants of the debate over this issue indicate the absence of a European public sphere as the reason for a fundamental ineffectiveness of social communication in the integrating Europe. Eriksen suggests that “What is missing in institutional terms is the link between institutionalised debates and the general public debate,” pointing out to the gap between the discourse of elite and the public. The problem seems to be even more complicated because public debate is also lacking a coherent frames and its discourse demonstrates confusions and misunderstandings. In part the media could be blamed. It used to be stressed that media in the democratic world are free but we tend to forget that this does not mean that they are unbiased. The media have their share in dividing the public in the European states over a national issues while broader perspective has been most often missed. European public, enjoying so much appreciated cultural and national differences, is very fragmented, and a common space for communication operating within the common discourse does not exist. Also, there is no effective pan-European media, not to mention European Babel tower when it comes to the problems of language. Why, then, should we rely so much on the promises offered by social communication and how to make it a significant factor in European integration?

It is true that - for the reasons mentioned above - at present there is no possibility for effective trans-national European communication reaching all segments of European societies. The greatest part of the problem, however, is social communication in each of the member states of the EU. It appears that no matter how important their cultural, political or historical differences could be communication with the public in all of them have something in common, something that is fundamentally wrong. When it comes to the European matters communication of politicians or more generally, communication of political elites with their public in most cases has not been placed in European but - almost exclusively - in national perspective. In other words, in communicating with the public over European issues, elites in most of the countries refer to the specific national, local controversies and problems as if the European and global frameworks have been completely irrelevant. And this observation is true both for the old members of the EU and for the newcomers. In Central European countries EU requirements have been blamed for many unpopular political decisions. In France, Germany or Austria unfounded but empirically real fears of the public, exploited by the media, have led to the delay of the free movement of the labour force from the new member states.

The most influential tv stations of largest of the EU member states only marginally refer to the European issues in their news programmes. Empirical study made by Fritz Groothues shows that the French France 2 devotes only 2 % of its news to the EU matters and 2 % more to the matters of other member states. In case of BBC 1 it is 3 % in each of these two categories. German ARD looks a little better with 4 % of its broadcasting time to the EU matters and 8 % to the matters of other members states. In new member states the way European integration is presented is sometimes close to disinformation. The reason is clear: people are more interested in their every day life and their closest community than in broader perspectives. Therefore neglecting locally oriented interests of the public would be the fastest way to the political failure of any politician in any of the member states. On the other hand politicians and the media should be responsible for opening the eyes of the public to the clear links between local and global developments. It seems that a radical change of a strategy of communication with the public might bring quite remarkable results. But such change is quite unlikely within nation states.

The lack of global perspective in social communication in European countries affects the contents of the EU’s social constituency, that is “the structure of demands and expectations that citizens and groups place on the EU” and - in effect - deforms the whole perception of the EU. I believe it is the absence of global challenges issue in the political discourse in the member states that led to the social perception of the EU as a system which is external to the nation state. It is hard to find any attempts that would show a very trivial observation that the interest of
every European state - including those who are still beyond the EU - is increasingly tied with the interests of the EU and depends on the further success of European integration. Emerging Asian identity and development of Asian economic and military potential, the threat of terrorism, world ecological instability, demographic decline of Europe, the world economic and financial system founded on the corroded basis - that is an American dollar - to mention just some of the challenges, should be enough to understand that only in unity these challenges can be effectively met by European countries.

European integration discourse is far from being a common communication framework for all Europeans and this may be the most difficult barrier for the emergence of a European public sphere, which is an initial condition for any barrier for the emergence of a European public sphere for communication and information - at present, the PR for Europe is still beyond the EU - is increasingly tied with the use of internet, the medium of an enormous potential which will inevitably continue to develop. However, not without some indications for the possible future actions. First, there is an urgent need for the EU strategy of social communication oriented toward specific priorities. There is no doubt that one of them should be a global challenge. Second, European Union must reach every home and every family in a form of an attractive, commonly accessible TV programme with the possibility of choosing the language of one of the member states. EuroNews offers certain experience, although in its present form it is limited to a very modest information service, its accessibility is also imperfect (only satellite and cable TV) and a choice of languages is incomplete.

There are also urgently needed further works on the use of internet, the medium of an enormous potential which will inevitably continue to develop. I know that very ambitious projects offered within EU 6 Framework Programme (with acronyms: e-Politics and SPEED) has not been accepted mostly because of a very high costs. In the fall of 2005 European Commission started intensive consultations on social communication in Europe and their effect was, first, a document entitled “Plan D for democracy, dialogue and debate”, and next, “White paper on a European Communication Policy” published at the beginning of 2006. The main objective of these actions have been exactly direct communication between citizens and between citizens and public institutions in the EU. It is expected that in effect a European public sphere will develop. The week point of this strategy is - first of all - the lack of conception for actions that would be aimed at overcoming local, party interests, inside member states, which at present are the barriers for perception of the EU in the global context. The main partners of the European Commission, envisaged by this document, supposed to be the governments of the member states.

European Union has to reach every of its citizens despite the costs, and this is a strategic choice that may decide about its future. We need PR for Europe.

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Communicating Europe – The View of a New Member State

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Abstract

Communicating Europe is an initiative to improve communication between European institutions and European citizens, to communicate more effectively about Europe, and to improve the image of the European Union. For many years, it has been felt that something must be changed in the ways that European institutions communicate with European citizens, but only recently was it put on the highest agenda of the European Commission and other European institutions. Some documents proposing new institutional responsibilities concerning communication management were issued and submitted for public debate on various levels. Important responsibilities and obligations are given also to various national players, including national governments. This article outlines the Slovenian government’s approach to communicating about Europe.

Introduction

Communicating Europe is an initiative aimed at improving communication between European institutions and European citizens, to communicate about Europe and for Europe more effectively, an idea which has existed for many years. Many have tried to cope effectively with communication gaps and especially with open criticism. Critics speak of a “faceless” Europe, of EU topics neglected in the mass media, of the gap between EU politicians and policymakers and EU citizens. However, the debate on how to improve the situation has chiefly been restricted to academic or other professional circles. The poor turnout at the last spring elections to the European Parliament in 2004 and the poor response of European voters have shown that people are too little aware of, or too little interested in the role of EU institutions. This was quite a setback, but also a sign that something should be changed. However, the need to communicate differently about the EU with citizens of EU member states became crucially apparent after the French and Dutch “no” at their referendums on the Constitution for Europe. The negative voting showed that there were different perceptions and understandings of the newly enlarged Europe. The Commission, headed by President Barroso, was expected to take radical steps towards changing its communication practices. It happened for the first time in the history of the European Commission that one of the vice-presidents, Ms Margaret Walstrom, was appointed to take charge of the communication portfolio. “A new approach is needed, not only relating to communication, but also regarding the future of Europe as a whole,” she said when she took office. Her task is far from easy or simple. The European Union is a highly complex international system integrating various political, economic, cultural, ethnic, religious and other aspects. Many stakeholders are involved – from all European institutions to member states’ governing bodies, national professional institutions, NGOs and citizens.

From Action Plan to White paper

To better understand what Communicating Europe means in practice, some explanation has to be given of the initiative itself. Communicating Europe as a political initiative to seek better ways of overcoming the gap between European Union institutions and its citizens was launched during the Irish presidency of the EU in the first half of 2004. The European Union was at that time on the threshold of the biggest enlargement in its history, and the need for a new constitution was recognised. The aim to better inform about and engage citizens in the developments in their Union was declared as one of the key objectives of the Irish EU Presidency. Dick Roche, Irish minister for European Affairs, said in his opening address that the conference was meant to “issue a wake-up call to the Union: the EU must develop a more innovative approach to communication with its citizens.”

At the informal ministerial conference in Amsterdam in October 2004, ministers and high representatives of EU institutions continued discussions about how to bridge the gap between the understanding of the local and the European. The European is most often seen as distant, bureaucratic, and difficult to comprehend. Since citizens’ main framework of reference is national or local rather than European, it was concluded that national governments and politicians bear the responsibility for communicating about Europe. After the ministerial conference in Amsterdam, the EC produced three documents to pave the way for numerous multi-level public debates on ways and means for more effective communication, and to create a forward-looking agenda for improved communication within the EU.

Action Plan has set the internal guidelines for the Commission’s communication practices regarding European issues. With this document the Commission seeks to change its communication pattern and behaviour in addressing European matters, and with the assistance of its representational offices, citizens of member states.

In the document, the Commission introduces three vital strategic communication principles: listening to citizens and taking into account their concerns; communicating with citizens, telling them in clear and simple language about EU policies; and connecting with citizens by going local, i.e. addressing people in their national and local settings, and using their favourite media.

After negative voting on the Constitution a reflection period was declared and Plan D – for dialogue, debate, democracy was launched to stimulate a wider debate about the future of the European Union at national and European levels between the European Union’s democratic institutions and citizens. Vice-President Margot Wallström said on its presentation that “...Plan D aims to inject more democracy into the Union, to stimulate a wide public debate and build a new consensus on the future direction of the European Union. The national governments must seize this opportunity to start the debates and to act as a motor for European change.”

A White Paper on Communication Policy was added in autumn 2005 to start a consultation process on the principles behind communication policy in the European Union and areas of cooperation with other European institutions and bodies. The White Paper proposes five areas for joint action. These are:

- defining common principles to guide communication activities on European issues such as the right to information and freedom of expression, an inclusive approach for all citizens, respecting all kinds of diversity and equal participation in communication;
- empowering citizens to provide as many people as possible with access to information and the opportunity to make themselves heard;
- working with the media and new technologies, which means trying to present European issues in the mass media at the European, national and local levels and trying
to exploit the potential of digital technologies such as the internet as new channels for communication;
- combining national and European forces with public opinion research to help to understand the very complex and diverse European public opinion, which reflects different national perspectives;
- by working together, the EC and EP encourage mutual cooperation with EU institutions and national key actors, from national governments to other civil society representatives, in being more active in informing citizens about EU affairs.

In all three documents, the main aim is to establish new methods or to upgrade and enrich current methods of communicating European affairs. But Vice-President Walström is more than confident that "a new approach is needed, not only relating to communication, but also regarding the future of Europe as a whole. Good communication is essential for a healthy democracy."²

Communicating Europe in Slovenia

In this paper we would like to present the government’s communication practices related to European matters, which have been developed in the last decade, and compare them with the recommendations of recently issued EC documents to discover the essential elements for communicating Europe from a member state’s perspective. We are very much aware that Slovenia’s example can be only one of many possible approaches.

For Slovenia, EU membership was one of the most important government undertakings since independence in 1991. Accession was an extremely extensive, complex and far-reaching process, not only for the political elite, but also for the whole society. It was clear from the very beginning that without the broadest understanding of the aims, the necessary changes, consequences and support from the wider public, such a plan could not have been successful. Moreover, the decision that, after the negotiations were concluded, Slovenes would have to decide at a referendum whether they were for or against accession was taken at the very beginning.

Communication about the European Union and EU related matters thus officially started in 1997, when the Government of the Republic of Slovenia entrusted the Government Public Relations and Media Office (PRMO) with the task of preparing a public awareness programme. It was the first public communication programme of this scope and dimension. The communication process was a long-term activity with many objectives, and with a referendum on accession at the end of it. The date of the referendum was not known, but the idea was felt through many years as a great obligation for all who were responsible for communication. The programme was an attempt to include all relevant stakeholders – not only government institutions and politicians, but also important social actors, chambers, trade unions, non-governmental organisations, and the mass media. It was attempted to respect their expectations and needs. In performing these activities, the PRMO also worked with the Delegation of the European Commission and other providers of information on the EU. Within the framework of the information programme, a number of communication tools were developed. Many of these had already been implemented continually for a number of years and thus became important sources of information on the EU for numerous publics.

A year later, the Delegation of the European Commission (DEC) also launched a similar public awareness programme. An information centre, Centre Europe, was opened in Ljubljana in October 1999, and in five years it became an identifiable part of DEC. In addition to Centre Europe, the Delegation of the EC developed a network of EU info-corners (27) throughout Slovenia, in cooperation with municipalities and the Chamber of Economy of Slovenia, and collaborated with EU information stands at various fairs and local events. It also employed a group of Slovenian experts on European questions, the so-called ‘Team Europe’, and cooperated with them at professional presentations and appearances.

The purpose of both programmes was to familiarise the inhabitants of Slovenia with all aspects of the European Union and Slovenia’s accession process, and to raise the general level of awareness and debate on European matters. We are certain that many factors influenced the positive support of Slovenian citizens during the referendum in 2003. But looking back on the complementary programmes, we may also assume that the effects of the two communication programmes were favourably reflected in the high level of support for the referendum. It was not only the success of the referendum, but also the results on the awareness and knowledge about the EU that were favourable. According to data from Eurobarometer research³, the majority of Slovenes perceived their own knowledge of the EU, its policies and institutions as average (5 on a scale of 1-10), but this result was the highest among NMS-10. More than half of Slovenes felt informed enough about the accession of Slovenia to the European Union and about the enlargement in general.

The programmes not only improved public knowledge about the EU and its functions, which was evident from the referendum results, but also helped develop various communication channels and tools⁴ that had not been used before, thus establishing a solid communication infrastructure. This was also the first time we had employed a host of external partners, which enabled us to reach other members of society. NGOs had a particularly significant role.

In order to present a clearer picture of the government’s organisation of, and different approaches to communicating European matters in Slovenia, we first provide an outline of information and communication activities before accession.

Pre-accession Experience

The Government Public Relations and Media Office RS (PRMO) has been responsible for the seven-year programme of informing the public about Slovenia’s accession to the European Union under the slogan ‘Slovenia: at Home in Europe’. The implementation of the communication programme started, symbolically, on 9 May 1998, Europe Day.

The Programme, which in the first three years was co-financed by the European Union Phare programme, consisted of four main components: public opinion research, implementation of the government communications strategy, co-operation with mass media and cooperation with NGOs.

Public Opinion – in favour of accession

The initial research showed that two-thirds of citizens would vote in favour of Slovenia joining the EU in a future referendum. Expectations regarding membership were high; the advantages were mainly seen by the more educated, the young and those employed in the business sector. There were some serious doubts about integration among the less educated, the unemployed and those employed in non-promising economic fields. Residents in rural areas were less well informed and also less clearly decided, i.e. more cautious in their decisions. Although there was very high support for accession, it was also clear that as we drew closer to accession, the percentage of those who believed that EU membership would be the best solution for Slovenia would decrease. With better knowledge of how the EU works, and the consequences of membership, an increasingly objective picture of the situation and, of course, the more negative aspects would emerge.

Therefore, one of the principles of the programme was to present the real picture of how the EU works and the results of Slovenia’s membership, so that excessive expectations during in-
to ensure that this approach in no way interfered with editorial policy. Our task was to propose to the media the possible themes, people to talk to, and suggested that they present the experience of EU members.

The second form of cooperation was dedicated to NGOs. Non-governmental organisations in Slovenia did not have a strong tradition of self-organisation and fund-raising. It therefore seemed even more important to encourage and help them to train their own members and develop informative communication activities regarding both the specifics of their organisations (for instance, consumer or environmental protection organisations) and the most topical economic, political and cultural issues regarding Slovenia’s EU accession. The PRMO co-financed this kind of activity on the basis of yearly public tenders, with an increasing variety of activities. The criteria for allocating funds did not discriminate between ‘pro-European’ and ‘Euro-sceptical’ organisations, but were determined rather on the quality and communication range of the projects applied for. The cooperation was extremely fruitful for both sides. On the basis of public tenders, the Media Office co-financed various informative-communicational and educational activities of NGOs. These functioned as multipliers, thus increasing the communication range of activities in relation to target groups and channels of information. A large network of NGOs dealing with EU topics was developed, not only fulfilling their projects, but more importantly, developing them and enabling cooperation on developing new democratic practices.

Implementation of the communication strategy

The strategy’s main goals were: to raise awareness of all aspects of accession; to explain the full implications of EU membership; to help the understanding of the new rights & benefits; and to prepare citizens for the referendum. In setting the objectives, we first tried to raise interest in the issues discussed and to stimulate an independent demand for information, and to establish a system for providing people with relevant and reliable information. Later, more attention was given to raising the level and quality of public discussions and to increasing public support for EU accession.

Issues such as fears relating to loss of national identity, culture and the Slovenian language, and the fears of farmers losing their position were the most frequently recognised as being the most sensitive among the population. In order to achieve these aims, we established some new techniques and tools. A great deal of attention was given to direct means of communication through which anybody could receive answers to questions. The toll-free telephone line called Eurofon was introduced, giving people the opportunity to pose specific topical questions. People could also use euro-postcards (with EU information and publication order forms), which were available from post offices. A special web site, http://evropa.gov.si, complemented both communication channels. An important part of the programme was the production of free publications, ranging from general publications to brochures covering specific aspects of EU accession or focusing on specific target groups.

A special effort to reach specific groups, the young, farmers, and rural inhabitants, was made. For the young, especially pupils in senior grades of primary schools and junior grades of secondary schools, some ‘infotainment’ publications were issued – web quizzes that encouraged them to seek answers from different sources. For students, a competition for the best diploma theses on the subject of the EU was introduced.

Farmers and the rural population were addressed by publications dealing with the issue of agriculture and reforms in this area, and also by Eurobas, a travelling information office and library, aimed at bringing people closer to EU issues in the environment where they live and work. Audiences such as the business community and interest groups, the trade unions and chambers, were addressed by specific publications, round tables, presentations and conferences. Technical standards, safety at work; the possibility of obtaining funds from EU programmes for which individuals, companies, municipalities, etc. can apply directly, were issues of prime interest to them. We were continually looking for new means of communicating with people and providing them with increasingly specific answers to their questions. In our cooperation with NGOs and the mass media, we were trying to stimulate independent demand for information from different sources, the expression of different opinions, and to launch reasoned public debate. Any unrealistic promises of benefits would simply have been counter-productive.

We were also continually obliged to confront the question of whether the main task of the programme was to inform or to persuade the public with regard to EU accession, and the related issue of the emotional or rational tone of communication. The government’s strategy to date has been based on a rational tone; emotional pressure has been very little used, and only applied where we have tried to motivate people to seek out information. Our aim was to inform and educate the public about EU realities, but as this was conducted as a government programme, it was understandable that we also had to present the government’s standpoint, proposals, activities and programmes.
Results of the programme

The main result was in the outcome of the referendum, which showed 89.61% in favour of accession: 970,422 of voters voted, i.e. 60.29% of voters. Slovenia’s referendum result was one of the highest among all ten new member states. Public opinion results for the support for accession fluctuated between 50 to 60%, and only three times did support fall below 50%.

We also measured and evaluated the results of the various communication activities. To sum up: around 11,000 questions received by Europhone, e-mails, postcards were answered; on the topical web site http://evropa.gov.si between 13,600 to 19,400 web-contacts per month were recorded. 52 different types of publication were issued in around 5 million copies. Eurobus, the travelling information centre which travelled around Slovenia for two years, visited primary and secondary schools, shopping centres, fairs and various events - a total of 322 visits were registered. In encouraging public debate, annual calls for tenders for non-governmental organisations were issued. Within this framework, 540 information-communication projects to a total value of more than 163 million tolar were co-financed by the government.

For the media (local, regional and national), in addition to providing regular information, we organised nine general and specialised seminars, in Slovenia and in Brussels, with visits to European institutions. With the network of non-commercial radio stations, we prepared a monthly half-hour programme called ‘Euro post-cards’. Besides, all the presentations are available replies and publications gathered through the contact centre, providing not only answers to callers and visitors on the website, but sending out replies and publications gathered through ‘Euro post-cards. Besides, all the presentations are in the hands of Europhone. In this way we try to adapt to the needs of the target groups and obtain feedback. We have been going local by organising events across Slovenia, and collaborating with Euro Direct Info Points. There has also been fruitful collaboration with NGOs. For eleven years, the PR and Media Office has published open annual calls for co-financing NGOs projects related to informing, communicating, and educating about European matters, adding its share to decentralising communication.

As a rule, public opinion is favourably disposed towards EU institutions and affairs. In autumn 2004, the Eurobarometer results showed that the Slovenian government reaffirmed in 2004 that it would continue to provide EU-related information and communication activities.

Communicating European matters therefore means continuing the communication activities begun in the pre-accession phase. Besides having a sound tradition of communication in this field, Slovenia has also developed a solid communication infrastructure in recent years. Today there are many more institutions conducting communication services: the Government of the Republic of Slovenia, the Representation office of the European Commission in Slovenia, the European Parliament Information Office, faculties, the media, and various NGOs.

Post-accession Practices

Slovenia joined the European Union in 2004. By becoming a fully-fledged member state, Slovenia thus achieved one of its key foreign policy goals. The accession to the EU has had a number of practical effects on the work and life of the inhabitants of the country; therefore providing timely, reliable, and complete information remains of crucial importance. The Slovenian government reaffirmed in 2004 that it would continue to provide EU-related information and communication activities.

When setting up a new communication strategy in 2005, we sought to:

- raise the level of understanding and debate among the inhabitants of Slovenia in relation to some relevant issues that were also priority issues of the country, such as the European Constitution, introducing the euro, setting up the external borders of the EU, structural funds and the cohesion fund, the enlargement of the European Union, etc.
- raise the level of understanding of the European Union and the role of Slovenia within the EU (educating the public about the history, institutions, policies, inter-state relations, and the system of decision-making in the EU);
- encourage public debate about Slovenia’s role in the EU;
- ensure current, topical information about the functioning of the EU (and key decisions of Slovenian national bodies in the sphere of European affairs).

When looking for new approaches, we were pleased to find that many communication approaches that are now being recommended in EC communication strategies, such as direct communication, using new technologies, and working with NGOs, were developed and implemented years ago. They have proved successful and they have been retained.

Recommendations by the EC are adhered to in practice through the programme of communicating European matters. We aim to present the practice of informing and communicating EU policies and decisions in various publications and at the website http://evropa.gov.si (the website has been transformed to the EU related information portal), through information-communication campaigns (the introduction of the euro, the Constitutional Treaty, etc.). We retained ‘Europhone’, a telephone hotline, which was transformed to contact centre, providing not only answers to callers and visitors on the website, but sending out replies and publications gathered through ‘Euro post-cards. Besides, all the presentations are in the hands of Europhone. In this way we try to adapt to the needs of the target groups and obtain feedback. We have been going local by organising events across Slovenia, and collaborating with Euro Direct Info Points. There has also been fruitful collaboration with NGOs. For eleven years, the PR and Media Office has published open annual calls for co-financing NGOs projects related to informing, communicating, and educating about European matters, adding its share to decentralising communication.

Also encouraging is the fact that the Representation of the European Commission in Slovenia and the European Parliament Information Office are very actively involved in information and communication efforts. They aim to present their respective institutions in the media to different interested parties, and to other citizens. It is important that they continually present their activities, decisions, views, and European policies. The Government PR and Media Office worked with the institutions before Slovenia’s accession, and has successfully maintained collaboration.
A Recipe for Successful Communication?

We can certainly claim that we possess considerable experience in this field, we have accomplished much. However, it would be mistaken to say that there are no problems, and that the image of European institutions has become clearer, or that understanding of European policies has improved. Nevertheless, it remains an indisputable fact that it is indeed difficult to make these matters appealing to the general public. Let us provide two examples: the response of Slovenes to the European Parliament election in 2004, and the communication campaign accompanying the adoption of the European Constitutional Treaty. Apparently, people are more interested in matters that concern them directly when there is a clear option of pointing out “what is in it for me”. Less than six months after the referendum on joining the EU, the turnout at the European Parliament elections was a mere 28.3 %. The Slovenes obviously did not understand what is “in it” for them. Among the reasons for the poor result, Slovenes stated lack of confidence in politics (19 %), lack of interest in politics (13 %), and lack of interest in European matters (10 %). These were the first such elections, and subsequent discussions led to the conclusion that people were more concerned about what the candidates would do for Slovenia, and not so much for Europe. The European Parliament Information Office in Slovenia opened in 2003, and at the time of the elections, could not reach enough people. The Slovenian government refrained from launching direct communication activities supporting the European Parliament elections.

Another example is the support for the European Constitutional Treaty. According to research in Slovenia, the Slovenian public was favourably disposed towards the ratification of the Treaty. Also, according to Eurobarometer (EB 62, Dec. 2004), Slovenes were second only to Belgians in expressing support for the Treaty (80 %). As many as 54 % of respondents of a Polibarometer survey agreed that the Treaty should be ratified in the National Assembly. But on the other hand, 74 % of respondents claimed they knew little or nothing about the document. Is this blind trust or pragmatism?

In support for the European Constitutional Treaty, PRMO has drawn up a special communication programme, and endeavoured to bring the issue closer to people through various channels: a topical publication, an expert telephone hotline and section on the website, public discussions and presentations, collaboration with the media, and by co-financing NGO projects. Experience has shown that those who already knew a great deal about the issue also expressed the most interest in it, whereas the remainder failed to respond to a host of initiatives for discussions. In February 2005, the National Assembly ratified the Constitutional Treaty. After that there was not much interest for further discussions. The question remains as to what the result would have been if there had been a referendum. However, the story is far from over; and the discussion will need to be revived when the matter of Constitution resurfaces on the European agenda in the future.

How do people see the EU two years after accession? A study conducted by Aragon shows that 59.7 % of Slovenes would still vote to join the EU if a referendum were held. Among the most positive aspects of living in an EU member state were the association with the EU, better opportunities for studying abroad, freedom to cross state borders, and employment opportunities in some member states.

The adoption of the euro, scheduled for 1 January 2007, is also enjoying considerable support. According to the topical Flash Eurobarometer, Slovenes feel the most informed about the euro (80 %) among the new member states, with the highest rate being among those who have seen euro banknotes and coins (95 %, 90 %) and used them (84 %, 83 %). Slovenes see a lot of benefits (on a personal level and country level), but also fears. The proportion of respondents expressing fear of being abused and cheated on prices during the changeover has been increasing since 2005.

Since mid-2005, a communication campaign has been under way. It is organised by the Government of the Republic of Slovenia and the Bank of Slovenia in collaboration with the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of the Economy, the Bankers’ Association of Slovenia, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia, the Chamber of Craft of Slovenia, and the Slovene Consumers’ Association. The fact that the European Commission (DG ECFIN) and the European Central Bank are included in the campaign also has an important role in communicating with the public.

Now, towards the end of the campaign, interim public opinion surveys show that more than 80 % of respondents have enough information on the introduction of the euro. Their main fears are still price abuses and price increases, so respondents express the need for more information about measures against unjustified price rises (62.3 % – June 54.5 %), rather than about the tolerance range rate (22.6 % – June 25.9 %) or rounding-off rules (19.6 %). It is interesting that, when asking about the most favoured distributors of information in Slovenia, consumer associations act as one the most reliable sources, following the Bank of Slovenia and European institutions.

Examples show that people find it easier to follow topics, which are relevant to our field of work and everyday life. Unfortunately, not all European matters fall into this category. Some find it hard to get media coverage, and if they fail, they will be more unlikely to reach the general public. The question is, how to secure wider media coverage for European matters relevant to Slovenia, and make them more familiar. Journalists covering European affairs sometimes comment that their own editors reduce the space available for EU coverage, as domestic issues always come first. Also, competent ministries do not always respond to decisions reached in Brussels appropriately; they fail to follow European policies closely as part of their regular activities. How long will it be before we realise that on the day we joined the EU, European affairs actually became domestic affairs?

Of course, with Slovenia’s EU presidency approaching, there will be new opportunities for in-depth comprehensive approaches towards communicating European matters. Slovenia will assume this task in the first half of 2008 as the first among the new member states. Preparations have been under way since December 2004. Among other things, Slovenia needs to draw up a presidency programme, and a communication and promotional programme, organise the necessary logistics, employ human resources, and ensure funding for the project. The presidency will also be a great opportunity to strengthen communication activities regarding various European matters. The Government PR and Media Office and competent ministries have been actively preparing for this task.

But before that, we must successfully navigate through the year 2007, which will be marked by preparations for the presidency and the fiftieth anniversary of the Treaty of Rome. We seek to collaborate even more closely with the Delegation of the European Commission in Slovenia, and the European Parliament Information Office. Slovenia will probably be one of the first countries to consider the Commission’s proposal to adopt one of the forms of strategic partnership in communicating European matters and designing new initiatives and approaches.

We believe that there is no single recipe for communicating European matters. Every member state can, and should in accordance with its capabilities, competences and potential, develop communication strategies which seek to reflect expectations on the one hand, and needs on the other. In addition, communication must be con-
Communicating Europe − The View of a New Member State

Endnotes

1 Nada Serajnik Sraka is senior communication consultant in PR and Media Office, Government of Slovenia


3 Opening Address conference: Communicating Europe: Building a Bridge between Union and its Citizens, 7 April 2004

4 Action Plan to improve communicating Europe by the Commission SEC (2005)985 - 20/07/2005

5 The Commission’s contribution to the period of reflection and beyond Prio-D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate, COM (2005) 494 final


7 From Ms Walström’s website: see http://ec.europa.eu/commission_barroso/wallstrom/communicating/communicating_en.htm#pland


9 The Public Awareness Programme was the first comprehensive national campaign conducted by the Government PR and Media Office, which first employed communication tools such as the “Europhone”, “Eurobus”, “Euro post-card”, and a special web site, all still active today. The communication programme of the EC Delegation featured very successful town-hall meetings, while Center Evropa in Ljubljana became the most important information centre for European matters.

10 i.e. ‘Evropopotnica’ - a concise, clear and simple presentation of the structure and functioning of the EU, EU policy members states and candidate-countries. The publication also contains questions and games, which stimulate children to search for answers and correct solutions.


12 Since 2005, six Europe Direct Info Points, which are part of a broader European network, have been opened in Slovenia. The Info Points are aimed at decentralising communication and obtaining feedback from local environments.


15 In the publication we tried to present in the simple manner what the Constitution brings to the individual to Slovenia and to European Union. The publication was sent to all 760,000 households in Slovenia. Italian and Hungarian translations of the publication were sent to the representatives of the respective ethnic minorities.

16 A public opinion survey conducted two years into Slovenia’s EU membership D Aragon, April 2006 - http://www.kpv.gov.si/slo/novinarsko_sredisce/javnomnenjske_raziskave/


19 Flash Eurobarometer, Introduction of the Euro in New Member States, July 2006
Is Europe a communication problem?

By Cees J. Hamelink

According to Greek mythology Europa was abducted by the Olympic boss Zeus; she never fully recovered.

As Margot Wallström at a recent EP seminar observed: Europe has an identity crisis and wonders: “Who am I? Where am I going? Why is it that nobody loves me?” This identity crisis is caused by what I call a clash of imaginations!

From the outset different imaginations of Europe were on a collision course and it needed the French/Dutch rejection of the Constitution to bring this dramatically home!

The European project as it emerged after the Second World War was inspired/motivated by the 17th century heritage of the Peace of Westphalia: the imagination of European peace and by the 19th-century heritage of Victor Hugo: imagination of the United States of Europe that could overcome 200 years of conflict.

Now, where did this imagined community get into trouble? Let me explore three analytical considerations.

a. The creation of a European community was largely based upon the 19th-century conception of the nation-state; the basis of the nation-state had to be “integration”; there had to be a common language (as John Stuart Mill argued) and shared religious and cultural values. In the reality of the 20th century with its multi-states, made up of indigenous tribes + strong diaspora communities with multiple identities and cross-border loyalties, the integration mould made increasingly less sense.

b. There was all the time as a source of inspiration also the 17th century heritage of Thomas Hobbes who provided the psychological portrait of Europeans as atomistic individuals who are driven by the desire to increase wealth, power and prestige. When the founders of the European project began to implement their imagined community they set out to build an economic, monetarist order on Hobbesian grounds. This turned out to be a social order that breaks down fundamental relations of solidarity among people.

c. As the elite was working towards the realisation of its imagined community, the ordinary European stood to be accused of lack of interest in the project. But was and is there political apathy among Europeans. In order to see this clearly one has to distinguish between “indoors” politics - the politics of the institutions - and “outdoors” politics. “Outdoors” politics is like the informal economy in poor countries: a space of enormous vitality, creativity and innovativeness but without an institutional frame of governance. This is the politics of movements such as Attac, the European Social Forum, the Conference of European Churches, or Kairos. Outdoors politics has actively campaigned against the kind of European project that was imagined by the European Constitution! Outdoors politics is motivated by the imagination of Europe as an inclusive community in which people sustain relations of solidarity, and European Churches, or Kairos. Outdoors politics has actively campaigned against the kind of European project that was imagined by the European Constitution! Outdoors politics is motivated by the imagination of Europe as an inclusive community in which people sustain relations of solidarity.

If you have a serious personality disorder; an identity crisis bordering on schizophrenia; would you go see a spindoctor or would you consult a psychiatrist?

The European project by and large preferred the communicators over the shrinks.

It is a common reaction to trouble: blame it upon inadequate information and communication. Try to deploy mind management techniques, various forms of strategic brainwashing, mass media information and of late even have recourse to the public dialogue.

Interesting to see how in the Netherlands the politicians that had supported the Constitution immediately suggested that the Dutch had been inadequately informed and had little understanding of what was at stake. “If only people had been better informed they would have made the better choice.” This belief in the power of information is strongly expressed in various European policy documents, such as the 1984 Green paper “TV without Borders”: where it reads that information is the decisive factor in European unification; a European identity will only develop if Europeans are adequately informed; there is an almost linear progression from information - to common identity - to a collective will. The media are evidently essential in this process (TV as the common language that Europe needs, as French president Mitterand suggested) and convenient and already outdated deterministic hypodermic needle media theories and McLuhan-esque beliefs in transborder powers of the media were embraced with great excitement.

It is obviously a comforting thought that by now there is a progression from such naïve constructions to the conviction - albeit still not widely shared - but suggested in the White Paper - that Europe should move from information to communication and engage in the exercise of listening to its citizens.

However, one should not too easily embrace the dialogical mode as the new panacea. There is a great deal of obstacles to overcome before Europeans can engage in meaningful dialogue.

• There is a great differential in the capacity to take part in a dialogical process - there are different levels of communicative capital among European people.

• The proponents of discursive methods such as Jürgen Habermas always seem to conveniently gloss over the possibility of radical disagreement; there are situations in which people do not want to be communicated with.

• Then there is the reality of unequal power relations in all European societies; and it is very questionable whether one should advise the powerless to dialogue with the powerful, given the empirical evidence that the dialogue between unequals tends to be to the disadvantage of the less powerful.

• One should also be careful to note that interactive processes do not necessarily unite people, they can also be very divisive!

To sum up:

• To deploy better perception management techniques or better campaigning methods amounts to the risky business of “brainwashing”, which easily violates the fundamental human right to freedom of thought.

• To provide better information is undoubtedly necessary but there is no easy guarantee of success. Research informs us that the belief that better information leads to better choices is a fallacy. Research informs us that the belief that better information leads to better choices is a fallacy. Research informs us that the belief that better information leads to better choices is a fallacy. Research informs us that the belief that better information leads to better choices is a fallacy. Research informs us that the belief that better information leads to better choices is a fallacy. Research informs us that the belief that better information leads to better choices is a fallacy. Research informs us that the belief that better information leads to better choices is a fallacy. Research informs us that the belief that better information leads to better choices is a fallacy.

• To engage in dialogue is destined to fail in unequal power relations.

• In any case, seeing Europe primarily as a communication problem ignores the roots of the European crisis.

For all its shortcomings the European Constitution did us the favour of articulating in clear language what Europe should be: a project guided by neo-
liberal economic and monetarist politics. Here we saw the fundamental clash between the imagination of an inclusive community with the imagination of a community managed according to neo-liberal principles such as free market, competition. Neoliberalism creates two categories of citizens through among others its privatisation policies: those who can pay for social services and those who cannot. And as the chairman of Daimler Chrysler recently noted: “The weak people will have to change or they will die!”

The EC wants to constitutionalize a political choice that divides European citizens into winners and losers. Europe already has a growing number of second-rate citizens whose only power it is to refuse to be integrated in a political-economic order that excludes them! Europe is primarily a moral problem! A problem of moral choice: is the moral choice for neo-liberalism (the imagination of a free and competitive internal market where social choices are subject to market fundamentalism and many of the solidarity services are seen as incompatible with the internal market; the Constitution does not recognize the right to a pension) defensible? Is the ideological choice one for a society that divides people into winners and losers, and is a choice that implies a non-inclusive structure - unable to bring about a community to which all belong - defensible? My answer is: as long as the European region remains trapped in a fundamentalist neo-liberal economic, monetarist and political ideology there will not be a community to which all can belong, feel to belong or want to belong!

Could the European problem of moral choice in the end still be a communication problem? Jack Lang once suggested that Jean Monnet had said “if I had to do it all over again I would start with culture.” What if we exchanged “culture” for “communication”?

The argument could be that we need to search for a collective imagination of a Europe that takes the values of the preamble of the European Constitution seriously. In the rest of the text these values are systematically undermined but they are there: social market economy, equality, solidarity!

This needs a “collective inquiry.” Where better to begin than with what I would like think of “United Kids of Europe”.

Why the kids? In the creation of collective imaginations on the national level - in most countries - the schools were probably more important than the media! If Europe has to be seen as a community of solidarity; a community one would want to belong to, we need to begin with the school kids and their exploration and discovery of a different Europe. The project could select schools from all the member countries; provide these schools with a sort of tool-kit to get the children started. Work with teachers to design basic materials. Use Internet connections to let the kids communicate with their peers in other countries about the future of Europe.

Why are we as professionals needed in this inquiry?

1. To help design forms of cross-border, cross-ethnic, and cross-cultural modes of information exchange, conversation, and campaigning.
2. To create support for this effort; spaces and materials; publicity.

Can the kids be helped through a European Communication Policy?

The key problem of European communication policy-making has always been the ambiguity of the free communication market versus identity politics. Intervention in the information/communication market risks to violate the free trade principle and refraining from intervention risks to violate the identity principle.

An additional problem is the tendency among European institutions to direct, order, or prohibit. However, a European Communication Policy should not be interventionist, but should be invitational. It should be an inspirational text that invites Europeans to share an imagination of a community that is worth and fun belonging to; It should invite Europeans to support and join the children’s discovery of a European future shaped by solidarity, equality, justice.
Communicating Europe: Who, How, Why?

By Antonia Carparelli

I would like to thank the organisers of the Bledcom Symposium for inviting me to address this very qualified audience and for their choice to dedicate this year’s seminar to issues that are at the centre of my current work at the European Commission: democracy, strategic communication and Europe.

The specific theme of this workshop is “Communicating Europe: who, how, why?” and I have been asked to present and discuss my views on these three questions.

If you allow me, I would like to reverse the order of the questions, and start with why? Because I think that we need to answer to this fundamental question to be able to reply to the other two.

Actually, despite the fact that it may appear so obvious in the communication era, this very question has proved very controversial in the debate that has preceded and accompanied the adoption of the European Commission White Paper on a European Communication Policy in February this year.

So why communicating Europe?

The answer that the White Paper gives to this question is very clear. Information and communication on public affairs is a fundamental right of citizens.

In his seminal works on contemporary democracy, Robert Dahl has listed three criteria for inclusion as a citizen: the first is that one’s interests are affected in a significant manner by the decisions of the relevant political body; the second is the possession of the requisite competence to be a citizen, and the third is the feeling of solidarity and trust towards the community.

Information and communication are crucial for the building up of civic competences. Without them, citizens will not be able to participate in political life and to fully exercise their rights.

Today, many decisions affecting citizens’ life are taken at European level. Therefore, citizens must be properly informed about these decisions, to be able to scrutinise them and to make their own judgement about them.

This is how democracies work.

In the beginning the European construction was mainly a foreign affairs dimension, working with the method of diplomacy rather than with the method of democracy. Over time, the European Union has extended its role, entering in virtually all policy areas, from the environmental policy to the consumer policy, to monetary policy, to trade policy, to justice and home affair policy.

However, the transfer of responsibilities by the Member States to the European level has not been matched by the emergence of a working European public sphere. In today’s Europe, the exercise of political rights mainly takes place at national level.

Political rights linked to the European dimension have been introduced, such as the right to elect the European Parliament. However, this has only marginally changed a situation where most civil society structures, education systems, party systems and media coverage are organised to support national forms of democracy.

European issues very seldom play a role in national debates, either in the institutions of government or in civil society. Pan-European debates mostly remain a privilege for élites directly involved in or close to the European institutions.

Citizens have become aware that an increasing number of decisions are shaped at a European level and that these decisions deeply affect their daily life. People are more than ever interested in political issues, although this is not expressed through traditional political channels.

However, public spaces for debating, scrutinising and influencing EU policy making have not been sufficiently provided, neither at national nor at supranational level. A European political culture is still not in place, and this generates a sense of alienation from “Brussels”.

The Eurobarometer surveys that the European Commission regularly runs on large samples of population in all European countries give a clear indication of the “communication gap” between Europe and its citizens. People feel that they are not adequately informed about European affairs, and they express a clear demand to know more, to understand more and to have a say.

So, to summarise, why communicating Europe?

Because citizens ask for it. Because it is their right to be informed and to be listened to. Because the European construction will not be sustainable unless it is fully legitimated as a democratic project, based on people’s support and ownership.

If the objective of communicating Europe is to implement a citizens’ right, to involve people in the making of the European construction, then it is not too difficult to see how communication about Europe should change.

So far, the European debate has only involved a small elite of people or selected interest groups. The channels, the subjects, the language, were all tailored on the elitist nature of the European communication.

All this is no longer sustainable. So we need to change the channels, the language, and also the subjects.

Let’s start with the channels. Today, European issues are only well covered in some specialised magazines or newspapers, like the Financial Times; they are in some measure covered in national opinion leading daily press, although mainly from a national perspective; much less so in popular newspapers and magazines. Europe is almost absent in local press and it is blatantly absent from television, which is the channel to which the overwhelming majority of people use to get information.

European decision-makers are unknown to the large majority of citizens. As someone has put it - Europe is faceless. I would add that Europe is also very often voiceless. We frequently see national politicians blaming Brussels when things go wrong - we call "the blame game". But we almost never see European political leaders reacting and responding. European decision makers are almost never on television. Again, Eurobarometer surveys clearly indicate that most people get and want to get information on public affairs through television: from news, interviews, talk shows, face-to-face confrontations.

The subjects that are covered are mainly those that are central economic subjects, despite the widening of the European political agenda. Even when Europe decides on issues that will have a significant impact on citizens’ life - for example...
the opening of markets to trade with China - this is very little reflected in media, and people only realise that certain decisions have been made when unexpected impacts become visible .... In general, there is still too little effort to understand what is relevant for citizens and too much focus on what is important for the institutions.

The language reflects the audience of the media that are usually targeted - so still an elite - but it also reflects the long-standing habit of EU institutions to use the jargon and the style of a technocracy, mainly addressing experts and little used to enter in direct relations with citizens ... and sometimes deliberately aiming at a certain degree of ambiguity, to avoid controversies and facilitate compromises.

But there is another dimension that is very important in this context, and has to do with the way communication is "framed", to use a word that is certainly familiar to you. The European institutions devote a fair amount of resources to release information to the public in line with the traditional prescriptions of institutional communication: as much as possible factual, balanced, neutral.

However, people are interested in information that allows them to form their own opinion, information that solicits reactions and debate. People want to be presented with options and alternatives. Because comparing alternatives and their likely consequences is the best way to develop "civic competences". Arguments and controversies are essential for civic participation. This is what is largely missing in the European discourse. We never see, on television, lively confrontations of opinions on issues that are high on the European agenda. Even during the political campaigns for European elections, the debate is mainly focused on national issues and gives very little space to pan-European challenges.

So to summarise on how the media people use, mainly television, on the subjects that are relevant to them, in a language that citizens can understand, in a manner that confront people with different options and engage them in a real debate.

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Third and last question, who should communicate Europe to citizens?

One can answer to this question from a normative point of view - who is responsible for communicating Europe? Or from a functional point of view - who is best placed to communicate Europe?

I will take the normative angle first and I cannot resist the temptation to give an answer that may sound a bit provocative.

The point is that nobody is formally responsible for communicating Europe. There is no obligation, neither in the EU Treaties nor in national laws, to inform citizens on EU affairs. Communication activities have been carried on by EU institutions, and mainly from Brussels, on the basis of what is called their "institutional prerogative". This means that the Commission, the European Parliament and the Council are of course "entitled" to inform the public about their activities, but this is not an obligation and there are no principles or rules to guide the institutions in the implementation of this task.

In the current division of competences between EU and Member States, as enshrined in the Treaties, education as well as information and communication are in the remit of Member States. However, information on European affairs has never been high on the agenda of Member States.

Communication on European affairs has been, to some extent, nobody's land, and this is reflected in the communication gap that risks undermining the very future of the European project. Therefore, one of the conditions to seriously address the communication gap is a clear recognition of communication as a public service mission and a clear attribution of responsibilities as regards the provision of this service. Who would be best placed to communicate Europe? In principle, European politicians and representatives of the institutions have the best insight and tools to communicate about European issues. I would add that this should be a primary concern for European politicians, if they have to be accountable and responsive to citizens. However, compared to national politicians, European politicians are often less known to the large public and this is probably the main reason why people feel that it is rather the responsibility of national politicians to keep them informed about Europe. Local politicians and actors are also in a very privileged position to involve citizens in a real debate, due to their proximity and to the possibility to assess and explain how policy developments at European level impact on local life. And, of course, citizens' information and involvement in political life depends very much on the role of the media, the political and civil society organisations, the educational structures in a broad sense.

In other words, closing the "communication gap" on European issues requires the mobilisation of plurality of actors at European, national and local level. It requires a common commitment to give sense and substance to the concept of "European citizenship". The real question, therefore, is how to create this commitment.

The Commission White Paper on a European Communication Policy intends to respond to this question. This leads me to the second part of my contribution to this conference, which deals specifically with the White Paper.

Democracy, strategic communication and Europe: The Commission White Paper on a European Communication Policy

The White Paper on a European Communication Policy intends to open a new chapter as regards communication between the EU and its citizens. It announces what should be the directions for change:
  - from monologue to dialogue;
  - from an institution-centred communication to a citizens' centred approach;
  - from Brussels based communication to a decentralised approach;
  - from an instrumental concept to a democratic concept of communication;
  - from an accessory tool to a real European policy, with equal dignity with other EU policies ("a policy in its own right").

To start this new chapter in the communication policy, the Commission proposes to agree on a set of common principles, which could be enshrined in a citizens’ Charter or in a Code of conduct.

This would be the basis to establish the legitimacy of a European communication policy. Let me be explicit. Today the European Commission is sometimes confronted with allegations that it is entering in areas where it has no competence, or that is using public money for self promotion or that it just issuing propaganda.

Establishing clear principles for public communication is a precondition to dispel these allegations. Only if we acknowledge that citizens have a fundamental right to fair, relevant and accessible information, that they have a right to be heard, and that it is a public mission to make sure that these rights are implemented, we will lay down the foundation for a communication policy at the service of democracy.

Another crucial point is the first appearance, in a European Commission document, of the concept of a European public sphere, which basically means a developed European political culture, diverse European
media, meeting places for European citizens.

To sum up, the White Paper aims at a communication policy which allows citizens to be really involved in the definition and the construction of the European project.

Defining common principles is the first of five “work areas” that are identified in the White Paper.

The second work area the White Paper proposes is called empowering citizens, and suggests three ways forward:
(i) to work more together on civic education, exploring innovative methods and approaches;
(ii) to connect citizens with one another, by establishing new meeting places;
(iii) to better connect the citizens with the institutions through public consultations, real openness and responsiveness.

The third area in which the White Paper proposes working concerns the media and new technologies. So, not only the press, radio and TV but also the Internet. The media landscape has dramatically changed over the last decades and we are faced with a highly evolutionary and competitive context of the media sector. To rise to the new challenges, a variety of answers must be offered, ranging from the supply and support of high quality content to new forms of partnership with public broadcasters, cooperation with private media operators, new links with regional and local communication systems and a pro-active use of new technologies. Of course, all this in full respect of the principle of media pluralism and independence.

The fourth working area is about understanding public opinion. One of the major challenges for European policy makers is to deal with the diversity and the complexity of the European public opinion. Citizens’ views on any issue can vary quite dramatically from one country or region to another.

The European Union has been a front runner in developing modern tools - such as the Eurobarometer surveys - for analysing European public opinion, and the White Paper gives suggestions and invites a debate on how the institutions could enhance the use of these tools in the democratic process.

Finally, the fifth area for joint discussion and work is how to mobilise all relevant actors, or how to do the job together. There are several questions that arise in this context. For example:
• How can the EU institutions work together more effectively and do more to decentralise their efforts?
• How can EU governments cooperate more closely with one another and with ’Brussels’ on informing and consulting citizens?
• How can national parliaments be better involved in the EU policy processes?
• Local and regional authorities are well placed to engage in real dialogue with citizens: how best can they channel the views of local communities to the Brussels policy-makers?
• What more can political parties and NGOs do to raise public awareness of European issues and stimulate public debate?

There are no ready-made answers to these questions, although the White Paper does provide some preliminary suggestions on the way forward.

I am saying suggestions rather than proposals because the main purpose of the White Paper is to generate a real debate, to invite the stakeholders to come up with ideas and solutions, to create ownership of the European communication policy. I would like to underline that this is the first time that such a consultation takes place, and the method in itself intends to be an illustration of the “new course” in the European communication policy.

The public consultation process will be over in September. Stakeholder conferences will be organised in the autumn to elaborate on the results of the consultation. By the end of the year we will also have the complete set of reactions from the other EU institutions and bodies: the Parliament, the Council, the Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of Regions. Several Member States have also sent their individual contributions.

On the basis of all these different inputs, the European Commission will prepare a report which will draw conclusions and present concrete proposals. The Commission intends to live up to its commitment to address the “communication gap” with citizens as a matter of priority.

But, let’s be clear: this is not something that will happen overnight! It has taken decades to build the single market - and it is still work in progress! It will not take any less to give shape to the vision of informed and active citizenship which is implicit in the White Paper.

I would like to conclude my intervention with the most inspiring quote I have found on communication. It comes from John Dewey’s book on Democracy and Education:

“Society […] may fairly be said to exist in transmission, in communication. There is more than a verbal tie between the words common, community, and communication. Men live in a community in virtue of the things which they have in common; and communication is the way in which they come to possess things in common. What they have in common in order to form a community or society are aims, beliefs, aspirations, knowledge - a common understanding. […] The communication which ensures participation in a common understanding is one which secures similar emotional and intellectual dispositions - like ways of responding to expectations and requirements.”

I believe this quote could well serve as a “manifesto” for a new European communication policy.
European Union on its (shaky) way towards our hearts

by Anže Logar, M. Sc.

On 1st May 2004, Slovenia acceded to the future major player in the global political and economic market - the European Union. Thus the theory: In March 2000, the leaders of the then EU-15 met in Lisbon and pledge to the citizens: “we will make the European Union the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion, including improved living conditions for the EU citizens.

This document makes public the commitment of the European political elite to ensure sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion, including improved living conditions for the EU citizens.

The Lisbon Strategy embodies the ambitious objectives of the heads of states who agreed that one country alone can never be as efficient as joint and coordinated efforts of more countries together. Joint projects have been launched in five main areas: education, internal market, business environment, labour market, and sustainable environment protection. The European Commission laid down in its report “Studies and simulations, conducted by the Commission, have concluded that the simultaneous and integrated pursuit of Lisbon reforms brings the GDP growth potential for the Union of approximately 0.5 - 0.75 percentage points over the next 5 to 10 years (COM (2004) 29 final: 2).”

The European Union - global player of the 21st century?

Comparing the present EU with the Community as it was in the period of its establishment, we can claim, without having any bad conscience, that it is a success story. A story that in 50 years succeeded to convert a divided continent, devastated by the Second World War, into a closely united community of 455 million people who live together in a peaceful cohabitation and with a high degree of democracy.

The times change.

The original motive for integration of Europe is gradually fading away with those generations who witnessed the Nazi terror and war destruction in European capitals. Europe has become economically successful; its citizens have been living in peace and welfare for decades, therefore, people and particularly politicians have started to slowly forget the bad experience from the past. While the statesmen in the past were ready to sacrifice a part of country’s sovereign rights in order to achieve higher goals of the Community, the situation today is quite reverse. More and more often they seem to think that the Union too much dictates their internal political activities.

Does this mean that the statesmen reconsider the “exaggerated zeal” of their predecessors who, in their desire to achieve an ever-closer integration, gradually conveyed more and more political power from the national level to the Community? Or has the management of the Community because of its extended size become so complex that it demands more than the statesmen are willing to sacrifice?

The growing euroscepticism has become rather popular in taking the stance on the future of the Union. At the European Parliament elections in June 2004, first euroskeptics got their seats as MEPs. It was exactly for their anti-EU ideas that they were elected to this European “house of freedoms”. Certain moves can also be perceived elsewhere. For example, at the level of the European Commission as the main advocate of the ever-closer community. Margot Wallström, Vice-President from Sweden, believes that the spread of euroscepticism requires from the politicians to thoroughly reconsider the next steps in the development of the Union. Politicians should show more respect for people and slow down the European integration process. In the European Commission we have to accept the fact that the weight in the decision-making process is being shifted back to the Member States,” is what she said in one of the interviews for Newsweek (Theil 2003: 27).

Such events and publicly expressed doubts cannot remain unobserved in the era of information society. The European citizens are known to be extremely well informed. A success story with cracks showing, then. What, and primarily where, it went wrong?

We live in a time when the quality of a product does not guarantee its success. To the same extent as quality - and sometimes even more - it is important that we know how to sell the product. If, despite the brilliant achievements of the European Union from the past half of the 20th century, the trust into the EU cannot be at least sufficient, something must be wrong with the way how the community is being “sold” to the citizens. There are objective and subjective reasons for this. Allow me to mention just a few of them:

- there is a general decrease of trust in politicians and governments in all modern western democracies;
- the EU’s information and communication strategy has always had more of an institutional and centralized PR dimension than a real citizen-centric “public sphere” dimension;
- there are no genuine EU-wide political parties and therefore any referenda or election with a European dimension will always be seen through a national filter;
- there are no big EU-wide media and national media will look at EU policies only within the context of their national political system;
- the EU’s information and communication strategy has always had more of an institutional and centralized PR dimension than a real citizen-centred “public sphere” dimension;
- the role of national Member States in communicating Europe has always been underestimated.

I can only assume that Margot Walström, Commissioner for Institutional Relations and Communication Strategy, had similar arguments on the table when, upon taking up her duties, she started to shape the new communication strategy of the European Union. Obviously her deliberations were especially incited by the double refusal of the constitutional treaty at the two referenda in France and in the Netherlands. As it is widely known, prior to these referenda, the Brussels political elite pointed out that there was no “Plan B” in case the outcome of the voting would be negative. This proved to be true as the deliberation period has recently been prolonged for another year. However, since October 2005, we do have the Plan, “Plan D”. Mrs Wallström launched the idea of a “Plan D for democracy, dialogue and debate”. The idea is to win back citizens’ confidence in the European project through local and national exercises of listening.

Plan D proposes 13 specific initiatives with altogether 126 measures, which range from straight use of good management to some innovative ideas for further consideration. The intention is to organise and stimulate national debates on EU issues. Why do we need such a Plan B, sorry, D?
Mrs. Wallström said at her presentation (I quote): “Until now, this has been a project for small elite, political elite. That has worked until now. But, has it ever been alive, European democracy?“ It is worth mentioning that this communication strategy came in response to surveys showing that public trust in the EU has fallen, from 50 % in the autumn of 2004 to 44 % in the spring 2005, when the strategy was initiated. At the moment, the public trust is at around 47 %.

But rather than low age, the lack of real action, following strong and repeated signals of discontent from different countries is what should worry us. The “non” and “nexit” only followed the low participation at the 2004 European Parliamentary elections and several others “no” referenda. This made headlines for a few days, refreshed ideas for a few weeks … And what happened then? Nothing. “Business as usual”.

Let’s be sincere. Just as with the Lisbon agenda to become the world’s most competitive knowledge-based society by 2010, the Commission has set itself high ambitions with this Plan D. But nowadays, due to its past performance, it has limited leverage and trust over the delivery capacity. Ultimately, the success of Plan D lies primarily with the national political elites in the Member States. And there is the danger that if this ambition fails, in the end, the Commission will get the blame, as it mostly does when national leaders fail to deliver. National leaders are more and more tempted to use Brussels as a scapegoat for all unpleasant, unpopular measures, while taking the prize for all “stories of success”. One might say that the worst worrisome disconnect at the end is not between the Union and the citizens but between the institutions of the Member States and those of the EU.

Can Plan D with all its preceding and successive documents - Action plan on the communication strategy, White paper on the same topic, A citizen’s agenda for EU - be of any help? In that context we should look a bit further. It is not the sole responsibility of the European Commission to offer a magic key to earn the citizens’ hearts. We should all bear in mind that better Europe means better future for us as well. That’s why I think the role of different think-tanks is crucial to make a loop forward. They bring together intellectuals, outstanding personalities and politicians to offer their invaluable knowledge. Friends of Europe, Breugel Institute, European Ideas Network, BledCom 2006, to mention just some of them …

As long as the EU remains the principal matter of Brussels, it will not gain the popularity. The key to “mainstream” the EU is to make Europe a democratic matter. We should integrate it as a part of national processes. National parliaments should be involved in EU debates. There should be more attention devoted to the training programmes on EU for policy makers and many other solutions that are to a large extent championed in the Plan D.

Second. We are talking about EU political system. This is OK, but for real democracy something is missing. In order to build a functioning and lively democracy, to engage the public interest, we need - an opposition. To win audience, we have to start addressing our citizens with controversial debates that “per se” shape the “pro” et “contra” camp. Because we can come to better solutions only through debates, Pan-European political parties are playing an important role in this process as well.

Third. Strong leadership is required. We need someone with the courage to explain what the future of Europe is, what it means for our children’s standard of life. It must mean something for ordinary people. At the moment, we see rather a technocrat approach concerned more with the process than with what the Commission wants to achieve. We need to spell out much the EU can do for its citizens - that is for “a clean, cleverer and more competitive Europe”. Lisbon Strategy again …

And last but not least - Europe, go local! There is no European public opinion, although Eurostat wants to persuade us to the contrary. We have 25 different national public views and there is only one level to earn the citizens’ approval - the national level. Thinking for 25 countries in Brussels cannot work. Translating information into 20 languages is not communication, even if it is posted on the Europa-website. EU institutions should as well upgrade their national representations in a major way - they could be led by national policy or communication “stars” of the respective country, why not? The commissioners themselves should play a more active role in their countries. The college of commissioners could, for instance, have a meeting each month in a different Member State. That would help the commissioners to understand better each country and its citizens. We could …

… speak for ages about that. What we need is an action. And Slovenia will do its best to take the chance. If not earlier; then in 2008. Slovenia, only recently a candidate country, will preside over the European Union in the first half of 2008. The preparations are underway and the Government Office for European Affairs, the main co-ordinator of the EU affairs is well into the preparation process. The organisational structure has been set - we have the Core Strategic Group led by Prime Minister Janez
Janša, Operational Group led by State Secretary for European Affairs Janez Lenarčič, and five specific sub-groups that all prepare the presidency in particular fields.

Possible priorities are set, but they might vary in the course of future developments. The great majority of posts are already filled with competent experts.

What about our communication strategy? Well, to some extent we face the same problem as the EU. Albeit thorough preparations, we still hear some people questioning our abilities to perform such an important and demanding task. “Can we really do it?”, “Do we have enough staff?”, even “What do we need this for?”, and “How much is this going to cost?” Such questions seem like a reflex which is triggered in us whenever we are faced with major international challenges. However, at critical moments we know how to stand tall, which is why we have achieved so many successes on the international scene in our short history since independence.

Ahead of us lies a real challenge, a new test of maturity, and with it an opportunity to establish Slovenia more firmly with wider recognition in the European and international arena. The task will be anything but easy. There are many problems we can or cannot influence. New geo-strategic or political and security circumstances in the world can quickly thwart our plans. However, these risks are insignificant in comparison to the advantages that presiding over the twenty-seven member states, five hundred million European citizens, offers to our country.

At this stage ahead and especially during the presidency, it is imperative that we all realise the significance of the EU presidency. This is our joint project, which includes the government, the National Assembly, the coalition, the opposition, the media, the business sector and citizens. At the time of our presidency, our every move will be scrutinised by the European public, and every step we take will be measured by European standards. It is therefore important that our presidency is based on national consensus, and carried out with the fruitful cooperation of all stakeholders of Slovenian society. The elections to the National Assembly in the autumn of 2008 must not mislead us into jeopardising the success of Slovenia’s presidency for short-term political gains. Failure would be of absolutely no benefit - either to Slovenia’s citizens, or any political fraction, and even less to our reputation or the EU.

The first half of 2008 provides us with a unique opportunity to prove to ourselves, the European Union and the world, as an established member, our maturity, know-how, and ability to carry out the most responsible tasks for the common good. The fact is that as one of the twenty-seven or even more members of the EU, we are not likely to have a chance to make a “second impression” soon enough.