

# 1 *Introduction*

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The euro crisis has been arguably the most profound crisis in the history of European integration.<sup>1</sup> European Union (EU) and national policy makers have been regularly using references to war and peace, as well as the fate of the EU in general, to point to the severity of the crisis. As German Chancellor Angela Merkel stated: “The euro is our common fate, and Europe is our common future.”<sup>2</sup> Or, to quote EU Commission President José Manuel Barroso: “We will defend the euro whatever the cost.”<sup>3</sup> Core issues of European integration have assumed center stage in the domestic arenas of most member states:

- What should the future of the EU look like? Should the EU move toward a fiscal union that also includes joint economic policies and the transfer of financial support from the wealthier to the poorer member states? How should austerity policies be balanced with policies fostering economic growth in times of deep recession?
- How much “solidarity among strangers” (Habermas 2006a, 76) do Europe and the EU<sup>4</sup> need in times of crisis? Is the “community of Europeans” (Risse 2010) strong enough to sustain fiscal transfers

<sup>1</sup> I thank the participants of the two workshops in Berlin (April 29–30, 2011, and January 13–14, 2012) for their comments. This introduction owes much to Marianne Van de Steeg’s input, which I gratefully acknowledge. I also thank Tanja Börzel and Vera van Hüllen for their critical comments. Support from the DFG-funded Research College “Transformative Power of Europe” is gratefully acknowledged.

<sup>2</sup> December 12, 2010. Available at [www.nytimes.com/2010/12/16/business/global/16union.html?pagewanted=all](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/16/business/global/16union.html?pagewanted=all) (accessed March 10, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> May 8, 2010. Available at [www.welt.de/politik/ausland/article7536673/Die-dramatische-Notoperation-am-Herzen-Europas.html](http://www.welt.de/politik/ausland/article7536673/Die-dramatische-Notoperation-am-Herzen-Europas.html) (accessed March 10, 2012).

<sup>4</sup> Of course, Europe is more than the EU. Nevertheless, this book focuses on the EU as the relevant supranational polity in Europe. As a result, I use the terms “Europe” and “EU” interchangeably unless noted otherwise.

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from Northern to Southern Europe to bail out countries facing the prospect of sovereign default?

- What about the future of European democracy at times when financial markets seem to determine the speed with which policy makers must make decisions involving billions of euros? What about the role of the European Parliament (EP) and of national parliaments in this?

The public salience of the euro crisis is unprecedented. A Google search for “euro crisis” results in 55.8 million hits, as compared to 8 million hits for “European constitutional treaty,” and only 719,000 hits for “Maastricht Treaty” (as of June 27, 2014).<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, never have domestic and European politics been as intertwined as in the euro crisis. When the German Chancellor and the Greek Prime Minister speak to their domestic constituencies to assuage their fears and to win over majorities for bailouts or for stringent austerity policies, respectively, the rest of Europe (and the world) not only listens attentively but also feels obliged to comment and to participate in the debates. In short, this is transnational communication in action. The domestic has become European, and European politics has become an integral part of domestic politics. Three processes can be observed simultaneously: transnationalization, Europeanization, and politicization.

The euro crisis exemplifies the main premise of this book: namely, the Europeanization and increasing politicization of debates on EU-related issues in the various public spheres. Even in the days of permissive consensus, European-wide debates took place. “Brussels” and regular meetings of European and national policy makers created a common discourse and a political agenda. Yet, European decision making mostly remained insulated from the larger public. Behind closed doors, it was easier for the member states to find compromises and reach consensus. The larger public was informed after the fact and may have noticed the consequences of European decision making only years later, when the European decisions were implemented at the national level.

This era is over, as this book argues. The permissive consensus has given way to a “constraining dissensus” (Hooghe and Marks 2009).

<sup>5</sup> I owe this idea to compare Google hits to Stephanie Anderson.

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During the past twenty years or so, since the Maastricht Treaty, the referenda in France and the Netherlands on the Treaty for a European Constitution, and now the euro crisis, the European polity has been transformed profoundly. EU politics is losing its technocratic and depoliticized nature and is becoming “normal” politics subject to similar debates and controversies, as in the case of domestic affairs. So far, political entrepreneurs – mostly on the far right – who disagree with moves toward more European integration have tried to seize the opportunity offered by the change in the political climate and to propagate Euroskepticism. European center-right and center-left politicians have been slow to react to increasing politicization of EU affairs and are realizing only gradually that they have to win the active support of their citizens; thin, top-down communication on deals struck at European summits will no longer suffice. Two-way communication on European politics between citizens and their elected representatives will be necessary (Schmidt and Radaelli 2004; Schmidt 2006).

Therefore, this book makes two claims. First, transnational cross-border communication in Europe – at the levels of both the elites and bottom-up social mobilization – is enabled through the gradual Europeanization of national- as well as issue-specific public spheres. We argue that European public spheres do not emerge above and beyond local-, national-, or issue-specific public spheres in some abstract supra-national space but rather through the Europeanization of these various public spheres that then allows for cross-border communication in Europe (see Part I).

Second, the politicization of European affairs at both the EU level and in the domestic politics of member states is inevitable and here to stay, whether or not we like it (see Checkel and Katzenstein 2009a and Risse 2010 for similar assessments). This book explores the nature of politicization in the public spheres and its likely consequences (see Part II).

The book then asks three interrelated sets of questions. First, what do we know about the Europeanization of public spheres (see Part I)? To what extent do we observe the emergence of transnational communities of communication and on what levels? What are the major scholarly controversies with regard to theory-building, measurements, and empirical findings (see Chapter 2)? We argue that the main scholarly disagreements do not so much concern theories and concepts. Whether we approach public spheres from a Luhmannian perspective

that focuses on mutual observation (Luhmann 1971) or a Habermasian concept that emphasizes communities of communication (Habermas 1980/1962) appears to be less relevant than methodological issues and how to interpret empirical results (e.g., what is the benchmark for establishing the Europeanization of public spheres? See Chapters 4 and 5 compared to Chapter 3.)

Second, how does the Europeanization of public spheres affect social and political affairs in Europe? Does it matter (see Part II)? We argue that Europeanized public spheres – whether elite media, mass media, or social media (e.g., the internet) – provide the arenas in which the politicization of European and EU issues takes place (see Chapter 6). The main controversy concerns the question of whether politicization and the increased salience of EU politics will contribute to the emergence of European identities and a European polity (see Chapters 6 and 7). In contrast, a more skeptical view holds that the politicization of European affairs does not affect identities and community-building directly but rather via party alignments and political cleavages. As a result, politicization might actually contribute further to the rise of Euroskepticism and to further alienation of voters in the EU (see Chapter 8).

Third, what are the implications of these findings for theory-building, on the one hand, and for normative questions related to European democracy and the so-called democratic deficit on the other (see Chapters 9 and 10)? In particular, Jeffrey Checkel (Chapter 9) asks critical questions about theoretical and methodological approaches. He also challenges assertions about the relationship of public spheres and collective identities as well as the generalizability of the book's findings with regard to wider Europe, particularly Eastern Europe. Andreas Follesdal (Chapter 10) takes a normative view and discusses the book's implications for deliberative as well as contestatory democracy in Europe.

The chapters in this book report empirical findings based on a variety of methods, including large-N statistical analyses (Chapter 8), claims analysis (Chapter 3), frame analysis and corpus-linguistics (Chapter 4), network analysis (Chapter 5), and experiments (Chapter 7). It is remarkable, therefore, that most of the contributors agree with the two core claims made previously: namely, that (1) we can observe the gradual Europeanization of various public spheres; and (2) the politicization of European affairs in these public spheres is here to stay.

This remainder of this introduction proceeds as follows. First, I define central concepts that are relevant for this book, such as public spheres, Europeanization, politicization, and Euroskepticism. Second, I introduce the book's central themes and controversies. Third, I conclude with remarks about the book's central findings and its contribution to the larger literature on European democracy.

## European public spheres: concepts

### *Public spheres*

There has been a long debate on what constitutes a public sphere, or *Öffentlichkeit*,<sup>6</sup> to use the German term. This discussion inevitably links normative and analytical perspectives (Trenz 2008). From a normative perspective of democratic theory, most observers deem crucial an open, pluralistic, and critical public discourse rooted in independent media for providing an interface between state and society in a democratic polity. Europe should not be an exception. As a result, the debate about a European public sphere is linked to the controversy about the democratic quality of the EU and its various problems (see Chapter 10).

The normative understanding of *Öffentlichkeit* as a necessary component of democracy has implications for the analytical conceptualization of a public sphere because it requires indicators with regard to its communicative quality. If public spheres as the “fourth estate” are supposed to inform citizens about the political process, monitor and critically evaluate governance, and enable a public discourse in a democracy (McNair 2000), then they must allow for meaningful communication and exchange, thereby satisfying certain normative criteria. This has implications for the development of indicators (see Chapter 2).

Depending on one's normative viewpoint about public spheres in a democratic polity, most conceptualizations of *Öffentlichkeit* are centered between a minimalist or Luhmannian understanding, on the one hand, and a more demanding or Habermasian concept, on

<sup>6</sup> The German term *Öffentlichkeit* usually is translated as “public sphere.” Yet, this translation does not capture the normative connotations implied in the German term. See De Vreese 2007b, 4; Trenz 2008, 1–3.

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the other. According to Niklas Luhmann's functional interpretation, public spheres constitute a societal subsystem devoted to the mutual observation of societal and political actors (Luhmann 1971). Accordingly, public opinion is the social subsystem through which a society observes and describes itself, thereby contributing to social integration (Luhmann 2000; Trenz 2005, 71–80). Communications through media then constitute second-order observations that not only enable participants and audiences to observe themselves and their contributions but also the observations of others and their construction of reality. By mirroring and communicating social conflicts, the media contribute to social order in a given society. In this understanding, communication through public media does not aim at mutual understanding and public discourse but rather at mutual observation.

Jürgen Habermas's understanding is normatively more demanding and linked to the challenging of public authority. He concentrated on the emergence of arenas of semi-public reasoning and deliberation among free citizens in the saloons, coffeehouses, and Masonic lodges of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century bourgeois society in Europe. These arenas constituted emerging public spheres in which private citizens challenged public authorities to legitimate themselves before the court of public opinion (Habermas 1980/1962, 25). Habermas's later work then systematically linked the concept of a public sphere to the institutionalized opinion-formation processes in a democratic political system that is governed by the rule of law (Habermas 1992; see also Kantner 2004). As a result, opinion formation in the public sphere no longer must single-handedly carry the burden of ensuring that deliberation occurs in a democratic polity. Rather, it is the legal and political institutional framework of a modern democracy that ensures its deliberative quality.

This book takes Habermas's conceptualization of public spheres as a forum for its starting point but uses a less demanding normative understanding. Following Friedhelm Neidhardt, we define a "public sphere" as "an open forum of communication for everybody who wants to say something or listen to what other speakers have to say" (Neidhardt 1994, 7; my translation; see Chapter 2). According to the forum model of public spheres, various actors engage in public speech acts within different public arenas addressing both their co-speakers and the audiences (i.e., in the gallery). As a result, each public sphere consists of

Table 1.1. *Public spheres and their selectivity*

Arena of speakers		
Gallery publics	More inclusive	More exclusive
More inclusive	“New” social media allowing for two-way communication; Habermasian “ideal speech situation”	Television; tabloids
More exclusive	Face-to-face communication	Quality newspapers; issue-specific publics

the following two components (including transnational components) with their own selectivity:

1. The arena of speakers and actors: Who is speaking? Who is allowed to speak? Whose voices are represented in this arena and its media, and who is excluded?
2. The audience or “gallery publics”: Who is listening to the speakers? Who is allowed to listen?

Although Neidhardt’s definition includes a variety of communication media (i.e., mass media and social media, as well as face-to-face-communication), it excludes many other social interactions, particularly private communication. For example: When interest groups raise their demands in the open and through public media, this is included in the definition. When they employ private lobbyists and conduct briefings for political officials behind closed doors, this is not part of public spheres in our understanding. The same holds true for policy makers and their interactions. In other words, the defining characteristic of a public sphere is the “open forum,” which delimits it from other forms of communication.

The two components of a public sphere (including European and transnational components) can be evaluated according to their selectivity (Table 1.1). The “publicness” and openness of public spheres is always a matter of degree. Public spheres can be more or less inclusive in terms of both speakers and listeners. This selectivity of public spheres related to who can speak and who is allowed to listen also points to

the inevitable presence of power asymmetries relative to public spheres. There are few public spheres resembling a Habermasian “ideal speech situation” (Habermas 1981)<sup>7</sup> in terms of openness toward whoever wants to speak and whoever wants to listen. The new internet-based social media might come close to these settings (see upper left in Table 1.1).

Most other communicative spaces are selective with regard to speakers (e.g., mass media, including television; see upper right in Table 1.1); audiences (e.g., face-to-face communication; see lower left in Table 1.1); or both (e.g., quality newspapers; see lower right in Table 1.1). Who is given voice in a public sphere often is decided by specific actors (e.g., journalists), but there also is structural power involved in terms of the political economy of mass media (for the classical study, see Herman and Chomsky 1988). For example, national and European executive policy makers rather than parliamentarians or representatives of civil society are overwhelmingly present in the Europeanized public spheres of quality newspapers (Koopmans 2007; Koopmans and Statham 2010a; see also Chapter 3 in this volume). This is probably due to structural power rather than individual decisions by reporters or journalists.

Power also plays a role with regard to a further dimension according to which public spheres can be evaluated: Do speakers actually communicate with one another and to their audiences, or do we merely observe shouting exchanges? Do they reason in an effort to persuade other speakers and/or their audiences, or do they speak past one another? Do speakers accept one another as equals and legitimate contributors to public discourse, or do they try to delegitimize communications through stereotyping or other rhetorical devices? When the Greek news media depicts German Chancellor Angela Merkel in a Nazi uniform with a swastika, or when the cover of a German weekly uses an antique Greek statue giving the finger, such framing delegitimizes other speakers in transnational public space (see Chapter 6).

What is at stake here is the deliberative quality of public spheres (see Steiner et al. 2004 for quantitative measurements of deliberation). Again, the standard against which to measure the communicative

<sup>7</sup> Note that Habermas himself introduced the “ideal speech situation” as a “counterfactual presupposition” that allows for the critical evaluation of various empirical communicative settings regarding their openness and inclusiveness.



quality of utterances in public spheres is a Habermasian “ideal speech situation” as a counterfactual presupposition (Habermas 1981; see also Risse 2000). Contestation, polarization, and controversies in public spheres are orthogonal to this dimension. Political conflict is a normal and constitutive component of a public sphere. If everyone agrees with everything, then no communication is necessary and debates are pointless. News-value theory states that conflicts and disagreements are more likely to be reported in the media than agreements and consensus (Venables 2005). However, whether political conflicts and contestation contribute to deliberation including transnational communication crucially depends on two factors: (1) the degree to which speakers consider one another as equals and legitimate contributors to the debate; and (2) the degree to which they use similar criteria of relevance or similar meaning structures enabling communication in the first place (Eder and Kantner 2000; see also Risse 2010, 113–26). The latter factor does not imply that we would always expect common frames of reference in a debate. On the contrary, many controversies are about how to frame a particular issue. For example, should budgetary discipline as the “master frame” structure the debate about the euro crisis, or is economic growth the main issue at stake? However, a controversy about this issue, including a transnational debate across borders, is possible only if the speakers recognize and understand the meaning of the two frames. Otherwise, communication is impossible.

To conclude, I highlight two further points. First, our understanding conceptualizes public spheres in the plural. There is no single *Öffentlichkeit* anywhere but rather several public spheres that might, however, overlap and interconnect (e.g., transnationally). Moreover, public spheres can be issue-specific, highly segmented, or rather generalized. Europe should be no exception. As a result, we speak of “European public spheres” in the plural rather than a single European public sphere above and beyond national or subnational public spheres. We also speak about European public spheres as a short form for interconnected and Europeanized local-, national-, or issue-specific public spheres (see the following discussion).

Finally, our understanding of public spheres is not confined to mass media, whether television or newspapers. Although it is true that most empirical work on Europeanized public spheres uses media analyses, we must remember that there are many more open fora constituting public spheres, including public face-to-face interactions, social media,