



Österreichische
Akademie der
Wissenschaften

eif
Institut für
Europäische
Integrations
Forschung

EIF Working Paper Series

The Referenda on the European Constitution: A Crucial Moment for the Development of a European Public Sphere?

**Christoph Bärenreuter, Cornelia Bruell, Helmut Gaisbauer,
Ulrike Gröner, Michael Kimmel, Monika Mokre,
Markus Pausch**

August 2006

Working Paper Nr: 24

**Institut für Europäische
Integrationsforschung
Institute for European
Integration Research**

Österreichische Akademie
der Wissenschaften
Prinz-Eugen-Straße 8-10
1040 Wien

fon: +43(1) 515 81-75 65
fax: +43(1) 515 81-75 66
mail: eif@oeaw.ac.at
<http://www.eif.oeaw.ac.at>

The Referenda on the European Constitution: A Crucial Moment for the Development of a European Public Sphere?

Abstract

The following paper is a summary of the final report of a research project on the European Public Sphere. The project analyzed debates on the adoption of the European Constitution. One of the main research questions was: How do these debates contribute to the emergence of a European public sphere and thereby to the development of a European democracy? This question was addressed by analyzing media coverage of the adoption process and, especially, of the referenda on the European Constitution. The empirical analysis is based on the theory of radical democracy; thus the project also aims at bridging the gap between normative-theoretical considerations on the European public sphere and empirical work on this theme.

1. Introduction

1.1 The Public Sphere in Democracy

In the famous Lincoln formula, democracy is government *of* the people, *for* the people, and *by* the people. The public sphere is necessary in order to include people in the process of decision making, i. e. for government *by* the people as well as to decide which forms and contents of government are good *for* the people. Thus, the public sphere is both *formally* and *substantially* a requisite of democracy.

Claims with regard to adequate *forms* of a democratic public sphere depend on the understanding of democracy, i.e., on the amount of influence on government granted to the citizens and on the amount of political activity required from the citizens. In elite democracy, e.g., the public sphere is understood as confined to discourses within and between political parties that can be observed by citizens but not directly influenced. Radical democracy (that is the normative outset of this paper) can be seen as directly opposed to this minimal concept of the democratic public sphere by understanding agonistic discourse as the core of democracy. While for elite democracy and understandings derived from this concept, the public sphere is mainly a form of control of government, in a more ambitious understanding of democracy power and, thus, government, has to be developed out of the public sphere. Therefore, radical concepts of democracy focus on critical, oppositional public spheres rather than on dominant public opinion.

Requirements for the *contents* of a democratic public sphere depend above all on the understanding of man and society by a political theory. Here, one can, e.g., name, on the one hand, the theory of deliberative democracy based upon the thought of Juergen Habermas (1989, 1996, 1998) that sees rational consensus as the ultimate goal of debates on the political. On the other hand, radical democracy understands the political¹ precisely as agonistic struggle that cannot be finally solved by a rational consensus. Obviously, this does not mean that no decision is made but that no decision can ever be ultimately legitimated. Therefore, every decision will lead, in due time, to new hegemonic struggles against its result.

Conceptualisations of the public sphere differ in understanding this term as either *singular* or *plural*. This differentiation applies both to empirical assessments and theoretical-normative requirements. The term “public sphere” is frequently associated with the image of the Athenian agora where citizens gather in order to discuss their common concerns. While it is obvious that this picture is inadequate to modern mass states it is still (usually silently) assumed that a unified public sphere exists within nation states. This unified public sphere does not consist of real debates between all citizens but mediated exchanges of opinion via media and elite discourses are meant to derive from “public opinion” in the sense of shared norms and interests and, thus, to represent them. This understanding of the public sphere is based on an understanding of the *people* as a unified entity, the *demos* has to be a unity in order to be the sovereign of democracy. If citizens do not identify with their fellow-citizens as well as with their polity they will not be prepared to accept political decisions that go against their personal interests. In a non-essentialist understanding of political identity, the public sphere plays a crucial role in constructing such an identity. This assessment of the eminent impact of a public sphere is shared both by modernist authors like Juergen Habermas and post-modern authors like Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe.

1.2 Why a European Public Sphere?

The European Union has been founded as an economic project – or, to put it more concretely, a project to reach political aims, namely the prevention of National Socialism and war, by economic means. But economy and politics are closely linked and economic harmonisation led (intentionally or not) to the ever closer Union taking over many competences of the Member States without having decision mechanisms similar to the ones on the national level. Due to this development, the “democratic deficit” of the EU became a key-term of literature on the European polity. Brought up by the European Parliament during the 80s (Zweifel 2002, 812) it has found its way into a significant part of political and scholarly analyses of the EU. Debates on the democratic deficit of the EU started with a critique of the institutional framework of the EU and its representative quality (Rommetsch/Wessels 1996; Brzinski/Lancaster/ Tuschhoff 1999). National members of government, i. e. national executives, become legislators on the European level; the European Parliament is not a full-fledged parliament (Andersen/Burns 1996; Van der Eijk/Franklin 1996a,

¹ *The political* is defined as a range of possibilities and the contingent struggle and decision for one of them.

1996b; Schmitt/Thomassen 1999), and national parliaments are weakened by European integration (O'Neill 1999; Wincott 1998). This formal lack of adequate representation is enhanced by the fact that elections to the European Parliament are usually fought in the national context around national issues and are perceived by the citizens as national second-order-elections (Dimitrias et al. 1994; Van der Eijk/Franklin/Marsh 1996a, 1996b; Mokre/Pausch 2005).

However, adequate democratic representation cannot be envisaged by understanding the citizens as mere individuals. The concept of democracy is based on the concept of a *demos*, i. e. of a political community with certain cohesion. While the existence of sufficient social cohesion of the people (and, thus, of a *demos*) is mainly undisputed for nation states (although also questionable from a theoretical point of view) the existence, possible development, or desirability of a European *demos* has been discussed contradictorily during the last decade (Cf. Kirchhof 1994, Weiler 1995, Habermas 1995 and 1996) This question, however, is paramount if one aims at introducing representative structures similar to national politics into European policy making.

Most prominently, the question for a European *demos* has been formulated in the no-*demos* thesis by the German Supreme Court of Justice (Kirchhof 1994) – “if there is no state, there cannot be a Constitution and if there is no *demos* there can be no state”². This thesis has been challenged frequently and plausibly (cp. Schneider 1995; Weiler 1995) in its essentialist form. Historical analyses have pointed out that national *demos* were not a presupposition of nation states, but that, quite on the contrary, the development of nation states made the “invention” of national roots and visions necessary (Habermas 1995; Anderson 1983; Gellner 1983, Thièsse 1999) If, however, a *demos* is not naturally given but a construction then it is – at least, theoretically – also possible to construct a European *demos*. It was first and foremost Juergen Habermas (1996) who emphasized the role of generally accepted rules for society, i.e. of the law, for the development of a “constitutional patriotism”.

However, other theorists of deliberative democracy (e.g. Bohman 1996; Parekh 2000) and, up to some degree, even Habermas himself (1992) have brought forward the argument that commonly accepted legal rules are necessary but not sufficient for the development of a European democracy. The community of citizens needs closer bonds in order to develop solidarity between the citizens and loyalty of the citizens towards the political system that are necessary for a working democracy. Thus, a European *demos* cannot be constructed by institutional measures only. Democracy needs the idea of commonality (not sameness) and universality, which is representable and which can be represented. This commonality does, however, not have to be constructed by cultural factors as it assumedly is the case in the nation state. Especially in studies based upon the theory of deliberative democracy the imminent impact of a EPS on the development of a European identity is highlighted. Consequently, the deficits of the EPS (or, even, its non-existence) have been discussed as part of the democratic deficit of the EU (see e.g. Gerhards 1993, 98-99; Abromeit 1997). The public

² „Wo kein Staat, da keine Verfassung, und wo kein Staatsvolk, da kein Staat.“

sphere has been understood as instrumental (1) to develop a European identity necessary for a European democracy, and (2) to enable political participation of the citizens in European policy making that is part and parcel of every understanding of democracy. Most of these studies have taken for granted that national public spheres of the Member States exist and work well enough to warrant national democratic orders. Thus, the deficits of the EPS have often been defined as deviations from national public spheres.

2. The Theoretical Outset

The study presented in this paper shares the normative starting point of most studies on the EPS that a democratic EU is to be wished for. It does, however, not assume that national democracies can serve as a yardstick for a European democracy. Instead, it is based in its normative assumptions on the understanding of Laclau and Mouffe (2001/1985) that democracy is not an existing political order but the normative horizon of our political thinking and acting.

The study goes along with deliberative thought on the EU in that it does not understand a European identity as a presupposition of a European democracy and an EPS but as a result of common political agency and discourses on this agency. It differs from these studies as it is based upon an understanding of democracy as a system enabling agonistic conflict on fundamentally irreconcilable understandings of the political. In accordance with the theory of democracy developed by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (2001/1985), democracy is understood as a necessarily unrealised project and the political as the field where different claims for “the good society” meet and contest each other. The link between the political and the public sphere leads to the assumption that the emergence of a political public sphere depends on the possibility of political participation. Out of this understanding, the public sphere is not an aim in itself but is constituted due to the pursuit of political aims. It is on the assumption of this relation that this paper is based upon.

2.1 Historizing Laclau and Mouffe’s Theory

Laclau and Mouffe have been called (and called themselves) *post-modern*, *post-marxist*, and *post-structuralist* authors. While these connotations are closely connected to each other and, frequently, used rather indiscriminately, they stand for different strands of their thinking.

Post-modernity is not to be understood as a historical period following modernity but as a certain way of thinking about modernity, “reflecting the different ways in which modernity conceives of itself” (Wetzell 2003, 12). Laclau and Mouffe’s understanding of modernity aims, above all, on disentangling its different basic components that, in their understanding, do not build an essentially unified block but are the sedimented results of a series of contingent articulations (Laclau 2002, 129). The foremost aim of their deconstruction of modernity has been to show the contingency of the combination between the *political* project of enlightenment with its *epistemological* understanding that (1) man (and, much later, woman) is a rational being and that (2) universal

values as well as universal rights can be defined (Laclau/Mouffe 2001/1985, 12) precisely because there are general, i. e. universal qualities of all human beings like above all rationality. Thus, post-modernity does not imply a radical break with modernity but aims at keeping its basic political assumptions while hegemonizing them out of a different perspective (Laclau 2002, 129) developed out of post-structuralism.

In much the same way, *post-marxism* deconstructs the assumedly necessary and, thus, scientific character of Marxism as the reversal of the epistemological project of enlightenment (Laclau/Mouffe 2001/1985, 15). Basic Marxist principles, like above all, the understanding of history as a history of class struggles, the privileged character of the proletariat, and the inevitability of a communist society, are refuted in the name of a non-essentialist and non-deterministic political project (called radical democracy) while Marxist political struggle for emancipation shall be saved.

While we can, thus, trace the political origins of Laclau and Mouffe's thinking in their dealing with modernity in general and Marxism in particular, their methodology of thought comes out of *post-structuralism*, i. e. the critique of structuralism. One can see structuralism as an important step towards refuting an essentialist, transcendental understanding of the world by deconstructing the assumedly natural or necessary relationship between the signifier (a word) and a signified (the mental concept to which the word refers). According to Ferdinand de Saussure (2001) this relationship is established conventionally and signifiers define themselves not in their dependence of a signified but in their relation (= the specific form of difference or equivalence) to other signifiers. This does not mean that no objects outside of our thinking, i. e. external to discourse exist but that they cannot be constituted for us outside of discourse. By giving up the contradiction between thought and reality, the range of categories explaining social relationships is radically enlarged: Synonyms, metonyms, and metaphors become part of the original terrain constituting the social (Laclau/Mouffe 2001/1985, 147).

It is this fundamental concept of structuralism that puts discourse in the centre of theoretical thought. A discursive formation is not the expression of a principle external to itself but consists exclusively of the relations between its elements. According to structuralism, a discourse is, thus, a system, an order. However, if every element of this system has its own place within it, defined by its relationships to other elements, then, every element has a relational identity within the system and all relations are necessary in their character. In a structuralist approach, a discursive formation is, therefore, a totality, neither related to nor influenced by other systems. (Laclau/Mouffe 2001/1985, 142-144)

This totalitarian character of structuralism is criticised and deconstructed by post-structuralism. According to post-structuralist thought, a completely realized structural space is not possible but its conception represents a new form of essentialist thought (Laclau/Mouffe 2001/1985, 150). Since

every signifier is defined by its relation to others, there are infinite chains of signification. The relational logic of a discourse is never complete and always diluted by contingencies. A discourse is established by articulation, thus, its (seemingly) structured totality is the result of articulatory practices. Floating elements of the discourse become (partially and temporarily) fixed moments by articulation. Some of these moments become nodal points that structure the discourse by forming chains of equivalences between different moments.

This, however, means that a discursive structure is not necessary and can be transformed by differing articulatory practices. So, the seeming totality of a discourse is never really a totality, never really sutured (Laclau/Mouffe 2001/1985, 142-144). And it is precisely by the possibility of transforming discourses by articulation that the political is constituted. While the social is defined as the field of sedimented articulatory practices understood as “objectivity”, the political is the reactivation of the contingent nature of this objectivity (Laclau/Mouffe 2001/1985, 19). The discourse understood as totality at one point of time is the hegemonic discourse of this time, successfully maintaining its own universality. The political is, thus, the struggle for hegemony.

2.2 The Empty Place of Power in Democracy

Democracy is a form of organizing the political and legitimizing political power. Historically, it has replaced other forms of political power that legitimized themselves transcendentally, by the assumed incorporation of the will of God or by Nature or, also, the will of the people understood as an abstract concept personalised the sovereign. This transcendental authority has been denied by democracy (Laclau/Mouffe 2001/1985, 13) but, at the same time, it has been replaced by the concept of reason, incorporated in human beings whose interests and needs are completely transparent to themselves and can be communicated to other human beings with other needs and interests. Thus, democracy has been envisaged as the negotiation of objective interests of different groups of people that lead to the definition of a common good. Human beings became political subjects and a society has been understood as a totality constructed by these rational, political subjects (Laclau/Mouffe 2001/1985, 152-153). The universality of former political systems based on transcendental aims and values was, in this way, replaced by a new form of universality based on human reasoning as well as assumed universal values all rational human beings are striving for and universal rights all human beings are sharing (Laclau/Mouffe 2001/1985, 13).

Marxism replaced this form of universality by another one, first, pointing out the neglect of economic differences and economic exploitation in liberal concepts of democracy, second, defining politics as a mere superstructure of economic relationships of exploitation and, third, deriving from the fundamental character of economics the existence of a privileged historical agent, namely the proletariat who, by liberating itself, will liberate manhood in general from all forms of exploitation and power relations (cp. e.g. Laclau 2002, 49).

Laclau and Mouffe go along with Marxist thought in its critique of the assumed universal character of liberal democracy but instead of abolishing the pluralist character of democracy by the introduction of a privileged historical agent they propose a radicalisation of this pluralism. In the same vein, the ultimate goal of Marxism to abolish power in a completely free society is refuted as a form of totalitarianism that can only be avoided by keeping society open for democratic power struggles (Laclau/Mouffe 2001/1985, 25).

In this understanding, democracy is radically different from other forms of organising politics as no social agent can legitimately represent totality (Laclau/Mouffe 2001/1985, 25). Although one can understand the ruler in democracies as a secularized God, a secularized God is different from God *in sensu stricto* as secular rulers have to justify themselves by proving themselves capable of properly fulfilling the ruling function. There is, therefore, an initial split between the empty place of a function which is not necessarily linked to any particular content, and the plurality of contents which can actualize it. Modern democracy is, thus, the institution of a space whose social function has had to emancipate itself from any concrete content as any content is able to occupy this space. The ruler has to justify her rule, and this justification necessarily requires that those who are ruled can judge the extent to which the ruling function is fulfilled by the ruling order – something not possible in the case of God. While previous forms of social organization concealed the difference between the function and contents of power by presenting concrete forms of political organization as the only possible ones to fulfil the function of political organization as such, modern democracy makes that difference fully visible (Laclau/Zac 1994,36). The only guarantee for the legitimacy of democratic power is the ultimate uncertainty and precariousness of its exercise.

3. Operationalisation of the Theoretical Concept

3.1 An Empirical Application of the Concept of Radical Democracy

Based on the discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe we have divided the different characteristics of a European Public Sphere in three categories: *discourse*, *discursive formation*, *discursivity*. We call the transition between these categories *discursiveness* – a measure for the grade of structuration and stability of a public sphere. *Discourse* is the most structured and stabilised entity, whereas *discursivity* is a mere accumulation of loosely bonded discursive elements without limits, which have no fixed position in the structure, but change their meaning continuously.

The first task is, thus, to establish if any discourses on European matters take place. Second, we have to identify the structures of these discourses thereby also identifying contents figuring prominently within them. Third, we look for participants of these discourses. Fourth, we aim at assessing the overlaps or even convergence of these discourses (i.e. for the logic of the discursive formation we call the EPS).

The potential empirical results of the study are limited by its scope. The project dealt exclusively with print media. Obviously, European discourses are not limited to media but take place in

political events, panel discussions, within or between political parties, in communications of civil society etc. None of these forms of the EPS can be taken into consideration within this project. Furthermore, also electronic media are excluded although they are probably in many cases more influential than print media. By carrying out a content analysis we are, third, not able to assess the effects of media coverage on readers but our results are limited to positive media contents.

Limitations in scope and contents are unavoidable for every project. While valuable information may be excluded by the concept chosen for this project, there are also good reasons to focus on newspapers. Media discourses have a greater chance of being realized by a broad public than face-to-face-communications, and are, therefore, of vital interest for considerations on a public sphere transcending elite discourses. And print media have more possibilities for elaborate coverage than electronic media, thus, discourses are more likely to be developed in newspapers than in TV.

Furthermore, we decided to focus upon one theme (the ratification of the European Constitution) and a limited time frame. We expect discourses on European matters to preferably take place when citizens have the possibility to participate in European decision making; this was the main reason for this choice. However, the relatively short time span of the project makes long-term monitoring of developing discourses impossible.

Discourse/Discursivity/Discursive Formations

A discourse in the understanding of Laclau and Mouffe (2001, 150) has to be differentiated both from discursivity and from discursive formations. *Discursivity* is the whole field of linguistic and non-linguistic expressions, while *discourse* is a temporary fixation of this field, an attempt to stop the gliding of differences, to create a centre. For the fixation of the plethora of gliding signifiers, privileged signifiers (nodal points) are necessary that fix chains of other signifiers, thus, creating chains of equivalences (Cf. Laclau/Mouffe 2001, 150).

A *discursive formation* is “the interaction/articulation between a plurality of (discourses)” (Laclau 2000, 283). While a discourse is structured by a ‘grammar’, a “set of rules governing a particular ‘language game’ (Laclau 2000, 283)” that gives the discourse its systematicity (at least ideally), “in a discursive formation this systematicity is absent even as a regulative idea because it has to include within itself antagonisms and hegemonic rearticulations which subvert the rules and bend them in contradictory directions. The coherence that a discursive formation can have is only a hegemonic coherence. (Laclau 2000, 283)” A further question to our empirical material is, thus, if we can identify interactions/ articulations between different discourses on European matters and how these interactions can be described.

Different levels/dimensions of the public sphere:

The intensity or kind of the *discursiveness* of the EPS can be structured along the following categories:

1. As a form of *discursivity* the public sphere serves only as a pool of elements for specific discourses (e.g. national, regional or issue-related ones).
2. As *discursive formations*, various discourses in the public sphere share similar elements (moments), but are structured around different nodal points.
3. As *discourse*, the public sphere refers to the same nodal points and moments that are structured in similar ways.

According to a weaker or stronger form of discursiveness of a EPS, different functions can be accomplished:

Table 1

	discursivity	discursive formations	discourse
Consequences for the EPS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - national/regional discourses are entirely fragmented - elements are combined and stabilized in different ways, even if there are transnational references 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - discourses are related to each other through the construction of several similar elements - the discourses refer to each other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - same nodal points - same moments - same antagonism
Functions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - collective, EU-wide, identity construction not possible, no Europeanization - agonistic negotiation difficult, because of the lack of a common horizon; antagonisms inside the system probable - responsivity only in the national framework 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - collective identity construction not possible, but national/regional etc. identities can be Europeanized - issue-dependent possibility to negotiate agonisms - EU-responsivity achievable through issue-networks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - collective identity possible - through agonism possibility to negotiate – common horizon is vivid, thus also a common antagonism - EU-responsivity fully achievable

As the limits of every category are blurred, the conceptual scheme serves as an analytical instrument only, not as a yardstick. Therefore it is more appropriate to talk about weaker or stronger discursiveness.

In order to determine the level of discursiveness it is necessary to refine the analytical instruments. For this purpose we apply the different components of a discourse to the analysis (cf. Howarth 2000: 7ff.):

- Moments: Moments are differential positions already structured around a nodal point. We have to count the interlinked moments in discourse, for it is by repetition that every hegemonic articulation tries to naturalise its own project. We can find equivalence, if we are able to identify a paradigmatic relation between different moments of a discourse. Yet, there is no simple identity between the equivalent entities, as they are only equivalent with regard to a certain aspect. Thus, social identities contain both, difference and equivalence.
- Elements: Elements are those differences that are not articulated discursively due to the floating character they acquire in periods of social crisis and dislocation. As elements are per definitionem not articulated, we cannot survey them. Still we can watch the process of elements turning into moments, i.e. arguments, concepts etc. taken from different contexts and interlinked in a new way to the object of investigation, e.g. the Constitution. Furthermore, it is of interest when moments of certain discourses cannot be found in other ones. Why did an element become a moment in one discourse while it remained unfixed in another one?
- Nodal points: Nodal points are necessary for the structuration of elements into a meaningful system of moments, i.e. a discourse. They are privileged signifiers or reference points that bind together a particular system of meaning or chain of signification. A nodal point can acquire the quality of an empty signifier, a master signifier. The emptier a signifier, the more meanings and connotations it can subsume. At the same time this emptiness is responsible for a power loss, since the less concrete meaning a signifier encompasses the weaker it becomes with regard to other, more concrete signifiers.
- Antagonisms: An antagonism is constructed by chains of equivalences: different elements/moments become equivalent by the exclusion of the pure negativity of the discursive system. The logic of difference then works against the logic of equivalence. It works through the expansion of a given system of differences by dissolving existing chains of equivalence. Although antagonism is not absolutely necessary for identity constructions, it can be an indication for the attempt to close a discourse. We aim at identifying antagonisms that unify/close single discourses on European matters as well as antagonisms arising between different discourses on European matters. Antagonism is not necessarily an enemy in real politics or in a territorial context. Rather it is the undefined outside, symbolizing the lack of the inside.
- Agonism: Agonisms are differences within the system, accepting each other as legitimate but contested positions. In terms of our theoretical approach, an EPS emerges due to agonistic positions on European matters. Only by agonistic struggles it is possible to create

common horizons for negotiating positions on a level playground. If these common horizons are already (precariously) fixed, we can find a (temporarily) closed, i. e. hegemonic discourse. Agonistic positions are desirable out of our normative understanding that the EPS should be a plural one; in order to prove the mere existence of an EPS either agonism or hegemony have to be identified.

By way of conclusion, we can define the following qualities of an EPS that shall be analysed within the empirical part of the project:

The EPS as a discourse:

- Which discourses can be recognized? – Homogeneous ones or heterogenous ones?
- Which nodal points are structuring these discourses?

These questions will be answered by identifying the most frequent as well as the most co-occurring arguments to spot the most important elements, moments and nodal points.

The EPS as a discursive formation:

- Are these discourses stabilized/closed by antagonisms?

In order to answer this question explicitly, exclusionary statements shall be searched for, so as to see if one can identify an “antagonistic Other of the EU” that furthers European identity building.

This antagonistic Other can either be relevant only for one special discourse or for several discourses; thus, it is possible that not one but several European identities emerge.

- Do different discourses overlap/interact/converge?

This question will be dealt with by comparing discourses in different media and different countries. Can the same main arguments and the same chains of equivalences be found in several media/states?

- Can we find agonistic discourses on European matters?

Different assessments of issues (Constitution makes the EU more/less social) as well as different evaluations following a common assessment of an issue (Constitution is a step towards more statehood of the EU, this is good/bad) shall be used in order to answer this question.

The EPS as discursivity:

- Can we only find similar elements that turn into different moments structured around different nodal points?

3.2. Layout of the Analysis

The empirical analysis encompassed the coverage of the process of constitutionalisation in the period from the IGC 2004 to September 2005. 14 newspapers (one broadsheet, one yellow press) in seven Member States were analysed.

The content analysis was based on arguments and the relation between arguments. A list of about 100 codes was developed in a lengthy, partly inductive, partly deductive process. Most of the codes

refer to contents of media coverage, furthermore explicit evaluations (positive/negative), groups of speakers and the ascription of responsibility to these speakers were also coded.

Table 2

Austria	Der Standard Neue Kronenzeitung
France	Le Monde Le Parisien
Ireland	The Irish Times The Star
Portugal	Diário de Notícias Correio da Manha
Poland	Gazeta Wyborcza Super Express
Sweden	Dagens Nyheter Expressen
United Kingdom	The Guardian The Sun

4. The Empirical Analysis

4.1 Number of articles

The sample of the study (defined by its time frame and the chosen media) encompassed more than 9000 articles. Of those, more than 60% were published in France – and more than 50% in the broadsheet “*Le Monde*”. The French tabloid *Le Parisien* delivered 11,1% of the material, all other newspapers contributed less material than the French tabloid. If we look at the distribution of articles excluding France, we get a rather balanced picture, the share of the single countries lies between Portugal with 5,2% and Austria with 7,9% of all articles.

Little surprisingly, the number of articles is considerably higher in broadsheet papers than in the yellow press. This difference is, however, not equally pronounced in the different countries. The most obvious gap exists between the two French papers, but it is also distinct in Ireland, Poland, Sweden and Great Britain while coverage of EU matters is generally scarce in Portugal but nearly equally distributed between the two newspapers. There is also a considerable difference in the quantity of coverage between the Austrian papers Standard and Krone; on the other hand, the number of articles in the tabloid Krone was higher than in other tabloids.

4.2 Development over Time

Within the time frame of our study, the number of articles developed more or less parallel in all analysed newspapers: We can discern three peaks and two valleys: the first peak took place in June 04 (ICG on the European Constitution and elections to the European Parliament), the second one in

October/November 04 (Signature of the Constitution in Rome) and the third and highest one in May/June 05 (negative referenda in France and the Netherlands). Some of the countries also exhibit a small peak around February (Spanish referendum), Sweden has a small valley instead of a peak in October/November 04 followed by a smaller peak in December 04 and in France articles become more numerous in September 04 (internal referendum of the French Socialist Party) and stay on the same level without an extra peak in October/November until elevating still more in March 05. In all countries, media attention on the issue declines in July / August 04 and after the highest peak in May/June 05. In the latter period, the quantitative change in coverage is especially pronounced. It seems as if attention starts again to increase in September 05, but our research period terminated with the end of September 05.

In general, the structure of peaks and valleys is similar in the broadsheet papers, while the tabloids differ strongly. Provisionally, we can, thus, conclude that the broadsheet papers seem to pay attention to similar issues – even though not always with the same intensity – whilst the tabloids show a quite diversified picture.

4.3 Speakers

For the theory of agonistic democracy it is also important to assess who contributes to discourse as it makes a difference if there is only a small elite involved or also citizens, civil society and other political forces. We therefore analysed our material with regard to “speakers” that were quoted or mentioned whereas not only speech acts were taken into consideration but also the mentioning of other activities, e.g. voting, participating in protests etc.

Not very surprisingly national political elites of the respective country are most frequently quoted. More interestingly, this overall result does not hold true for Poland where the political elite on EU-level is more frequently represented by the media. In general, however, political elites – on the national level at home or in other Member States or on the EU-level – dominate media discourses in all Member States. The relative weight of these three groups differs between the countries, but not to a very high degree. Only French national speakers play an exceptionally prominent role.

We can also identify groups that are rarely quoted in any of the analysed media, namely the “pro-constitution camp”, “media” and “civil society on EU-level”. The rest of the speakers differ from country to country.

Both French papers show a strong tendency to quote the national political elite. This attitude is shared by the tabloids Star and Krone whilst the two Polish papers are more interested in the political elite on EU-level and of other states (Gazeta Wyborcza) and the political elite on the EU-level respectively (Super Express). In contrast to their tabloid counterparts, the political elite from other states dominates clearly the national political elite in Irish Times and Standard, a phenomenon also observed in a less pronounced way in Diário de Notícias, also in contrast to the

Portuguese tabloid. The Swedish Dagens Nyheter and the Portuguese Diário de Notícias, both broadsheet papers, show a special interest in the citizens of other states respectively their national civil societies whilst the Polish tabloid relatively frequently refers to speakers from national and foreign civil society. The Portuguese and the Austrian tabloid show a higher interest for national citizens than the other newspapers in the sample. The Irish papers show another specialty: Both papers focus almost exclusively on the political elite, The Star even more extremely than in Irish Times.

Broadsheet papers tend to a more balanced relation of national political elite, political elite on EU-level and political elites from other states, sometimes even with a tendency to the EU-level or to other countries whilst tabloids mostly show a stronger bias to the national political elite. Exceptions are the French *Le Monde* and the Polish *Super Express*. With regard to all other categories of speakers neither clear cut common structures of the two types of media nor obvious differences between broadsheet and tabloid can be found.

Broadsheet papers clearly offer more space for transnational or even European speakers than tabloid papers do and in most of the broadsheet papers national political elites are less frequently mentioned than European elites and political elites from other Member States.

A second important question is the relative weight of elites, citizens or civil society in media discourse. As we have seen above, there are huge differences in this regard between countries and media. Nevertheless, we can also see some general differences between broadsheet and yellow press.

Broadsheet papers generally present more speakers and a greater variety of speakers from the two categories in question whilst some of the tabloids exhibit very few or even no speakers from these categories. In Poland, Sweden, and the UK, this difference is less pronounced than in the other countries; both tabloids and broadsheet seem to be relatively open for this category of speakers. Broadsheet papers tend towards more interest for international speakers of this category than the yellow press; again tabloids from Poland, Sweden, and the UK are an exception from this rule. French papers, in contrast, show a remarkably low interest in citizens and civil society in their media coverage.

Thus, a more intensive debate does not automatically lead to an inclusion of more speakers not belonging to the political elites. While there is a tendency for broadsheet papers to be more open than tabloids for opinions and activities of citizens and civil society, this is not a general rule. Probably, the inclusiveness of media discourses also depends on social structures that differ between the Member States.

4.4 Main issues

As we are searching for European discourses or discourse formations in the media debate on the European Constitution the identification of the main issues of debates is a crucial point of our analysis: Are there national, transnational or European main issues? In a second step we have analysed how these main issues are structured and if there are transnational or European patterns.

Table 3

Main issues in %	France	Portugal	Ireland	Austria	Poland	Sweden	UK
Social issues	10,8	3,7	3,7	3,6	3,1	3,8	2,8
Elite/citizens	5,3	8,7	7,8	10,1	3,9	7,3	2,6
Immigration	0,03	0,2	2,41	1	0,7	0,6	0,3
Enlargement	3,9	1,5	4	4	4,4	3,3	2,2
Democracy	3,6	14,3	4,7	6,5	2,3	5,3	2,4
Security/militarism	1,1	0,9	1,8	2,4	1,6	1,5	0,8
Quality of debate	11,3	5,8	9,35	3,2	7,6	5,7	4
National vs. EU	5,3	8,8	11,2	4,7	9,8	2,6	5,2
Economic issues	2,8	3,2	3,22	3,4	3	2,5	2,9

We can find four relevant issues for all countries. The most frequent ones focus on the QUALITY OF DEBATE and the gap between CITIZENS and ELITES. The debate on SOCIAL ISSUES is very strong in France but in none of the other countries. Discussions focusing on the relation between Member States and the EU (NATIONAL VS EU) are intensely debated in Ireland, Poland, and Portugal. British media differ from this overall pattern in that media coverage of all these issues is relatively weak there whilst the French debate is concentrated extremely on the two focal points SOCIAL ISSUES and QUALITY OF DEBATE.

The debate concerning the controversy between ELITES and CITIZENS shows most homogeneity with regard to the importance national debates assign to the issue whilst the intensity of debates on the other issues differs strongly from country to country. Therefore we can make out several common focal points in the debate, but the importance given to these is not homogenous which means for our research question that there are European wide similar discourse formations concerning the common focal points while the structure of the whole debate or the importance given to the several issues differ widely.

Table 4

Frequency of Main Issues: Broadsheet in %

Focal points	Le Monde	Diário de Notícias	Irish Times	Standard	Gazeta Wyborcza	Dagens Nyheter	Guardian
Social issues	25,0	4,2	11	11	3,33	4,2	3,60
Elite/citizens	12,3	8,3	9,5	10,5	3,67	8,4	2,66
Immigration	0,1	0,1	7,8	6,6	0,73	0,8	0,40
Enlargement	9,9	1,6	5,1	5,7	4,47	3,7	2,96
Democracy	9,6	13,1	4,6	5,2	2,27	4,9	1,45
Security/militarism	3,2	1,1	3,9	4,7	1,6	1,6	0,74
Quality of debate	22,1	7,1	3,2	4,6	7,2	4,4	3,84
National vs. EU	11,7	9,4	2,5	2,5	9,87	3,4	4,78
Economic issues	6,0	3,7	1,9	0,7	3,27	3,7	3,47

Table 5

Frequency of Main Issues: Tabloid in %

Focal points	Le Parisien	Correio da Manhã	The Star	Krone	Super Express	Expressen	Sun
Social issues	23,2	2,4	15	14,1	1,5	2,8	0,81
Elite/citizens	11,2	8,8	7,5	11	9,2	5,6	2,61
Immigration	0	0,3	7,5	9,5	0	0	0,09
Enlargement	6,3	1,1	5	6,7	1,5	2,4	0,27
Democracy	5,1	15,8	2,5	3,7	3,1	6,8	4,95
Security/militarism	1,0	0,5	2,5	3,1	1,5	1,2	0,99
Quality of debate	33,4	2,9	0	1,8	15,4	9,6	4,84
National vs. EU	12,4	7,2	0	1,5	7,7	0,8	6,30
Economic issues	7,3	2,1	0	1,2	0	0	1,53

Comparing broadsheet and tabloid we can state a relatively similar discourse structure for the French papers. Thus we can talk about a national focal point concerning the French national debate on the European Constitution. The same is true for the Portuguese papers with the exception of the QUALITY OF DEBATE which does not figure prominent in the tabloid. In the Irish press, the tabloid shows a smaller variety of issues than the broadsheet. The two Austrian papers show in general many similarities with some differences for SOCIAL ISSUES, IMMIGRATION, ENLARGEMENT and DEMOCRACY, the first three - not surprisingly - more present in the tabloid the last one more important in the broadsheet. The Polish papers also differ in several points: ELITE/CITIZENS and QUALITY OF DEBATE are much more important for the tabloid while ENLARGEMENT finds more attention in the broadsheet. In the Swedish broadsheet, the controversy of ELITES and CITIZENS is more important whilst the QUALITY OF THE DEBATE

is discussed more intensely in the tabloid. And last but not least, the British broadsheet focuses more on SOCIAL ISSUES and ENLARGEMENT, the tabloid more on DEMOCRACY and the relation between NATION and EU.

Differences between broadsheet and tabloid cannot be generalized over all countries in our sample. For the broadsheet papers we can find five more or less important common focal points: SOCIAL ISSUES, ELITE/CITIZENS, DEMOCRACY, QUALITY OF DEBATE and NATIONAL VS EU. However, in contrast to the comparison between the countries, no homogenous distribution of issues can be found. The debate in the tabloids is much more heterogenous and reduced than in the broadsheet. Thus, we can state only three common focal points that are SOCIAL ISSUES (with a very low representation in the British *Sun*), ELITE/CITIZENS and DEMOCRACY. The debate on ELITE/CITIZENS is a bit more homogenous than in the broadsheet whilst the others differ strongly.

For an emerging European public sphere, European wide focal points of discourse are important. Therefore, a comparison of all papers with regard to the most important issues seems useful. As we have already seen, the three issues QUALITY OF DEBATE, ELITE/CITIZENS and SOCIAL ISSUES can be considered as the most important ones in all the papers. A comparison shows that the controversy between elites and citizens is clearly the most homogenous debate which is present in all media. Social concerns and the quality of the debate in contrast differ strongly from paper to paper.

4.5 Co-occurring Themes/Positions

The co-occurrences of the main issues with single themes or positions tell us in more detail, how the discourses in the respective countries are structured and if we have to talk of single national discourses or one common European discourse.

In almost all countries under research, the debate on the relationship of the national and the European level shows a link to the STATEHOOD-dimension of the EU. Thus, when confronting the two levels, the statehood of the Union plays an important role. The same holds true for the ASSESSMENT OF THE DEBATE. In most countries the quality of the debate is considered as dependent on the relationship between the national and the EU level. Other positions are less important.

However, if we look at the themes and positions co-occurring with these two themes, no crucial parallels in the European media are observable. The structuration of this issue, its combination with other topics, differs from Member State to Member State. Thus, the dimension of statehood and the EU and the relationship between the national and the EU level are important themes in all Member States included in our study but they are part of different chains of equivalences and, therefore, fail to become supranational nodal points.

Discussions on EUROPEAN DEMOCRACY frequently mention elitism, citizen rights, common values and the power of the European parliament. Thus, little surprisingly, the structure of the democracy discourse is similar in all Member States, which probably has to do with a certain common understanding of democracy. Without doubt, a democratic polity is associated with citizen rights and parliaments as well as common values. Yet, in this very general form, this understanding of democracy is rather a common western style of thought than genuinely European. More interesting seems the fact that in most of the Member States the EU is perceived as elitist and thereby undemocratic. Questions of democracy as well as the quality of the debate are associated to the GAP BETWEEN ELITES AND CITIZENS. In addition, the DECISION ON THE REFERENDUM is linked to that relationship, and we cannot fully separate the SOCIAL DEBATE from this aspect. Thus, we can certainly recognise the following nodal point in the discourse: the EU is perceived as elitist, which influences its democratic quality, the quality of the debate, its social dimension and the outcome of the referenda. Assessing these correlations we can assume that the debate on the Constitution was occupied by the classic elite-citizens gap, provoking such a force of attraction that various themes got structured around it.

Furthermore it is interesting that the assumed negative quality of the Constitution for social affairs in France is roughly articulated as often as its positive counterpart. Exactly the same pattern but on a lower level we see for Ireland and Austria. While in Sweden the positive interpretations of the social effects of Constitutionalization surprisingly are stronger than the negative, we see the clear opposite for the United Kingdom. Finally it is noteworthy that in Poland there is nearly no debate on the social quality of the Constitution – an interesting fact if one bears in mind that generally the Polish broad sheet Gazeta Wyborcza provided a lot of information on the reasons for the French “No”.

The argument that the Constitution would lead to a LOSS OF NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY or competences is of high impact on the Portuguese and the British debates; to a minor degree to the Irish and Austrian ones. Astonishingly, it is not that central in the Polish debate. One should, however, bear in mind that the main Polish argument against the European Constitution in Poland was the altered relative power of Member States. The Polish concerns, hence, were to (re-)gain an adequate power position in the concert of the big Member States rather than a general fear of loss of national sovereignty.

Finally we see a very distinct pattern concerning the centrality of arguments that the “NO” in the French and Dutch referenda was to high degree CAUSED BY THE DOMESTIC POLITICAL SITUATION and not directed against the European Constitution. This argument is to a significant degree central in the Swedish debate on the European Constitution and to a lower degree to the Austrian and Portuguese debate.

A main issue of debates were the CONSEQUENCES OF THE “NO” to the constitution. The argument that a “No” would offer the chance for a better constitution is frequently linked to the social issue. This shows that the future development of the EU was quite often discussed in the framework of the social question. Another important moment is the democratic impact of the constitution. This may have its reason in the common strategy of the pro-camp to list all the putative positive factors of the constitution.

The argument: 'NO': SPELLS CONSTITUTION'S FINAL DEMISE is an essential part of the debate in all the Member States. Clearly, the French and the subsequent Dutch “No” to the European Constitution created a highly influential discursive pattern around the question whether this means (or should mean) the end of the European Constitutional adventure or not. Astonishing enough this argument is more central to all the specific country discourses but the French one, where the “No” to the Constitution has been achieved. We can put up the hypothesis that this mirrors the weakness of the French pro-Constitution camp which failed to make a sustainable claim about the faith of the Constitution in case of a negative referendum outcome. This suggestion is partly backed by the analysis of discourses on the quality of the debate. The significant centrality to the debates in Ireland, Poland and Austria seems to reflect at least partly a higher degree of politicisation of this issue by oppositional and eurosceptical parties. Generally spoken we can suggest that this topic constitutes a further nodal point.

In a comparison of broadsheet and yellow press, we have, however, to assess that all nodal points remain concentrated on the broadsheet media debate. European tabloid media may have similarities concerning the main issues, but whenever a more concrete argumentation is under research, the results remain modest. This result is certainly in accordance with most work on yellow press showing the lack of argumentative corroboration of assessments within these media.

4.6 Comparison of Agonistic Positions

Radical democracy defines agonism as differences within the system accepting each other as legitimate but contested positions. These agonisms are only possible, if they can refer to a common horizon. In order to be able to talk about a common horizon it is necessary to identify common nodal points in different fora (regional/national/transnational) of discoursivation. In the previous chapters we tried to find such common European nodal points by analysing the debates on the European Constitution in different broadsheets and tabloids. The existence of agonisms on a specific topic is proof for a precariously closed discourse, in the sense that it forms a structured totality. As we have elaborated in the theory part, difference is as important as equivalence. Both logics strongly interact and can even only exist with the counterpart. Different assessments of issues can only interact as legitimate positions and be negotiated if they are articulated on the basis of a common ground of understanding. Thus, in order to prove that some nodal points (or main issues) do not only occur accidentally, we have to show that they constitute the background or horizon for the same agonisms. If they do not, the different positions will address the same main

issue, but without being able to meet, understand and relate to each other at the same level. This positioning and recognizing is also necessary to negotiate upon common perspectives and systems of signification.

After the comparative coverage analysis on EU-constitutional matters in the selected Member States of the European Union we can now try to advance the located parallels in regard to their mutual agonistic positioning. The question we try to find an answer to in this chapter is: Are there similar transnational agonisms so that we can talk about a European Public Sphere in the sense of a discourse or at least a discursive formation? If there is a European discourse, discourse as defined in the radical democracy concept, there also have to be agonisms that are negotiable and intelligible by the entire community of communication. To expose possible agonisms we have chosen six codes (themes and positions) in the broadsheets and three in the tabloids that have a relatively strong frequency in all analysed newspapers.

Across all media the opinion prevails that the NEGATIVE REFERENDA mean the CONSTITUTION'S FINAL DEMISE. In Austria and Portugal we see a precise balance between the negative and the positive evaluation of the Constitution's breakdown, whereas in Poland for instance the negative evaluation dominates. From that perspective we can conclude that in Austria and Portugal there was a chance to debate the breakdown of the European Constitution agonistically, whereas in Poland a hegemonic position on the negative consequences of such a failure prevailed.

Furthermore, there are many classical, yet quite consolidated positions in the EU-VS.-NATIONAL and the ELITE-VS.-CITIZENS debates. In all countries negative judgements can be found concerning the differences between elite and popular discourses. These judgements are mostly accompanied by animadversions on an information deficit regarding the European Constitution and the intransparency of the decision-making process. Obviously we have to consider that media often position themselves as advocates for "the ordinary Joe".

The comparison of two frequent codes is of special interest for our research question: DEBATE: SETS FOCUS ON NATIONAL AGENDAS: NEG. and CONSTITUTION: NATIONAL COMPETENCIES AND SOVEREIGNTY DIMINISHED: NEG.. The relatively strong occurrence of these two codes shows that on the one hand national media (and cited speakers) are afraid of losing national power within the European Union, on the other hand the prevailing focus on national concerns in debates on the European Constitution is highly criticised. By taking into account the different nodal points the positions are linked with, this paradox can be resolved. Assessments of the quality of debate on the European Constitution do not interfere with the assessments of the Constitution's content. The same we can conclude from the comparison of co-occurring themes and positions with the main issue QUALITY OF DEBATE. There are strong reasons to assume that these two discourses are separated and not argumentatively linked to each

other. Both topics, the consequences of the Constitution for national sovereignty and the critiques on the national focus of the debates, are not discussed agonistically. The overall negative evaluation implies that, in fact, there is nothing to argue about.

The codes CONSTITUTION: SOCIAL EU IMPROVED and CONSTITUTION: SOCIAL EU DETERIORATED are of special interest because of their agonistic positioning in broadsheets. Due to its average frequency in all media, it is the most agonistic code we were able to compare. While in Austria, France and Portugal the code is nearly balanced, in other countries the dominance of one position is, at least, not absolute. This quantitative balance of opposed positions may be due to the fact that the social question entered a discussion previously dominated by other topics. The strong discursivation of the Constitution in terms of social security emerged in French discussions on the referendum. If a new element enters a discourse it has to be contested before it gains a certain position in the structure.

Debates in tabloid newspapers are more fragmented, shored-dated and one-sided than in broadsheets, thus, agonistic positions are rarely found. The only one we can identify is the assessment of the “No”-vote for the European Constitution in the British Sun and in a lesser way in the Austrian Kronen Zeitung. All other categories are mainly dominated by clear-cut positions, in some cases adding up to 100 %.

An overall picture can be drawn from our results on agonisms. Regarding the idea of the European community in general, there is a kind of hegemonic EU discourse. The project of the European Union should not be fundamentally contested. Precisely because of this tacit agreement on the necessity of a community like the EU the rejection of the Constitution has been perceived as such a shock. It seems as if there are some discourses that are placed aslant to each other dislocating one another at their contact points. The tacit agreement on the EU is, at least nowadays, not widely spread in the broad public. On the other hand, European elites tend to implicitly presuppose a positive assessment of the EU. This leads, on the one hand, to the prominence of the elite/citizens-gap in EU discourses and, on the other hand, to radical positions questioning the European Integration project in general. Precisely because of its non-agonistic articulation or due to a complete lack of articulation, the approval of the European project has lost strength

There have been two predominant discourses in the debates on the Constitution, namely social issues and the cleavage between elites and citizens. The necessity of a European Constitution was mainly attached to the nodal point of a more or less social EU and the responsibility of the political elites. Initiated by the French public, this discourse spread all over Europe – although mainly referring to the French debate. By the focus on social issues, the European project became, once again, a moment of national discourses; European Integration was only to be supported if it could be brought into line with national ideas. Still, it was not a hegemonic discourse on the social that emerged but both sides, the negative and the positive evaluation of the social quality of the EU or,

else, of the need for a more social Europe were considered as legitimate. At least from this perspective the referenda on the European Constitution turned out to be crucial for the emergence of a European public sphere even though this specific form of a European public sphere was heavily influenced by the discourses within one national public sphere, namely the French one. Still, for some time, the same subjects were discussed in different Member States.

5. Conclusions

The starting point of this project was the question if the possibility of political participation enhances the development of a European Public Sphere. Thus, it was our aim to scrutinize in how far a “democratisation from above” would influence the European Public sphere. More precisely, we planned to analyze the reaction of media to the possibility for citizens to have their say in the future development of European Integration - a possibility that was conceded to them by some of their governments. Furthermore, we aimed at comparing public debates in countries where a referendum took place and countries where the citizens were not asked for their judgment. Little surprisingly, the quantitative analysis shows that in France, where a referendum took place, media coverage was by far larger than in all other countries.

For an analysis carried out from our theoretical point of view, it was, however, of much higher impact that political developments in France in fact dislocated hegemonic discourse on European Integration. Obviously, this is not only due to the fact that a referendum took place in France, but, more importantly, to the emergence of a fierce opposition against the European Constitution and, more generally, against the continuation of European Integration in its hitherto path.

Our concept of a European Public Sphere derives from a normative view of the public sphere in general understanding

- agonistic debate as the political core of democracy,
- identities as brought about by political debates,
- responsiveness of the political system as enabled by agonistic debate.

The precondition of these three functions of a public sphere is the existence of discourses on political matters, i.e. in our case on EU politics. Our study has, therefore, focussed on the discursive quality of debates on the EU. Can we find (temporarily) closed discourses with relatively stable chains of equivalences bound together by a nodal point, are these chains of equivalences weak and frequently changing or can we only identify discursivity without fixations? We looked for these discursive qualities first within one medium, then within one country and only in the third step in an transnational view. Thus, our first concern has not been for transnational similarities but for the existence of any discourses on European matters. Agonistic debates are, in our point of view, the most important feature of a European Public Sphere irrespectively of the question if they take place only within one medium, within one Member State or across the European Union. Similarly, European identities can be developed by agonistic debates on the

European Union and different European identities do not have to be compatible with each other. We do not understand a political identity as a value by itself but as a precondition of democracy as only by identifying with a polity people are prepared to accept decisions that go against their interest. Thus, it seems perfectly unproblematic if we can find in the EU different French, British, Austrian etc. political identities or, even, if identifications with the EU differ within one Member State. However, in order to allow for responsiveness of the political system, i.e. to enable politicians to act accordingly to the wishes of the citizens, transnational discourses are necessary.

Out of these theoretical considerations we have developed a three-step-model of analysis, searching first for European discourses in one medium, then in one country, and, finally, transnationally.

Little surprisingly, we have mainly found national debates on the European Constitution, i.e. subjects and concerns of the debates varied greatly according to national emphases. However, when the French debate became more intense, the issues brought about by the French referendum spread over the EU. From this perspective the rejection of the Constitution and its intense discussion in France and the Netherlands have been crucial for the development of a European Public Sphere on the issue of the European Constitution. Precisely by the possibility to become active against European integration (or an important step of it) a public sphere emerged while communicative efforts of the European institutions have usually remained widely ignored.

The impulse triggered by the referenda becomes obvious in the analysis of the monthly frequency of published articles. In all media the coverage exploded in May and June 2005. There are strong parallels in the amount of published articles and consequently the intensity of discussion, above all their concentration on June 2004 and May/June 2005. These congruencies in coverage can be interpreted as a common sphere of action. If we would re-separate the notion of the public in the parts of public (= political) acting and public debate of political acting, we could argue: the sphere of political acting is already coordinated in many respects, also in its perception, but the sphere of textual interpretation is not. To put it different: the usage of same signifiers provokes an increase of debating, but the characteristic and structure of these debates differ widely.

One of these differences can be found between broadsheet and tabloid coverage in all countries. Not only are there more articles addressing the topic of the Constitution in the broadsheets, but also themes and positions are more differentiated and complex in broadsheets than in tabloids. Although this is not surprising, it is interesting that the main issues often diverge within the same nation state.

We have found several discursive formations: (1) the elite-citizens gap being reactivated and combined with national concerns (e.g. the call for a national referendum in Austria and Sweden) and (2) the assessment of quality of debate linking to French discussions on the referendum and dealing as a primary function of media coverage.

Agonistic discourses could only be found – to a limited degree – in broadsheet media. Yellow press media mainly reproduced one-sided hegemonic positions. The only common issue we identified for all media was the elite-citizens gap. The feeling of being underrepresented seems to be a general phenomenon of representative democracies and not a genuine European one.

Neither before nor after the referenda real EU discourses can be found and for that reason the possibility of a collective identification and legitimisation is missing. What has changed by the referenda is the openness of the structure. The latter got dislocated by the collision of traditional dissatisfactions (i.e. elite-citizen-gap, social concerns) and thus opened up possibilities for new hegemonic articulations. To put it in another way: Precisely the lack of agonistic discourse on European Integration enabled alternative discourses. This result goes along with our theoretically derived assumption that it is the contestation of European politics and not the call for its overall acceptance that can lead to a European Public Sphere.

But, at least, there seems to be the possibility to fill this rift in the structure (the discursivation of the EU as such) with new social imaginaries. In the interest of the emergence of a European Public Sphere, it is to be hoped that this possibility will not be abandoned after the referenda (although the fact that media coverage declined rapidly as early as in summer 2005 points exactly towards such a development). The debates around the French and Dutch referenda showed the possibility of a European Public Sphere going beyond national concerns, a public sphere based upon the potentiality of public discursivation, because of its dynamisation by unsatisfied citizens. It is this kind of a European Public Sphere that could open up for the European Union the possibilities of the democratic horizon aimed at by the theory of radical democracy.

6. References

- Abromeit H. (1997), ‚Direkte Demokratie und Föderalismus in der Europäischen Union‘, in: E. Antalovsky/J. Melchior/S. Puntcher Riekmann (eds.), *Integration durch Demokratie. Neue Impulse für die Europäische Union*. Marburg, 207-222.
- Andersen S.S./Burns T.R. (1996), ‚The European Union and the Erosion of Democracy: A Study of Parliamentary Governance‘, in: *Contemporary Development Analysis*, Vol.1 (2), 33-65.
- Anderson, B. (1983), *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London.
- Bohman, J. (1996), *Public Deliberation*, Cambridge.
- Brzinski J., Lancaster T.D. and Tuschhoff C. (1999), *Compounded Representation in Western European Federations*, London/Portland.
- Butler, J./ Laclau E./Zizek S. (2000), *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality. Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*. London/New York.
- Dimitrias P.E. et al. (1994), ‚Notes on the 1994 Elections to the European Parliament‘, in: *Electoral Studies* 13 (4), 331-367.
- Gellner, E. (1983), *Nations and Nationalism*, Ithaca.
- Gerhards J. (1993), ‚Westeuropäische Integration und die Schwierigkeiten der Entstehung einer europäischen Öffentlichkeit‘, in: *Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, Jg. 22/1993 (2), 96-110.
- Habermas, J. (1962), *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit. Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*. Neuwied.
- Habermas, J. (1989), *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Cambridge, Mass.
- Habermas, J. (1992), ‚Further Reflections on the Public Sphere‘, in: C. Calhoun (Ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere*. Cambridge.
- Habermas, J. (1995), ‚Remarks on Dieter Grimm’s ‚Does Europe need a Constitution?‘‘, in: *European Law Journal* 3/1995, 303-307
- Habermas, J. (1996), *Between Facts and Norms. Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, Cambridge, Mass.
- Habermas, J. (1998), *Faktizität und Geltung*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp.
- Kirchhof, P. (1994), ‚Kompetenzaufteilung zwischen den Mitgliedstaaten und der EU, in: *Europäisches Forum: Die künftige Verfassungsordnung der Europäischen Union* (Europäische Gespräche 2/94), hrsg. von der Vertretung der Europäischen Kommission in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Bonn.
- Laclau, E./ Zac L. (1994), ‚Minding the Gap: The Subject of Politics, in : Laclau, E. (Ed.); *The Making of Political Identities*. London.
- Laclau, E./Mouffe, C. (2001/1985), *Hegemonie und radikale Demokratie. Zur Dekonstruktion des Marxismus*, Wien.
- Laclau, E. (2000), ‚Constructing Universality‘, in: Butler, J./ Laclau E./Zizek S. (2000), *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality. Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*. London/New York, 282-306.
- Laclau, E. (2002), *Emanzipation und Differenz*, Wien.

- Mokre, M./Pausch, M. (2005), Les elections européennes de 2004 en Autriche et Allemagne, in: Delwit, P./Poirier, P., *Parlement puissant, électeurs absents ? Les élections européennes de juin 2004*, Bruxelles.
- Nowotny, S. (2005), *The Condition of Becoming Public*, online under: http://republicart.net/disc/realpublicspaces/nowotny03_en.htm, [27.02.2006].
- O'Neill M. (1999), 'Between Regime and Republic: The Polity Problem in the European Union.' Paper presented to the UACES-CESPG-AMLRP workshop on *The State of the Art: Theoretical Approaches to the European Union in the Post-Amsterdam Era*, Aston University, Birmingham, 6-7 May 1999.
- Parekh, B. (2000), *Rethinking Multiculturalism. Cultural Diversity and Political Theory*, London.
- Rommetsch D./Wessels W. (eds.) (1996), *The European Union and Member States. Towards institutional fusion?*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Saussure, Ferdinand de (2001), *Grundfragen der allgemeinen Sprachwissenschaft*, hrsg. von Charles Bally. Berlin
- Schmitt H./Thomassen J. (eds.) (1999), *Political Representation and Legitimacy in the European Union*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Schneider H. (1995), 'Die Europäische Union als Staatenverbund oder als multinationale ,Civitas Europea?', in: A. Randelzhofer/R. Scholz/D. Wielke (eds.), *Gedächtnisschrift für Eberhard Grabitz*, München.
- Thièsse, A-M (1999), *La creation des identités nationales. Europe XVIIIe-XXe siècle*, Paris.
- Van der Eijk C./Franklin M. (1996a), *Choosing Europe?: The European Electorate and National Politics in the Face of Union*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Van der Eijk C./Franklin M./Marsh M. (1996b), 'What voters teach us about Europe-wide elections: What Europe-wide elections teach us about voters', in: *Electoral Studies* 15 (2), 149-166.
- Weiler, J. H. H. (1995), *The state "über alles", Demos, Telos and the German Maastricht Decision*, Harvard Jean Monnet Working Papers 6/95, Cambridge.
- Wetzell, D. J. (2003): *Diskurse des Politischen: zwischen Re- und Dekonstruktion*, München.
- Wincott D. (1998), Does the EU pervert democracy? Questions of democracy in new constitutionalist thought on the future of Europe, in: *European Law Journal* 4 (4), 411-428.
- Zweifel, T. D. (2002), '... Who is without sin cast the first stone: the EU's democratic deficit in comparison', in: *Journal of European Public Policy*, 9/5, 812-840.