

Chapter 2

Asymmetric and Asynchronous Mediatisation: How Public Sphere Research Helps to Understand the Erosion of the EU's Consensus Culture

Christoph O. Meyer
Birkbeck College, University of London

This paper sets out to show how the literature on the political effects of mediatisation and the empirical findings of public sphere research can be combined to better understand the erosion of the EU's consensus culture over the last ten years. The Europeanization of national media coverage is a reality, albeit one that varies substantially across countries, media types, and policy areas. Studies have also demonstrated that horizontal Europeanization is lagging behind vertical Europeanization. Moreover, the Europeanization of media coverage has been both asynchronous and asymmetrical with problematic repercussions for citizens' trust in and support for EU institutions, national governments, and further integration through Treaty amendments. By linking Europeanization to media effects on politics, one understands better why the Commission has had so many problems with regaining its former role in the integration process, why member states are increasingly finding it difficult to constructively engage in EU-level joint-problem solving, and why it is becoming increasingly more difficult to win citizens support for EU Treaty amendments. The paper will also examine briefly how European governance and representation could be adapted to encourage the positive

consequences of mediatisation and minimise its increasingly problematic effects.

1. Introduction

The past five years witnessed a dramatic surge in studies at different levels of scholarship focusing on the Europeanization of public discourses and public discourses (Hagen 2003, Klein *et al.* 2003, Peters *et al.* forthcoming, Koopmans 2004b, Trenz 2002, Meyer 2002, Steeg 2002). Most of the research was concerned in some way or another with the ‘public sphere deficit thesis’, i.e. whether the economic and political integration has been matched by an increasing interpenetration, synchronisation and possibly convergence of national public discourses; this is considered necessary from the perspective of cross-national identity formation, increasing cross-national trust and allowing for opinion-formation about and scrutiny of European governance. Some of the larger research projects have conducted large-scale quantitative and qualitative coding of media content (Peters *et al.* forthcoming), usually of the press, but some also of television news and the internet (de Vreese *et al.* 2001, Koopmans and Zimmermann 2003).¹

Five years is not a long-time for the findings of these varied research projects to sink in, but given the wealth of the literature and the emergence of sound empirical evidence at least with regard to media content, it is both possible and necessary to pose the question: How does it all matter? What we can learn from results of public sphere and discourse research for better understanding, explaining and possibly also evaluating the way in which the European Union is governed and is evolving?

This article does not present major new empirical findings, but primarily aims to draw on the existing body of knowledge to explore the

¹ It is arguably revealing for cross-national differences in political culture and the role of the media that most of these studies have been conducted by researchers from the Netherlands, Britain or Germany.

implications for theorising the increasing erosion of the political consensus culture in the EU as technocratic politics and functional spill-over are becoming increasingly contested; this phenomenon arguably manifest itself in the declining ability of the Council of Ministers and European Council to reach agreement, the slow-down in political initiatives from the Commission, and the crisis of how to institutionally reform after the negative referenda in France and the Netherlands on the Constitutional Treaty. I will argue in this paper that politicisation can be better understood in its structure and effects if one theoretically links it to the mediatisation literature and empirically to the evidence from public sphere/discourse research. In particular, I will suggest in this paper that these phenomena are linked to the asynchronous and asymmetric mediatisation of European governance, which is empirically reflected in longitudinal data about vertical and horizontal Europeanization of discourses.

2. European Governance and Mediatisation: Outlining an Analytical Framework

Robin Hodess was among the first to criticize that political science has so far largely failed to incorporate the media into its analysis of European integration and governance, despite the media's numerous effects on politics (Hodess 1997: 20-21). One part of the explanation may be that political science has found it difficult to understand, model and operationalize the nature and extent of media effects on policy-outcomes, political processes, and polity-evolution. Media effects, be it on electorates, intermediary actors or political systems, are mostly indirect, interact with other variables and are difficult to prove. However, communication research has shown that even direct media effects on the political system are possible, for instance, in the case of very narrow electoral campaigns, which may be swung either way by sustained media coverage favouring particular political parties (Negrine 1994).

This is because citizens do not usually have the opportunity to develop an opinion about political leaders or governing processes from first hand experience, while media consumption has been generally increasing in Western democracies over the last decades. Public knowledge and beliefs are at least in part a function of news media coverage (McCombs and Shaw 1972: 176-85). Even though the news media may not be very good in shifting public opinion on their own, research has shown that the media can set the agenda for, frame and prime the perception of political issues, influencing the audiences' views about what is important and in what way an issue is important, which has indirect repercussions for the evaluation (Iyengar and Kinder 1987, Bonfadelli 2001). Political news itself is far from objective or neutral, but inevitably the outcome of a complex process of filtering, prioritising, interpreting and evaluating, which is influenced by the logics of a particular medium (note for instance the selection differences between broadcasting vs print journalism) as well as the role of news values, organisation's political stance, and professional norms (Galtung and Ruge 1965, Schulz 1990).

Beyond a narrow definition of such effects in particular instances, such as elections, one can see a growing awareness in political science that mediated communication is moving ever closer to the centre of the political process in Western democracies, gradually altering not only presentational aspects, but also political institutions and policy-output. Saxer (1998) for instance argues not to lose sight of some of the long-term consequences of the increasing interpenetration of media and polity systems. Here the concept of mediatization is helpful. It refers in a rather broad sense to *the process through which the interdependence between political system and the news media system increases in a way, which strengthens the influence of the latter and puts the former under adaptation pressure*. A narrower strand of the mediatization literature argues that the logics, codes, and structures of the political system are increasingly penetrated and transformed by those of the media system, which is seen as undermining the systems ability to take rational, informed and long-term

decisions (some times called 'colonisation' or 'over-steering' of the political system) (Meyer and Hinchman 2002). While accounts of growing media influence on domestic politics are proliferating (sometimes to the extent of overstating their influence), International Relations scholars are also paying increasing attention to the role of the media in international affairs (Nacos *et al.* 2000), positing for instance a key role of the media in building empathy for civilian victims of genocide and persecution abroad and putting pressure on Western governments to intervene militarily as in the case of Somalia, Bosnia, and Kosovo (Hasenclever 2001, Gilboa 2005)

Broadly speaking, one can distinguish research on the news media according to whether the focus on the media is used to explain outcomes, either as an independent or intervening variable, or whether they are studied as outcomes when they adapt to different kinds of causes. In so far as the news media do influence elites' and publics' attitudes and perceptions about the European Union, its legitimacy, actions, and communication, we would expect the news media to exert some influence, usually in combination with other variables, across all three of the classic dimensions of political science analysis: polity, policy, and politics. Table 1 attempts to provide an overview of how the news media may be relevant to understanding the European Union, how it evolves, works, and what it does. It is worth highlighting that the European Union as conceived here includes the national political systems in so far as they are involved in or affected by the production, institutionalisation and diffusion of legal provisions, norms and goals through the European Union. We can expect that differences in way in which national news media adapt to Europeanization can account for some of the variation in member state's policies vis-à-vis the evolution and working of the EU.

We have seen some cases of research on all three of these dimensions, even if most it was concentrated on the macro-issues relating to the direction of integration and its legitimacy. Particularly in the context of the legitimacy deficit thesis one increasingly finds remarks about the necessity for 'publicity'

(Risse-Kappen 1995: 74) or the demand to close the ‘cognitive gap’ between the EU and its citizens (Sinnot 1997). Anderson and Weymouth study has focused on the issue of newspaper ownership in the UK to explain the dominance of Euroscepticism in the national broadsheets and tabloids, and thereby low levels of public information about and support for the EU (Anderson and Weymouth 1999).

Table 1: Potential Impact of News Media on the European Political System

	Polity Level	Politics Level	Policy Level
Typical Question	How do the news media influence the overall development of the EU, and/or its component parts?	How do the new media influence the interplay of political actors seeking to exercise power in EU decision-making?	How do the news media influence policy outcomes?
Expected Degree of Effects	Weak to Intermediate, depending on national opportunity structures (referenda, Eurosceptic parties, say of parliaments etc).	Weak to Intermediate, depending on national political culture, strengths of domestic actors	Intermediate to High, contingent on case properties and on actors involvement
Research Hypotheses	Increases in media scrutiny put pressures on EU institutions to become engage in reforms, but also gradually undermine the legitimacy of national political systems	Increasing news media attention is putting increasing strains on the effectiveness of EU governance, but increases the say for non-profit interests	Supportive news media coverage is important for the Commission to take decisions against strong national resistance in Anti-Trust and Consumer Cases and make companies seek settlements
Significance for Research on	Outcome of Referenda, Public Support for Integration and Authority Transfer in Particular Areas, Inter-Institutional Balance and Design	Influence of Brussels Press Corps, European Council negotiations, Performance of Governing Modes	Studies of Lobbying, Interest Representation, and Implementation

With regard to the policy dimension, we can find increasing references in Europeanization/ implementation studies to the role of national opportunity structures, including the news media, in influencing the degree to which full and swift implementation is likely (Börzel and Risse 2003). The role of news media is also considered crucial for the performance of so called new modes of governance, which rely on persuasion and peer pressure to achieve outcomes (Meyer and Kunstein forthcoming). Surprisingly, studies of European interest representation and lobbying do hardly ever systematically integrate the news media in their account of processes and outcomes, reflecting the traditional attitude of public affairs firms of the mid-1990s (Van Schendelen 2002).

Finally, the news media coverage can help different political societal actors to become aware of the benefits and costs of new and old EU legal provisions as they affect them, they are alerted to 'misfits' between European and domestic arrangements, and they would have the opportunity to participate in multi-level governance, influencing outcomes or being persuaded of alternative solutions. One sees increasing anecdotal evidence emerging of how Heads of State are sensitive to news media coverage when negotiating in Brussels, how the Commission is anxious to build a public case to prepare its decisions, and how both companies and non-profit interests use different means of communication to influence decision-makers via media coverage.

3. Europeanization of Media Discourses? Reviewing the evidence from public sphere research

The Europeanization of the media does not necessarily lead to a mediatization of EU politics in the same way as quantitative shifts do not necessarily cause qualitative changes. However, if these shifts are of a certain magnitude, they often do signal a qualitative change. In the following I will

draw on evidence from public sphere research to suggest that important changes in media content have occurred, which have implications for the way in which political conflict becomes visible and resolved. In their empirical inquiry, many of the key studies make the distinction between horizontal and vertical Europeanization. Horizontal Europeanization of media discourses refers to an emergence and intensification of cross-national debates about issues of collective concern, whereas vertical Europeanization focuses on debates - be they bottom-up or top-down - which involve EU actors and/or themes in national spheres (Koopmans 2004b, Peters *et al.* forthcoming).

Horizontal Europeanization

How is horizontal Europeanization measured in practice? In the context of the public sphere debate, it is not sufficient that the same topic is discussed at the same time with the same criteria of relevance as Eder and Kantner have argued (Eder and Kantner 2000), but there also needs to be discursive interaction (Steeg 2002) or 'reciprocal resonance structures' (Tobler 2001) between different national debates in order to speak about a Europeanization public discourse. However, without the yardstick of democracy theory, vertical Europeanization could be observed already if there are increasing references to foreign (EU) politicians, interest groups, or news media within national public discourse over time. Yet, the empirical findings from the longitudinal studies mentioned above suggest otherwise. Peters *et al.* (Peters *et al.* forthcoming: 7) have found that '[a]ll five national newspaper demonstrate either no clear pattern or even a slight decline over time in their attention to other European countries.' Koopmans found that horizontal Europeanization trends were weak in the issue fields covered by the study (Koopmans 2004a). Looking at the different issue areas this finding is perhaps not surprising given that many policy areas have been increasingly subject to European level regulations and coordination, so one would expect a degree of trade-off between horizontal and vertical Europeanization as a reflection of real shifts in political power and activity. In other words, the more attention the news

media play to EU politics, the more they less they are interested in national politics of other countries. In acknowledging this redistribution of public attention, the Europub-Group also adopted an aggregate perspective and still found a net-increase in the Europeanization of public discourses as far as political claims are concerned.

Even though one finds little empirical evidence for a significant increase in transnational debates at this aggregate level, case studies of different controversies ranging from tax policy (Tobler 2001), Haider/Austrian elections (Steeg 2004), to the accession of Turkey (Wimmel 2004) indicate the potential for transnational communicative reciprocity and common discursive frames. Of course these are studies of carefully selected single cases, rather than of broad issue areas as in the previous longitudinal studies. Still, they do show that certain questions can become transnationally politicised and debated, especially when national politicians, and not EU-Commissioners, are at the heart of controversies as in the Tobler (Lafontaine) and the van de Steeg studies (Haider). Moreover, in the case of the Stability and Growth Pact my own studies have shown that national politicians are increasingly drawn into the coverage in so far as they are acknowledged as significant EU-actors with conflicting goals (Meyer 2004). This personalisation can be quite problematic from the perspective of discourse ethics because both debates entailed a certain element of demonisation of these foreign national politicians (Haider and Lafontaine), which would have been unacceptable within national discourses. Generally, it seems that cross-national debates are highly episodic and issue-dependent and, if they do occur, they are often very asymmetric in terms of who observes and reacts to whom.

Another, probably less problematic dimension of horizontal Europeanization from the perspective of reform and policy effectiveness, is the moderate increase in cross-national comparisons on the economic performance of other EU countries (Meyer 2005a). This means that national public discourses are increasingly comparing quantitative data and political evaluations of their own policy performance with those of other countries

when debating these particular policies. Even though evidence of real learning across boundaries is still limited, we do see first indications of an emergent discourse in each country centring on its own competitiveness *within* Europe, and to regard its own ranking within Europe as an indicator of successful or failed policies. This is particularly true for those countries, which have a strong European orientation and are doing badly in relative terms such as Germany, Portugal and Italy. The increased availability of data on national policy performance means that opposition parties have found additional and potent ammunition against the government in the battle for public opinion. Of course, there are differences in the degree to which countries frame their policies in this way, but since every country is likely to be worse than the European average in some policy areas, the main phenomenon should not be limited to countries, whose economies are doing badly. The probably most interesting finding stems from research about the media coverage of processes leading to Treaty change. First evidence from the media coverage of the European convention, the IGC, and the national referenda on the Constitutional Treaty indicate, firstly, that the high expectations regarding the visibility of the Convention method have not been met in terms of the quantity and continuity of coverage (Kurpas forthcoming), secondly, that common frames in coverage regarding the evolution of the EU existed in the quality press (Trenz 2005), but that, thirdly, these common frames rapidly collapse once debates start about how to vote in national referenda on the Constitutional Treaty (Kurpas *et al.* 2005).

These comparative studies of the referenda debates reveal that these debates were very self-centred, overarching themes hard to identify, and EU actors were kept deliberately at the side-line on the insistence of national governments (limiting even vertical Europeanization). We are therefore faced with asymmetrical Europeanization in the dual sense that, firstly, the horizontal flow of communication lags behind continuously behind the vertical flow of political opinion formation, and secondly, that national level events with a clear European dimensions are covered completely different

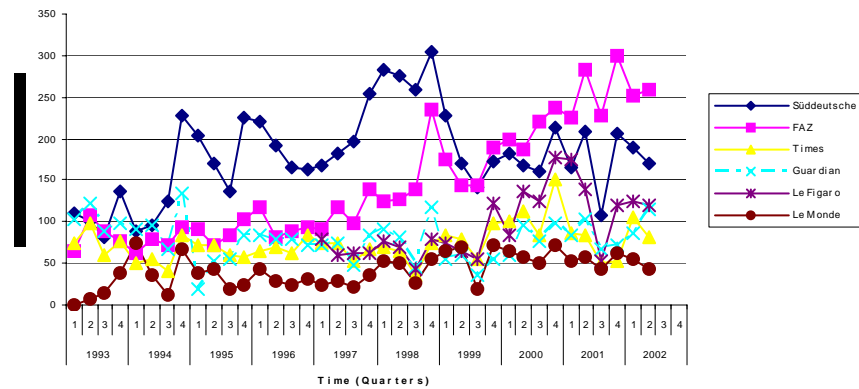
than EU level events with national repercussions.

Vertical Europeanization or EU-ization

One way of investigating the vertical Europeanization phenomenon is to ask whether EU themes are more frequently and prominently covered over time in national media. Here, the findings of are moderately positive. My own research indicates that we have seen over the last ten years the emergence of a geographically and socially restricted public discourse in Brussels, revolving around a particular elites, including Brussels-based journalists, who read similar publications and can and do engage in transnational debates, not always, but frequently enough to call it cohesive (Meyer 2002). The number of accredited journalists working for EU 15 based news media has almost doubled between 1990 and 2002, from 333 to 638. It is, however, striking that correspondent figures until about 2000 rose particularly strongly for North European countries (especially Germany, UK and Netherlands), whereas the figure for Southern European countries showed at best a slight increase (particularly for French and Spanish media) (Meyer 2002).

At the aggregate level, however, the evolution of correspondent figures in Brussels testifies to the rising importance of Brussels on the national news agenda. With more resources the focus of EU coverage has changed and become more diverse. The typical Brussels story in the old days provided either very technical information or an anecdotal reflection of single market harmonisation, including the notorious straight bananas and square strawberries story. Today, Brussels is being continuously covered (except for the summer recess) and is making the headlines frequently. This is also reflected in my own longitudinal data based on a keyword-scanning analysis of headlines in quality newspapers in the UK, France and Germany.

Figure 2: Press Coverage with EU/ European Union in Headline since 1993



As figure 2 shows, all of the sampled press products have increased their coverage of the EU as a headline issue between 1993 and 2002, even if fluctuations in attention have been large. The increase was most pronounced for the German Conservative daily, the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, but also the German Süddeutsche has substantially expanded its coverage of the EU. In the middle group are the French papers, the conservative Le Figaro and the left of centre Le Monde. Relatively weak increases could be seen in British newspaper coverage of the EU, which had to do with high national salience of the EU in British national politics in 1993, which was due to the divisions in the governing Tory Party over Europe.

More sophisticated data from media content analysis have been generated by two major research projects coordinated in Bremen and Berlin (Koopmans 2004a, Peters *et al.* forthcoming). They confirm and elaborate the general finding that EU-ization has clearly increased over time. The Bremen-Group examined newspaper coverage at various points in 1982, 1989, 1996 and 2004 and concluded that ‘we can observe a clear trend of Europeanization, as the percentage of articles referring to European institutions increases up to at least 20 % in four out of five newspapers. Overall, the appearances of the European Union, in general, and of the European Commission increased more than three times from 1982 to 2003,

while the European Parliament remained at a relatively low level since 1989” (Peters et al, forthcoming, p. 9). The Berlin/Europub-Group found in their claims-making study even stronger empirical support for what they call ‘vertical Europeanization’ trends, but noted substantial differences across policy-fields, less so than between countries (Koopmans 2004a: 24). So one can safely assume that media awareness of the EU has increased and with it the scope and depth of public discourses about political issues relating to the EU.

Whether the degree of vertical Europeanization is sufficient or still inadequate if measured against the real importance of what is happening is a moot point, which cannot easily be answered without some objective indicator of what real importance is (it is sometimes argued that at least 50 percent of all national laws today originate from the EU). Peters et al. argue on the basis of their longitudinal data that the coverage of EU politics has increased from 2 percent to 10 percent between the 1980s and 1990s, but remains still less prominent than the overall coverage of international affairs, and is furthermore in no position ‘to challenge the dominance of debates about domestic politics’ (Peters *et al.* forthcoming: 9). More importantly, however, for the purposes of our thesis is that media coverage has been in a catching up mode, namely that due to a number of inertia factors, vertical Europeanization only set in with some delay after the momentous political decisions about the future evolution of the EU had been taken in 1987 and in 1991/2. We are therefore faced with an asynchronous Europeanization of media coverage in terms of quantitative.

4. Exploring Effects of Mediatisation on Actors and Processes

The EU-Commission: intensified media scrutiny and structural problems to meet expectations

The first institutional victim of the mediatization of EU news has been the Santer-Commission, which resigned as a collegiate body in the early morning hours of 16 March 1999 amidst cheers from the large crowd of waiting journalists (Meyer 2002). This event marked a watershed in the relations between the European Commission and the news media and is the prime case for demonstrating the effects that mediatization can have on unprepared political institutions. Since the very beginning of European integration, individual journalists had tried to highlight cases of abuses of power and incompetence, which were not less frequent than in national political settings. Journalists interviewed told me about a number of attempts to highlight problems in the use of public money, as for instance relating to the Phare programme or the European year of Tourism of 1990, but before the late 1990s there was not much of a market for such reports, little support from editors at home and little follow up from other colleagues, be it from other fellow national or foreign papers. In the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, papers on the centre-left of the political spectrum and audio-visual media found stories with a single-market angle simply boring. Prominent national dailies, like the French *Libération* had no correspondent in Brussels until 1994. Other papers had just one reporter in Brussels, who was supposed to cover not only the EC, but also NATO and Belgium politics. Few editors at the time understood how the EU worked and what it did, providing the small group of long-time Brussels correspondents with an interpretation monopoly.

The result of this constellation was threefold: Firstly, journalists had little incentive to go out and investigate actively on their own. Secondly, the few correspondents present enjoyed a more than privileged position vis-à-vis those with an interest in publicity, leading to a culture of 'spoon-feeding' through sources and collaboration with them. Finally, given the low priority attached to EU news, there was little competition between correspondents of the same nationality, which fostered the creation of dense national networks and relatively homogenous coverage. The national boundedness of scandals made it easy for those accused to either wait and ignore the allegations or

exert pressure on the journalists without having to fear a backlash. In the old days, being a Brussels journalists could be either very comfortable (if one was using the official sources) or very frustrating (if one was trying to write original or investigative stories). All of this changed gradually and with some delay through the commercialisation of EU news. As the value of EU news rose substantially with the increasing competences of the EU in many important policy fields, market forces have been brought to bear on the formerly sheltered circle of Eurofunctionaires and Eurojournalists. First of all, it affected the composition of the press corps, bringing in more, younger, and more critical journalists. This changed the way the Brussels press behaved, intensifying competition for news, strengthening the incentives for more critical coverage, and thus undermining the 'delicate plant syndrome' among European elites, which held that European integration was too fragile and precious a project to be subjected to public criticism. This was sometimes but not always a conscious editorial decision and journalistic brief. Without the personal, financial and legal support from editors or even proprietor, investigative journalism is very difficult to practice and to sustain once the pressure from all sides, including through lawsuits, mounts.

The wake-up call for many editors to support EU-related investigative journalism was the BSE crisis of 1996-1997, which provided all the ingredients for a pan-European headline story, but failed to gather the momentum it could have because of a lack of transnational support. In the second half of 1996, a small number of investigative journalists started their own investigations into the role of the European Commission and EU-comitology in playing-down potential health threats associated with the BSE epidemic in British cattle. However, the group of investigative journalists was very small and working in isolation from each other. The rest of the Brussels press corps adopted a wait-and-see approach, covering the new allegations as they were published but not actively investigating themselves. In the end, the Commission was left off the hook over the cover-up and negligence charge by the European Parliament with a 'conditional vote of censure'.

However, some of the journalists involved in the BSE investigations such as Quatremer from the French *Libération* or Nathe from *Focus*, learned the lesson from the BSE case and joined force when allegations about nepotism (Commissioner Cresson employed a close friend on a dubious EU contract as a scientific advisor) and mismanagement (in the *Echo* programme) surfaced. A small group of investigative journalists joined informally forces, partly out of frustration from the BSE crisis. Journalists from the Belgian *Sud Press* Group, *Focus*, *ARD*-German television), and French *Nouvel Observateur*, the British *Sunday Times* and French *Libération*, the Belgian *Le Soir*, and the British *Guardian* coordinated their coverage and exchanged new findings to provide a steady stream of allegations thereby keeping the issue on the Brussels news agenda. However, the majority within the press corps remained sceptical about the value of the story and alleged anti-European design on the part of the authors. Especially the French media were initially hostile against what was described as the ‘American-style smear stories against a former French Prime Minister’ as the correspondent of *Liberation* recount. Only when Cresson sued *Liberation* and the Commission reacted increasingly aggressively against the allegations, did opinion swing within the press corps.

Contrary to some accounts of the crisis, which attributed to the European Parliament the key role in the events (Lautz 1999), it was the advent of transnational investigative journalism in Brussels that launched and sustained the scandal against the initially overwhelming resistance from within the European Parliament and indeed the press corps itself, not to speak of the Council watching from the side-line. It is also worth emphasising that not the substance of the allegations led to the resignation, but the inability of the EU’s central institution to come to terms with the changes affecting the Brussels press corps as its first public as Baisnée called them (Baisnée 2000). The Committee of Independent experts would later strongly criticise the ‘growing reluctance among the members of the hierarchy to acknowledge their responsibility. It is becoming difficult to find anyone who has even the slightest sense of responsibility (...) It must be demonstrated, first and

foremost, by the Commissioners individually and the Commission as a body' (Committee of Independent Experts 1999).

The legacy of the Santer-Commission's resignation can be felt in Brussels and beyond even today. On the one hand, the European Commission has still not recovered from this blow to its self-confidence and is struggling to find its own voice and sense of direction again after a number of internal reforms to its management, personal policy, but also the way it communicates with the public introduced first by the Prodi-Commission and then steered in a different direction by the Barroso-Commission and its Communication Commissioner Mrs Wallstrom. The dilemma for the Commission is that its own structures and its dependence on member states hinder it still to conduct effective public communication, project a uniform message, and exercise political accountability in way that most journalists expect using the inappropriate benchmarks of the national systems. Thus, the Commission faces today not only a more critical and news-hungry press, where the motivations to report on scandals is no longer limited to British journalists, but also a more critical European Parliament, that has recognised, how it can use the instruments at its proposals to create media pressure on the Commission as a whole and individual Commissioners such as the Italian Candidate Rocco Buttiglioni, who was forced to resign before taking office despite the support from his government. Any attempt to explain the Commission's changing (and indeed weakening) role in the European politics, thus needs to take the mismatch arising from vertical Europeanization of public discourse and deeply ingrained institutional structures into account.

National governments: intensified competition and the reversal of blame-shifting

The main blind spot in the democratisation of EU governance through media scrutiny remains today the Council of Ministers, where national ministers are still not sufficiently held to account for their actions and those of their civil servants. The EU-Commission can be considered overrepresented

as compared to the Council of Ministers as far as their legal remit and competences in the decision-making process are concerned (Meyer 2003, Meyer 2004). This is also reflected in focus group data (OPTeM 2001), which indicates that the Council is by far the least well-known EU institution and that the role of national representatives is frequently misunderstood. Even though the Commission has been a victim of vertical Europeanization at one level, it has also benefited in another way, given that its position as the communication hub of Brussels has been strengthened vis-à-vis the Council and member state delegations. Until the mid-1990s Commission press officers would usually shy away from openly criticising member states over aspects of policy, according to Thierry Daman, the Commission's Deputy Spokesman under the Santer-Commission:

We used to be very cautious in our briefings about member states positions in the Council of Ministers. All these briefings were totally background and off-the-record. Even a couple of years ago we mentioned only "one delegation said this, the other said that" instead of naming the countries. We have changed that quite recently and are more open about criticising, for instance, France or Germany in our briefings (interview, June 1999, Brussels).

Mediatization has also motivated national EU delegations, particularly those of smaller states, to become more active as a way of compensating for their lack of weight in the Council. Until the mid-1990s, national representations focused their active presswork almost exclusively on national journalists. The ministers and their spokesperson have offered substantial assistance to their national press corps in Brussels, taking their needs such as their specific production deadlines, into account. Some national ministers such as Gordon Brown have explicitly demanded that only national journalists attend post-Council briefings and some national delegations have been slow and reluctant to reply to foreign journalists inquiries in contrast to their 'own' journalists. However, this monopolisation of the national press, and this neglect for the non-domestic press is being challenged. As more and more

sources, governmental and non-governmental, seek to influence EU news coverage, the transnational verification and comparison has become easier for journalists, diminishing the scope for national (and European) official spin:

It has become increasingly more difficult to tell journalists stories, because of cross-checking. Especially countries with minority languages were quite successful in packing their journalists, so that they bought the national spin [...] the Greek government under Papandreou practised a lot of official window-dressing, also the Portuguese and the Spanish. Today this is less viable, since other member states are more prepared to attack other national positions, making it easier for journalists to counter-check accounts (interview Council official, November 2003).

Member states are gradually losing their grip on their national contingents, while at the same time encouraging the trend further with the realisation that they need to be more proactive in approaching foreign journalists in order not to lose out at the negotiation table. Particularly smaller countries like the Netherlands, Ireland, or Finland, have discovered the power of the media to increase their influence on decision-making. Press officers increasingly approach foreign journalists to get their national position across on ecological taxes, capital gains tax or regional policy. In some cases such as the Agenda 2000 negotiations, pro-active press work can make a difference as one Dutch press officer said, citing the Netherlands lobbying in favour of zero budgetary growth as an example of how media lobbying paid off in shifting some governments' initial negotiations stances (interview Dutch official, July 1999).

As competition within the Brussels public space sharpens, some countries come under pressure not only to become more open, but also more transnational in approach. National decision-makers increasingly realise that EU news coverage does influence their perception in public, and secondly, that EU news coverage is perceived as an increasingly important factor for influencing decision-making outcomes. France is the prime example of a country, which had to realise that its traditional approach to the non-French

press was proving increasingly detrimental both to French policy interests, as well as to coverage at home. As a result, France decided to hire new and more press officers at the Permanent Representation and adopt a more proactive stance towards the non-French press. In Germany, Chancellor Gerhard Schröder demonstrated his awareness of the potential of EU politics to backfire domestically by urging his Finance Minister to postpone the publication of the budget figures demanded by the EU Stability and Growth Pact for the time after the elections, thus preserving the public image of a prudent financial policy. In Britain, EU politics have assumed high public salience not least since the fall of Margaret Thatcher and John Major's slim majority government, which could be upset by every new Eurosceptic story filed by Brussels reporters. British reporters at the time joked that it would be useful to have key to automatically insert phrases in their copy such as 'in another move certain to enrage Eurosceptic backbenchers, Brussels decided that...' (Cropley 1997). The Blair government learnt that EU news had become too important to be ignored as a British official said:

In the past, the government, both ministers and press officers, didn't give a damn about the non-UK press. Now, Alistair Campbell recognises that a lot of coverage by the UK press both from here [Brussels] and from London is and can be affected from what gets written on the continent. So he is making an effort to speak to non-UK journalists who are less inclined to see things in terms of fourteen to one. From that coverage play it back on to the UK media (interview, July 1999).

Today as the Commission and other actors increasingly reveal and attack member states positions on EU issues as well as on national performance, national governments find themselves badly equipped to deal with such criticism as it spills-over into the national arena. The consequences are two-fold. First governments have started to pay more attention to EU decisions and exercise more control. As decision-making becomes increasingly and increasingly early mediatised, decision-making processes become ever more cumbersome, stop-and-go processes, where the

responsibility for taking a decision is passed up the hierarchies with the effect that European Council summits become overloaded and overpoliticised. Agreements are becoming more difficult to reach and outcomes are increasingly dysfunctional. However, once governments have agreed to a given measure (or were outvoted) and the decisions turns out to unpopular or raise certain problems for somebody (as it inevitably will in the post-Europeanised public debate), governments are tempted to blame outcomes on EU institutions or other actors. This brings two other problems. First, national governments are increasingly seen as powerless by their citizens, lowering trust in and satisfaction with political institutions, and secondly, national governments can no longer expect EU and other national actors not to hit back. Governments are increasingly becoming the victim of other governments and EU actors blame-shifting as scapegoating is turning from a bottom-up to a top-down affairs, as particularly the debate about the Stability and Growth Pact and the Lisbon Agenda demonstrates. Just as the Commission is unable to respond effectively to the expectations expressed via the media, so do national governments particularly in larger member states find it difficult to communicate to their media that their political autonomy has been limited in many policy areas by European integration and that one cannot always prevent undesirable outcomes.

Treaty Referenda: The boomerang effect of asynchronous visibility and national blame-shifting

The history of European integration is replete of crises, false starts, and temporary paralysis after governments' had cast vetoes and negative referenda blocked the ratification of Treaty amendments. However, the clear No votes by both the French and the Dutch indicate that the current crises may be related to qualitative shifts and the maturation of long-term trends, rather than one-off events that could be explained with reference to the peculiarities of each case. While there is clearly a strong case to differentiate between both cases, particularly regarding the intensity with which the debate was

conducted (high in France, little and late in the Netherlands), the post-referendum analysis by the Commission's Eurobarometer series (2005) also suggests that there is an important commonality: Few of the citizens had any particular problems with the constitutional treaty or any of its particular provisions per se, but had a whole host of more general grievances across a range of issue areas that they felt they could express *vis-à-vis their national government* by voting 'No'. Given the findings about the media coverage of the European Convention, the IGC and the referenda debates mentioned in the earlier section, it seems that both asynchronous and asymmetrical Europeanization can account for the increasing problems for governments to gain approval for treaty amendments in referenda.

First of all, the asynchronous element can be seen when citizens use the opportunity to express their dissatisfaction about past Treaty amendments and the way in which they were passed with little visibility and domestic consultation in most member states (except in Britain where the EU has been politicised for a long time). In the Netherlands, many citizens were clearly worried about past decisions to enlarge the European Union by 10 countries and to give Turkey candidate status. In France, some voters were concerned about EU legislation aimed at market liberalisation in the services and energy sector. The delayed visibility of EU decisions coupled with past attempts of government blame-shifting to Brussels has created the deeply ingrained impression among citizens of being constantly presented with a *fait accompli* as far as European politics is concerned. Saying 'No' even to perfectly sensible and empowering treaty amendments appears thus justified in the context of a general impression that public debate about decisions comes too late and is not linked to voting procedures to influence outcomes. Add to this the general findings of mediatisation literature, namely that trust in political institutions has decreased, political leaders at both European and domestic level are increasingly seen as arguing and appear less powerful than ever before. Furthermore, established benchmarks die hard, so it was in retrospect a mistake to call a wide-ranging Treaty amendment and consolidation

negotiated and signed by governments a constitution. The lack of direct electoral procedures at the European levels remains the key reasons why voter dissatisfaction can express itself still through referenda and elections on European issues.

The second problem for pro-Constitution campaigners was the lack of horizontal Europeanization. It hinders citizens from seeing the shortcomings of their own government's performance in terms of negotiated outcomes in a comparative perspective and thus better understand how certain EU decisions and in particular Treaty amendments are compromises and are necessarily not in all respects beneficial to everyone involved (Kurpas *et al.* 2005). As long as national events with a European dimension are covered by the media in this way, national referenda on EU Treaty amendments will become increasingly difficult to win, especially in a European Union of 25 where the most Eurosceptic countries had not even voted on the constitutional treaty. European public sphere research shows that media coverage often follows opportunities to make political choices and that referenda are much more intensely covered than European Parliament elections, because the latter is portrayed (increasingly inaccurately) as not being able to change policy outcomes. Either one changes the way in which citizens can influence the composition of the European Commission or particular policies through voting, or one has to invent new ways of turning national elections into European events. This could be done through synchronisation of the timetables or by conducting a single European-wide referendum on Treaty amendments. Especially the later option would transform the way in which campaigns are conducted and debates are framed as I have argued elsewhere (Meyer 2005b).

5. Conclusion: The Ambiguous Effects of Mediatisation

This paper has attempted to show how the literature on the political effects of mediatisation and the empirical findings of public sphere research can be combined to better understand the erosion of the EU's consensus culture over the last ten years. I have argued that Europeanization has been both asynchronous and asymmetrical with problematic repercussions for citizens' trust in and support for EU institutions, national governments, and further integration through Treaty amendments. Europeanization and mediatisation are thus linked in many ways. They help to explain why the Commission has had so many problems with regaining its former role in the integration process, why member states are increasingly finding it difficult to constructively engage in EU-level joint-problem solving and find it hard to communicate the outcomes, and finally, why it is becoming increasingly more difficult to win citizens support for EU Treaty amendments.

From an optimistic vantage point, it can be argued that mediatization can foster input legitimacy by increasing the opportunities for holding EU institutions accountable for their actions, by widening access and voice opportunity to civil society actors, and by promoting a greater awareness of the EU in the eyes of news media audiences/citizenry. Yet, all of this may have the perverse effect of aggravating the cognitive democratic deficit by highlighting the gap between the increasing political authority wielded in Brussels and the electoral mechanisms available to citizens to directly influence the selection of political personnel or the direction of particular policies. It may be the case that knowledge of the EU is usually associated with more support, but extensive media coverage of the EU does not always bring about more understanding of the EU as the example of Britain demonstrates. Moreover, there has been relatively little research on the extent to which mediatization causes a politicisation of European governance to a degree,

which would hinder an increasingly heterogeneous system to take decisions effectively. The risk is that the EU will enter a vicious circle that demands for the participation of ever more actors will increasingly limit its ability to solve common problems and thereby reduce its output legitimacy. But the more unpopular the EU becomes, the longer will be calls for giving European and national parliaments, citizens groups, the Council of the Regions etc, more say in decision-making.

Mediatization can be thus a double-edged sword, whose short term effects and long term consequences are hardly understood. Substantially more empirical research of a comparative nature will be needed to study the multifaceted effects of the heightened role of the news media in the EU political system, differentiating effects across various dimensions including types of media and their role in the various national and regional arenas. But it is clear that there can and should be no return to technocratic politics, even if expertise and deliberation will still be needed (Radaelli 1999). The EU central institutions, national governments, and the involved interest groups will need to come to terms with the changed media environment, in which their actions and words will be intensely scrutinised. At the same time, mediatization does not necessarily lead to a loss in problem-solving capacity as long as there is sufficient intra-media competition and scrutiny. The problem here is that horizontal Europeanization (the rise in cross-national debates) is lagging far behind vertical Europeanization (debates between European and national level). Under these conditions mediatization may increase the risk of rising intra-EU polarisation within a political system, which is caught midway on the road from technocracy to a democratic political entity.

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