



The Nature of European Issues

Conceptual clarifications and
some preliminary empirical evidence

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Why do we need an EU public sphere?

Argument. Every citizen of a democratic political system who wants to participate in a political discourse, be it actively or passively, must be able to do so.

Implication. If this is not the case, the political system in question is not a democracy.

To be specified. What does it mean to be able to participate in a political discourse?



Structural requirements.

Extention: one 'pan-European' public sphere or many inter-connected ones?

Intermediaries: 'pan-European' parties, interest groups, social movements, or trans-national federations?

Media: 'pan-European' media[^]system, or inter-connected ones?



Individual-level requirements.

Knowledge: EU-citizens in the different member countries must be able to acquire knowledge about *European issues*.

Participation: if it comes to EU policy making, EU citizens in the different member countries must be able to add to the choir, i.e. to participate in public debate and political decision-making on *European issues*.



Features of European issues.

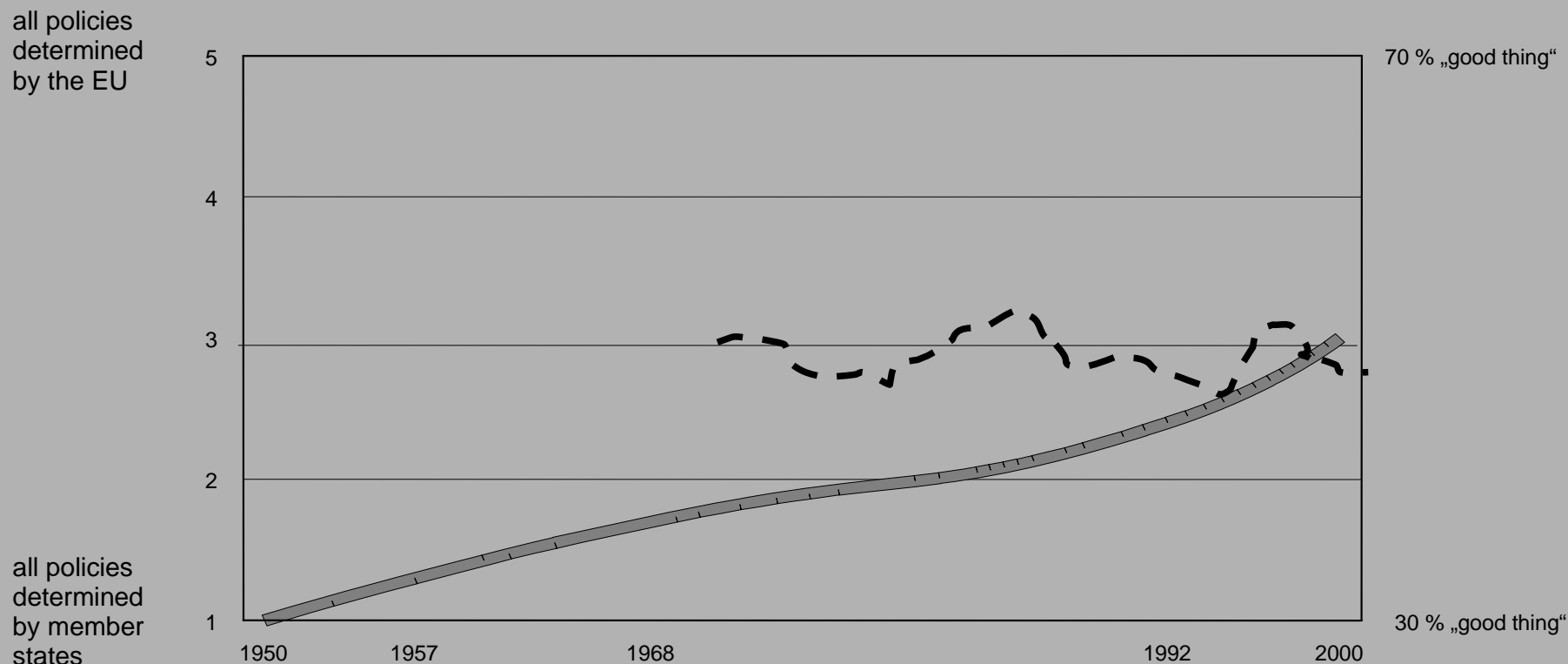
Two domains : 'normal' vs. constitutional politics

Two types: position vs. valence

Two mechanisms: saliency & competence



The Policy Scope of the European Union, 1952-2000, and the Proportion of EU Citizens Considering EU Membership a „good thing“ , 1970 f.



Note: The trend line indicates the average policy authority of the EU over 28 policy areas drawn from the economic, foreign, legal and constitutional, and social policy. Individual authority rankings are based on expert judgements by Lindberg and Scheingold 1970; Schmitter 1994; and Hooghe and Marks 2001; the raw figures are taken from Hooghe and Marks 2001: 187-189. The „good thing“ proportions are ‚hand-copied‘ from the Eurobarometers.



A cross-classification of domain and type of European issues.

	normal	constitutional
position	left-right issues	e.g. EU enlargement
valence	e.g. unemployment	European integration ?



Saliency of EU politics.

Citizens Political Agenda by EU Member-State and EU-wide
(figures are percentages)

	Belg	Denm	Germ	Gree	Spai	Fran	IRL	Ital	Lux	Neth	Port	UK	FIN	Swed	Aust	EU
<i>all economic</i>	26	27	71	51	69	73	31		36	19	27	35	84	68	58	58
<i>all welfare</i>	3	13	9	17	4	3	16		36	13	55	15	2	12	4	10
<i>all political</i>	26	35	11	22	12	12	33		9	27	6	31	10	10	29	17
... of which EU		18	0	1	0	2	3			1		10	4	4	5	3
<i>all social</i>	15	14	8	8	9	9	16		9	29	12	9	3	2	5	10
<i>all environment</i>	25	11	1	3	2	2	1		9	8	0	2		7	3	3
<i>other</i>	4	1		1	2	0	3			4	1	8	1	1	0	2
weighted N	334	155	2915	385	1373	1928	122		10	467	355	1784	140	258	268	10494

Source: *European Election Study 1999* post-election surveys. *Note:* The original coding of the open ended agenda question has been recoded in such a way that five substantial groups of issues are distinguished – economic, welfare, political, social, and environment. The data are weighted such that the population sizes of the different member-countries as well as the EP election result 1999 (according to turnout and party strength) are adequately represented. The agenda perceptions are not available for the Italian survey. Cramér's $V=.25$, $p=.000$.



Competence attributions to the EU level of governance.

Most Important Problem: Perceived and Preferred Level of Government (figures are percentages)

perceived level of problem solution	preferred level of problem solution			
	Region	Nation	Europe	all
region	10	7	6	23
nation	10	28	12	50
EU	5	6	16	27
all	25	41	34	100

Source: *European Election Study 1999* post-election surveys. Data are weighted as described at the bottom of Table 1. Weighted N=10176.



What should Europe be responsible for?

Most Important Problems and Preferred Level of Problem Solution (figures are percentages)

problem	preferred level of government			type of issue	salience EU-wide column %
	EU row %	nation row %	region row %		
Kosovo	82	14	4	political	1,7
peace & war	69	27	4	political	1,5
environment	54	31	15	environment	2,8
...					
€	35	50	15	economic	1,4
other political	26	51	23	political	5,0
other economic	33	52	15	economic	7,9
taxes	15	52	33	welfare	2,3
EU	31	53	16	political	2,6

Source: *European Election Study 1999* post-election surveys. Data are recoded and weighted as described at the bottom of Table 1.



The association of Europe with pressing political problems.

**The Correlation Between
Political Problem Perceptions and the Evaluation of EU Membership
According to Vote Intentions in Poland in June 2004**
(figures are percentages, Pearson correlations [*100], LR mean scores, and n of cases)

issue	% "important"	LPR	PiS	PO	UW	Self Defense	PSL	UP	SDPL	SLD	non- voters	unde- ecided	all
unemployment. employment	77	+17	-25	-09						-19		-14	
poverty, impoverishment	25		+12		-42		+12	+28		+31		+14	
political corruption, fraud	16				+25		+14		+22				
economic & social conditions	9	-12	+21	+11		-15	+22			+30		+22	
politics, authorities, government	8									+18			
EU integration, con- stitution, subsidies	5	+13				+14	-15		+16	+25		+15	+13
LR mean		7,2	7,0	6,7	5,4	5,0	4,5	3,3	2,7	2,0			
N		98	72	157	25	101	29	17	28	32	252	118	960

Source: *European Election Study 2004*. Analysed are weighted data. Bold correlation coefficients are statistically significant at $p=.10$ or better. Correlations under or equal $r=.10$ are not reported.



Summary: 5 points

- a. The “raw material” of the European public sphere are *European issues*.
- b. There are different kinds of European issues, and different ways to look at them.
- c. Despite of the growing policy reach of the Union, there is not one European agenda, but several, and ‘Europe’ does not play a major role in it.



Summary ctd.

d. Citizens want more Europe rather than less, but also want it to focus on international politics and the environment rather than on 'domestic' welfare politics.

d. The hopes and fears associated with Europe vary within nation-states, let alone across them.

What does this all mean for the viability of a European public sphere and for EU democracy?