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Ideals of European Public Sphere and EU Journalism

Santrauka. *Europos politikos ir valdymo globalėjimas kvestionuoja ryšius tarp politinio veiksmo, piliečių ir žurnalistikos. Šie iššūkiai nagrinėjami lyginant normatyvinius viešosios erdvės idealus ir šiuolaikinės žurnalistikos Europos Sąjungoje praktiką. Teigiama, kad viešosios erdvės idealų, ES vykdomosios valdžios ir žiniasklaidos logikos santykiai – prieštaringi.*

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1. Introduction

The notions of the European Union's (EU) democratic legitimacy or democratic deficit have become the major themes in debates of the EU polity – coinciding with the developments in which tasks and powers of nation states have been transferred to the European Union. Analyses on the relations of democracy and transnational governance have been published in numerous academic books and journals as well as in newspapers.

This article participates in these discussions from the standpoint of deliberative democracy which, in comparison with a liberal understanding of democracy, shifts away the focus on the state and its institutions and emphasizes the role of civil society and actors outside the formal institutions of governance. In accordance with this standpoint a viable public sphere is seen as a central precondition

for a democratic order not only in nation states but also in the EU.

In its widest sense, public sphere has been understood as a space that is created when individuals deliberate on common concerns. Traditionally, political theory and media theory have thought public spheres as features of nation states. How applicable are the ideas of a public sphere in the European Union? Academic scholars and, as my empirical study demonstrates, correspondents in Brussels seem to be rather divided on their views on the possibility and existence of a European public sphere (EPS). This article considers different views of the possibility of an EPS in academic literature on the one hand and among the journalists working in Brussels on the other, and then seeks some explanations for these differences.

The seminal ideals of a public sphere by Jürgen Habermas (1989/1962) emphasized the role of individual and equal citizens who assemble into a public and set their own agenda through open communication. The result of this communication is a public opinion which should encompass decision making in society. After being criticised for locating the public sphere entirely in the 'lifeworld' of the citizens Habermas later acknowledged that formally organised institutions within the political system may also play the role of publics (Fossum and Schlesinger 2007; 3-4.). One of the influential commentators of Habermas's original ideas of public sphere is Nancy Fraser (1992) who conceptualized the distinction between citizens and formally organised institutions as 'weak' and 'strong' publics. Weak publics refer to spaces whose deliberative practice consists only of opinion formation while discourses of strong publics (formally organised institutions) encompass both opinion formation and decision making.

As already mentioned, the existing body of the studies seems to give contradictive conclusions about the possibility of EPS. Part of the research (mainly based on empirical studies of media contents) conclude that there have already been clear signs of the existence of public sphere in European level while others consider even the idea of it impossible. My empirical analysis of the *production* of media content (based on the interviews of EU correspondents in Brussels) seem to back both conclusions: the original public sphere ideals including active citizen participation seem hard to accomplish but if the definition of a public sphere empha-

sises strong publics, there are some signs that could be interpreted as emerging EPS.

2. Is European Public Sphere Possible?

Those who are sceptical about the possibility of the realisation of a European Public Sphere tend to emphasize the lack of a common language among European citizens, the lack of a pan-European media, the lack of a genuine European civil society, and the lack of European identity which are seen as preconditions for democratic public sphere (Brügge 2005; Grimm 1995).

According to this approach, communication and participation as the basic conditions of democratic existence are mediated through language. In 2007, the EU recognizes twenty three official and about sixty other indigenous and non-indigenous languages spoken over the geographical area. Almost every second citizen (forty four per cent) of the EU does not know any other language than her/his own mother tongue (Special Eurobarometer, February 2006). In addition, language skills are unevenly spread: in some member states almost everyone is bilingual, while, for example, two-thirds of the British cannot speak another language except their mother tongue. Inside the member states young people and managers tend to display greatest competence (Schlesinger 2003).

Even people who share the same language may have difficulties in communicating with each other, because due to historical, cultural and political reasons the same terms may have completely different meanings. Language barriers also restrict the use of In-

ternet as a space for transnational discussion and deliberation.

The problem with the lack of a common language is not only the lack of a shared medium for meaningful communication. There is also a strong connection between languages, cultures, collective identities and, in the end, ways of perceiving reality. From this basis it is hardly surprising if a sceptic asks if it is meaningful to speak about a truly democratic public sphere based on rational and critical discussion if the majority of the "members" don't even understand each other's words. Or as Fraser (2006; 59) asks: "(I)nsofar as new transnational political communities, such as European Union, are transnational and multilingual, how can they constitute public spheres that can encompass the entire *demos*?"

The second argument of the impossibility school is the lack of a genuine pan-European press, and consequently, a common European forum for debate and discussion. Attempts to create a transnational European media (for example, The European, Voice of Europe, Euro News) have not been successful in terms of reaching large audiences or creating a pan-European debate. Some papers and magazines with a European emphasis, such as the European edition of the Financial Times and the Economist, are read all over the Union but the readers are mostly drawn from economic and political elites. Moreover, their content does not conform to ideals of free public participation and citizen involvement. Access to these discussions is very limited, participation is not equal, issues are predefined (mostly economics and international politics) and the purpose of stories in these papers is obviously

not a collective will-formation in a wide sense but rather a promotion of liberal approaches to economics and society.

Whether one considers print, radio or television (commercial and public service), the relations to the audiences have been built on some form of understanding of cultural tradition and social responsibility within a national frame of reference. Media markets are still culturally and linguistically separated national markets (Slaatta 2006). In spite of the fact that the ownership of the media industry has become more multinational, there are few signs that the national media order based on national cultural traditions, local language and regional focus are being replaced by a transnational media order. In these circumstances, how could media audiences in different EU countries deliberate together as peers?

Moreover, empirical cross-national studies indicate that media attention to European issues is low in comparison with the global, national, regional or local issues (Risse 2003). There is also quite a low level of public awareness on EU issues and low interest in following the EU-level decision making among citizens. Obviously public demand for EU issues in journalism is not very high, either. Brussels-based correspondents tend to have difficulties in linking adequately European events to the needs of their audiences at home (Golding et al., 2007). This is also reflected in the structure of the press corps in Brussels: while public broadcasting companies tend to hold permanent positions for correspondents in Brussels, commercial TV news channels only occasionally have a full-

time correspondent in post (AIM Research Consortium 2007). A similar division is observable in the newspapers: elite-oriented, nationwide quality newspapers tend to have correspondents in Brussels while popular papers allocate their resources somewhere else. The use of journalism to connect EU issues to the life world of the publics has obviously not been very successful.

The lack of a collective identity is partly related to the lack of common language and common media in Europe. Moreover, cultural heritages and collective memories are distinct, a sense of unity and belonging is limited, and there are no general agreements on common interests or values in different parts of Europe. All this makes collective opinion formation and coherent action unlikely.

Thus, one finds that Europe lacks a common language, a common forum and a common point of reference. A European identity and European civil society do not exist, at least in the way that they are perceived within nation states. Media coverage of EU issues is rather limited in comparison to those at a national level and a large proportion of citizens do not seem to know, or at least do seem to be very interested in what's going in the EU. Thus, it could be argued, it may be more correct to speak of a European non-public sphere or put ironical quotation marks around "European" and "public".

While the "impossibility school" represents one end of public sphere discussion spectrum, scholars at the opposite end claim that the European public sphere is not only possible but already exists. They claim that the public sphere is not just a normative ideal

but is also an artefact that can be empirically examined (Risse 2003; Risse and Van de Steeg 2003). Instead of talking about a single European public sphere with a common language and pan-European press, they emphasise the importance of Europeanised national public spheres.

Risse (2003) agrees with many of the observations of the "impossibility school" but he reaches contrary conclusions. He labels arguments against the possibility of an EPS a "conventional wisdom" to be challenged. He defines the conditions under which a democratic European public sphere would emerge as:

1. If and when the same (European) themes are discussed at the same time at similar levels of attention across national public spheres and media;
2. If and when similar frames of reference, meaning structures, and patterns of interpretation are used across national public spheres and media;
3. If and when a transnational community of communication emerges in which speakers and listeners recognize each other as legitimate participants in a common discourse.

Risse (2003) argues that there is no reason why all Europeans should speak the same language and use the same media in order to communicate across national borders in a meaningful way. If citizens attach similar meanings to what they observe in Europe, they should be able to communicate across borders irrespective of languages and in the absence of a pan-European media. He compares Europe, in this sense, to multilingual Switzerland. For him it is questionable

to claim the absence of a public sphere only because people read different newspapers in different languages. In fact, the opposite is true, he maintains. A lively public sphere should actually be based on a pluralistic supply of media competing for citizens' attention. As long as media report on the same issues at the same time, there is no need for a pan-European media based on a common language.

Secondly, Risse (2003) argues, conventional wisdom seems to be based on an idealized picture of a homogenous national public sphere that is then transferred to the European level. Many national public spheres, however, are fragmented, but few would argue that because of that people are unable to communicate meaningfully with each other. Similar frames of reference or meaning structures don't necessarily lead to agreement or consensus on an issue. Indeed, heated debates over political issues are a way to raise the level of interest in European issues. "The more we debate issues, the more we engage each other in our public discourses, the more we actually create political communities."

In Risse's view preconditions for a public sphere already exist in Europe. As an example he uses the so called Haider-debate, and media coverage of European reaction to an Austrian government formed from a coalition of the right-wing populist Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ) led by Jörg Haider and the Christian democratic Österreichische

Volkspartei (ÖVP) in 2000. There was a general outcry because some of the slogans used by FPÖ were considered racist. Before the official presentation of the new government, fourteen EU states insisted that Austria refrain from taking this step and threatened it with sanctions.

Media content analysis showed that not even the Austrian press treated the views of other Member States or the intervention of the EU as either 'foreign' or 'illegitimate'. In Risse's view, there was actually a transnational community of communication in this case and he sees it as a kind of litmus test of an emerging European public sphere.

Trenz (2004), who analysed European quality newspapers, argues that the existence of an EPS is indicated by such facts as: topics within European quality newspapers being similar, with almost one third of the political news being related to Europe or the EU, institutions of the EU like the Commission, Council of Ministers, and European Central Bank being major agenda-setters in quality newspapers. In spite of the fact that Trenez pinpoints the absence of the non-institutional, civil-society actors among agenda-setters as "striking" in his study, he concludes that "a European public sphere has come into existence"¹.

Many of the studies about the possibility of the European public sphere seem to land between those two opposite views. The idea of the EPS is seen quite hard to accomplish

¹ In the later text, however, Trenez seems to be more pessimistic about the mediatisation of the EU. Issues in the mainstream media are mainly nationally framed and periods of high media attention are short and linked rather to the corruption, mismanagement and conflict than decision-making (Trenz 2006).

in reality but some emerging signs have been detected. Downey and Koenig (2006) employed the same kind of research design as Risse (2004). They had the same kind of criteria for the possible existence of an EPS and they also based their study on a cross national comparison of contents in quality media. Conclusion of Downey and Koenig (2006) was, however, that “the data do not indicate a European transcendence of national public spheres”.

If the popular press is included in the analysis, the existence of a European public sphere seems even a more distant ideal, not least because of relatively low number of stories covering EU related issues. Machill et al. (2006) made a “meta-analysis” of 17 media content analyses in different EU-countries and their results indicate that the public spheres of the EU states continue to exhibit a strong national orientation. Overall, the EU topics accounted for an extremely small proportion of reporting. Compared with national actors, the players at EU level also featured in minor roles. The conclusion of Machill et al. was that “at best it is possible to talk about the first signs of a European public sphere”.

Scholars who detect some signs of an EPS tend to talk about public spheres in plural. Schlesinger (1999), for example, does not believe in a single European public sphere but rather a growth of interrelated spheres of European publics. But how these will evolve is “open to conjecture”. Broad public engagement in European public affairs does not exist but he sees “European” media like the *Financial Times* and *Economist* as a possible

start. But “at best, some European elites have begun to constitute a restricted communicative space”, Schlesinger writes.

The differences between the view that European public sphere is impossible and the view that it already exists can be largely explained by the way different scholars define “public sphere”. The impossibility school seems to take seriously the original Habermasian ethos of public sphere as an assembly of private persons discussing matters of public concern of common interest. From this point of view the idea of public sphere provides an institutional mechanism to make states accountable to citizenry and, on the other hand, it designates ideals of discursive interaction. Discussions are to be unrestricted, rational, and accessible to all. Merely private interests should be excluded, inequalities of status and power should be bracketed, and discussants should deliberate as peers. The result of such discussion would be “public opinion” in the sense of rational consensus about common good. In Frasers (1992) concepts they emphasise the role of weak publics.

Those who maintain that the EPS already exists seem to employ a more narrow, newspaper oriented definition of the public sphere. The public sphere here is facilitated by the newspapers and the public sphere is, in fact, a debate held in public by several actors who are in contact with each other through the pages of newspapers. The media is considered to be a representative of the European publics (see also Eder and Trenz 2007; Van de Steeg 2002). Deliberation among citizens has no specific role in this discourse and the emphasis is on strong publics.

3. Journalistic Conventions vs. Public Sphere Ideals

The empirical studies cited above have been based on the analyses of media content. My own empirical research on a European public sphere is based on the analysis of media content *production*, i.e. interviews of twelve correspondents in Brussels. The analysis of correspondents' interviews is motivated on two accounts: on one hand, correspondents are rather influential gatekeepers of EU journalism in their organizations. On the other hand, the correspondents are experts of their own journalistic culture and are able to evaluate the possibilities and obstacles that covering EU issues face in the contemporary journalistic climate.

The theme of this article, how the ideals of public sphere survive in a transnational environment, is approached here from a media perspective and employs two angles: 1) what kind of "public sphere" is constructed in journalists' discourses, and 2) what hinders the realisation of a European public sphere.

Correspondents in Brussels seem to have internalised the necessity of some kind of public sphere in the EU level (although they usually didn't use the theoretical concept of public sphere) simply because a large part of the decision-making and legislative power has been moved from national institutions to the EU level. They felt that it was their task to follow European decision-making and provide building material for informed citizenship. However, the variety of views on the nature and possibility of an EPS broadly mirrored that of academic community.

Practically none of the interviewees believed in large scale citizen involvement in discussions about EU issues in a European frame, mainly because of a lack of a common language, common experiences and the lack of common forums. The correspondents were also quite sceptical about the interest of citizens in taking part of such discussions. Here the arguments of the correspondents resemble the views of the "impossibility school" of EPS researchers.

The correspondents were also sceptical about the willingness of the media organizations to provide a forum for such discussions. This crucial problem was frequently mentioned by interviewees and was blamed on the public's lack of interest in the EU-issues and journalism about the EU. This provides an interesting counterpoint to the lack of attention given to this issue in academic literature on the public sphere and participatory democracy. It seems that many scholars take it as a given that participation is the nucleus of citizenship and that the problems of interest are quite automatically solved if citizens were provided with the means and accesses to participate (Hirzalla 2007). This is, after all, quite a crucial question when one considers that interest is the fundamental criterion for the ideal public sphere – it is difficult to have a discussion if only small minority of people are interested in taking part or even follow such an interaction.

The relatively low demand for the EU accounts also has influence on resources committed by media enterprises to European journalism and many commercial TV-stations have closed down their bureaus in

Brussels. There is, for example, no longer permanent representation from Finnish or German commercial TV-companies in Brussels. Reporters are sent to Brussels to cover larger media events but the daily follow-up of the news is mainly done by public broadcasting companies. In addition, tabloids don't seem to have the motivation for permanent correspondents in Brussels. Common market trends tend to shift the focus of the news organisations towards national issues (AIM Research Consortium 2007a) and news coverage of the EU in Brussels is largely in the hands of "quality" papers and public broadcasting companies, which automatically excludes a large part of the public.

The bureaus of small Member-States are working on especially tight budgets and resources in Brussels. For example, there were only two Estonian and Lithuanian accredited correspondents in town in 2006 (AIM Research Consortium 2007a; 10). The largest Finnish daily Helsingin Sanomat has routinely only one correspondent and the national broadcasting company YLE three. The Swedish Svenska Dagbladet used to have three correspondents in Brussels but during the research period (2006) there was only one. In comparison, the BBC had at the same time seven journalists and four producers in post, and German ARD had a studio and six journalists permanently based in Brussels². Altogether, there is a strong geographical im-

balance in the composition of press corps in Brussels. Correspondents from three countries Germany, the UK, and Belgium make up one third of more than one thousand accredited Brussels press corps while the share of Estonian, Lithuanian and Romanian correspondents is only 2.3 per cent (Ibid.).

The scant resources of Brussels bureaus can partly explain the public's low interest in EU issues. Tight budgets force many correspondents to limit their coverage on routine issues fed by the information departments representing strong publics like the EU organisations. Typically, correspondents don't have a possibility to make more time consuming and independent stories like reportages or investigative journalism.

Those correspondents who defined the debates of the political and economical elites (strong publics) as a "pan-European discussion" emphasized that a transnational discussion already exists.

It's not only possible, it's going on all the time. It's going on in institutions, in the Commission, in the Council, in the Parliament, it's going on in research organizations that this town is full of. They [the research organizations] also take part in and influence the policy making here.

Occasionally, the correspondents used this kind of discussions as a raw material for their stories, but they were not systematically followed. Often the forums for these discus-

² The interviewed correspondents were Erika Bjerström SVT Aktuellt (Sweden), Enrico Brivio Il Sole 24 Ore (Italy), Rolf Gustavsson Svenska Dagbladet (Sweden), Mark James BBC (Great Britain), Rolf-Dieter Krause ARD (Germany), Thomas Lauritzen Politiken (Denmark), Konrad Niklewicz Gazeta Wyborcza (Poland), Inga Rosinska TVN24 (Poland), Jussi Seppälä Yle (Finland), Michael Stabenow Frankfurter Allgemeine (Germany), Antonio Steves-Martins Radio Television (Portugal), Petteri Tuohinen Helsingin Sanomat (Finland).

sions were somewhere else than in the media. This interaction of politicians, officials, pressure groups, think-tanks, experts and scholars and its role in the EU decision-making also seems to be rather poorly analyzed in the European public sphere research.

There seems to be many obstacles in realisation of the public sphere ideals on a European level in contemporary journalism. Many of the ideals are clearly in contradiction with the prevailing news criteria. First of all, the correspondents were sceptical about the possibilities of creating a “European” frame or agenda when handling EU issues. All of them stated that they mainly chose topics of a national interest and mainly handled EU issues from a national perspective. That is what their audiences and superiors expected them to do, they said. As a rule, EU issues had to be domesticated to fit in to the national talking points. In general, “European” journalism seems to be a system of national news agendas rather than some kind of pan-European entity of the same themes and similar frames of reference, meaning structures, and patterns of interpretation (see also AIM Research Consortium 2007b). However, the correspondents mentioned some exceptions:

[L]et’s say, constitutional discussion in Spain, or in Hungary or in Germany, or in Scotland, there are a lot of similar arguments reoccurring. I really think we have a pan-European debate today in Europe, and it’s going to shape Europe. I think we’re not seeing it as much right now, but it’s going to have a big impact.

Another correspondent reminded that even if there was no genuine pan-European discussion at that moment, there were

grounds for a shared European identity and consequently potential for common discussions in the future:

Although we are not very conscious about European identity, the debate about the European social model has just started, and I think it’s linked to the fact that over the years there’s something of the common identity that has developed. Not a single member state... applies a totally free market approach like the United States. All of these societies are aspiring some social counter balance of the free market and no country is inspired by the communist or socialist model, that’s over. So we have a common ground there. No European country – even if in Poland there was a debate looming – is bringing back the death penalty.

4. EU’s Character vs. Media Logics

The interviewed correspondents also highlighted that many structural problems make EU issues less attractive than national politics in the light of prevailing news criteria. At the national level, the conflict between the government and the opposition creates drama and tension that attracts journalism. In the EU this is absent because of executive nature of its governing institutions (the European Commission and the Council of Ministers) and their relatively weak accountability to the European Parliament. With political questions deliberated and decisions made behind closed doors, not only are ordinary citizens relegated to the role of a spectator or reactor to what the Commission and the Council produce, but journalists are also excluded.

At the national level, interpellations are a central way to bring political controversies in public discussion. In the EU the main actors

and institutions are not elected and do not, therefore, have the same kind of motivation or obligation to provide a rationale for their decisions as required from national bodies. Neither do they have direct political responsibility to the electorate as, for example, prime ministers and presidents. Moreover, the EU Commission's and Council's aspirations to speak with one voice and dampen down national differences, illuminates the discrepancy between the operational logics of the EU and the news media.

From a journalistic point of view these aspects make the EU decision process not so "sexy", as this was reflected in the interviewees' commentary. Responsibility for the decision-making is spread across many different institutions, background discussions are hidden and it is difficult to identify those people or parties that are liable for particular issues or decisions.

This is one of the problems when reporting from Brussels. Politics is sexy, because you have fights between different powers. This is what makes politics sexy on the national level.

It seems that the democratic deficit in the EU causes interest deficit among both the media and the public. The media are not in the habit of systematically monitoring people or institutions that are not directly responsible to citizens.

Personally, although I'm in favour of Europe as an idea, I don't think the European Union deserves to have a big credibility or the love of the citizens today, because it is not a democratic institution, it is, say, still an elitist concept.

The media keenly follows national elections but the role of EU issues seems to be

rather marginal in different countries, especially in popular media. One reason for that could be that even though large part of the legislations originates from the EU, taxation is still in the hands of national governments and it is taxation and the allocation of taxpayers' money that tend to dominate pre-election debates.

In addition, the party system at the EU level is vague and fragmentary and this can also hinder political discussion. Rather than a genuine Europeanised party system, one finds a rather loose system of cooperation among national parties. European parties are mainly coalitions of different national parties and the logic of the alliances is different to that found in national party systems. Citizens don't necessarily know who or what kind of politics they are supporting when voting and the situation can also make it difficult to have meaningful public political debates. Not only is following debates in the European Parliament more difficult for those who are used to following national party politics, the connection between the debates in the European Parliament and the actual decisions and legislature is much more complicated than at a national level. In summary, the European political culture is still rather undeveloped compared in comparison to national political cultures.

There is also another feature in EU topics that contradicts that of prevailing news values: power in the EU cannot be personalized the same way as in national politics. The EU lacks an elected president, prime minister and opposition leader through whom one could focus on political goals or policy

disagreements. The main power centres like the Commission or Council of the European Union are collectives that make decisions behind closed doors and there are usually no possibilities to connect certain views to certain people. The main actors like the President of the Commission, commissioners, or High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy are obviously quite distant figures to most Europeans, especially as their backgrounds or personal lives are not common knowledge.

Citizens have been able to follow the top politicians at the national level for years or even for decades whereas the top EU figures come from nowhere, influence EU decision making for a few years and then disappear from the sight. At the national level personalisation of power gives journalists tools with which to make politics more attractive in the eyes of the audience. People and human drama may interest many people who wouldn't otherwise follow politics but on EU issues, journalism usually lacks the human aspect of politics.

Personalization is actually one of the key things that keep journalism and public sphere ideals apart. For rational public sphere ideals personal aspects and emotions related to politics seem to be only some kind of fuss, whereas in journalism handling issues through persons has become more and more salient.

5. Conclusions

The possibilities to realize some kind of a European public sphere (or spheres) clearly divide scholars and journalists. Those who claim that EPS already exists tend to empha-

size the deliberation in institutional spaces: the EPS exists when the politicians, officials, experts and journalists from different EU countries are having mutual discussions on European issues. On the other hand, those who think that an EPS is far from realization tend to emphasize the legitimacy problems: the (lack of a) role of citizens outside the formal political system. They claim that a true public sphere requires much more extensive citizen participation.

The journalistic culture in Brussels favours heavily the use of elites and experts as sources of news. It can be said that the use of these sources is a stone base of working routines for the journalism in Brussels. Making news and stories of EU elites and experts is usually seen as the main task of the journalists while handling the interests and everyday life of the citizens hold a much more minor role. The domination of elites and experts is built through the news criteria and journalists' understanding of what journalism is all about. In spite of the fact that there has been a shift towards the needs of "ordinary citizens" in media contents, these conventions are not about to face major changes in the near future. Even if the correspondents themselves would like to report more about the lives of the EU citizens, scant resources often prevent them doing it.

"Europeanizing" the public sphere also seems to be a distant idea because of the nationalistic bias of EU journalism. The main task of the correspondents is often to domesticate the news and construct a national frame to the European issues. Moreover, many structural features of the EU governance like the executive nature of its governing institu-

tions, vague party system and the fact that the EU leaders have remained distant to the EU citizens make it difficult for the journalists to make stories that attract publics. Media logics and logics of the EU governance don't fit very well with each other.

This study indicates that even if some signs of an emerging European public sphere are detectable, there are many features in journalism, the EU governance and EU structures that hinder its genuine development. The dif-

ficulties of creating a public sphere are much bigger at the EU level than at a national level. At the moment the main challenges seem to be concentrated in a relatively low public and media engagement in European public affairs. Prevailing journalistic conventions, news values, the nature of the EU governance and public sphere ideals do not fit very well with each other. The crucial question still remains: how does one make the elitist EU project more popular.

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ABSTRACT

Transnationalization of European politics and governance clearly causes challenges to the relations between political action, citizens and journalism. This article approaches these challenges by comparing the normative ideals of a public sphere to the conventions of contemporary journalism of the European Union. It seems that the ideals of public sphere, features of the EU's executive character and media logics do not fit well with each other.

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