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Which European Public Sphere? Normative Standards and Empirical Insights From Multilingual Switzerland

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Abstract

Since the beginning of the 1990s, the EU has increasingly been criticized for its democratic deficit, which is intrinsically linked to the absence of a public sphere at the European level. Whereas scholars consider the emergence of such a public sphere a necessary requirement for democratizing the EU, they disagree on the conceptualization and normative requirements for a meaningful public sphere at the European level. This article takes an empirical perspective and draws on the nation-state context of multilingual Switzerland to get insights into what a European public sphere might *realistically* look like. Based on a content analysis of the leading quality papers from German- and French-speaking Switzerland using political claims analysis, this article shows that three of the most often cited criteria for a European public sphere—horizontal openness and interconnectedness, shared meaning structures, and inclusiveness—are hardly met in the Swiss context. On this basis, the article concludes that the normative barrier for finding a European public sphere might be unrealistically high and should be reconsidered.

Keywords: European public sphere; Switzerland; media; content analysis

Introduction

Despite significant advances in the European integration process since the early 1990s (in the form of an increase from 12 members in 1986 to the current 27 through different rounds of enlargement, and a deepening through the establishment of the monetary union and the introduction of a common currency), the European Union (EU) has been increasingly criticized for its perceived democratic deficit. Part of this deficit allegedly lies in the EU's institutional architecture, such as the general remoteness and opacity of EU institutions, the lack of accountability of the EU Commission, and the weakness of the European Parliament (for a summary, see e.g. Follesdal and Hix 2006), but many scholars blame the absence of a European public sphere as the main cause. This public sphere deficit materializes in the discrepancy between the continuing transfer of decision-making power from the national to the EU level and the ongoing predominance of the nation-state as the primary locus of public debate, opinion formation, and citizen participation (e.g., Gerhards 1993, 2000). Yet the emergence of a European public sphere is critical to democratize the EU: on the one hand, a public sphere allows European citizens to inform themselves about EU institutions and policies and hold them accountable and, on the other, allows EU actors and institutions to observe public opinion and to gain public resonance, support, and legitimacy. Such an interface between European citizens and political elites is all the more important in the context of the difficult national ratifications of EU treaty reforms and several no-votes in recent national referendums.

Against this background, a vivid academic debate has developed over the normative standards of a European public sphere and the conditions of its emergence. The older literature is characterized by much disagreement on how to conceptualize and measure a European public sphere, and this has led to diverging conclusions about the public sphere deficit in Europe (Risse 2002). Based on a public communication approach, many researchers have more recently come to conceive of a European public sphere as the Europeanization of national public spheres through communicative flows that transcend the boundaries of the nation-state. Although it is relatively undisputed that these communicative flows should increasingly reach up vertically to the EU level in the form of the growing visibility of EU institutions and policies in the national media, whether and in which form the flows should also reach horizontally across to other European countries is still contested. In addition, other

disagreements relate to the normative importance and empirical operationalization of more qualitative discursive aspects, such as shared meaning structures or the inclusiveness of Europeanized public communication.

Short of any generally accepted normative standards and requirements, this article takes a more pragmatic and empirical approach to the study of a European public sphere. However, the aim is not to offer yet another empirical analysis of the current level or form of the Europeanization of national public spheres, but to draw on the Swiss case to provide useful comparative insights for assessing what a European public sphere might *realistically* look like (for a similar but historic approach without empirical testing, see Ernst 1998; Neidhardt et al. 2000). I argue that we should not expect anything more from a European public sphere than what we can find in the nation-state context of one of the oldest and most stable European democracies, which can in many ways be characterized as "pocket-size Europe" (Kriesi 1992, 576). Therefore, my goal is to determine whether the Swiss public sphere meets the main normative standards that scholars have set for a meaningful European public sphere: Do we find interconnectedness and discursive exchanges between the Swiss language regions? Is there a shared system of meaning? And how inclusive is the Swiss public sphere?

This article proceeds in four steps. First, I review the most influential theoretical and empirical literature on the European public sphere deficit and identify the main indicators used to measure the degree and form of Europeanized public discourse. Next, I introduce my data and measurements, before I present my empirical findings on the degree of openness and interconnectedness, the convergence of meaning structures, and the level of inclusiveness of public communication in the media of the Swiss language regions. Finally, the conclusion discusses the implications of my findings for the European public sphere deficit and the prospects for democratizing the EU.

In search of a European public sphere

Research on the European public sphere has flourished since the early 1990s, when the difficult ratification process of the Maastricht Treaty signalled the end of the era of "permissive consensus" and opened up a new period of growing public contestation over Europe. In one of the earliest and most cited articles in the field, Gerhards (1993, 100) sketched two models for a European public sphere: a unified, pan-European public sphere carried by European-wide media and the Europeanization of the various national public spheres in the form of increasing national media coverage of EU themes and actors from a non-national perspective. Earlier studies disqualify this second model as insufficient and unable to alleviate the democratic deficit of the EU. In this view, national news media are "directed at national publics and remain attached to national viewpoints and communication habits" (Grimm 1995, 295). Therefore, these media are likely to "domesticate" European topics rather than to "reorientate an audience towards a common European perspective" (Schlesinger 1995, 25-6). Thus, although these authors claim that a nation-transcending communicative context can be created only by the emergence of a European-wide media system, they reject this scenario as unfeasible due to the absence of a common language and shared structures of perception and understanding (see also Kielmansegg 1996, 27-8).

More recently, this view has been criticized as being deficient because it relies on an idealized conception of a homogeneous national public sphere and, most importantly, mistakenly equates the public sphere with the media system (e.g., Kantner 2003; van de Steeg 2002, 2006). More recent studies acknowledge the crucial importance of the media, but argue that the media constitute a forum only for representing the public sphere, not the public sphere itself.[1] In this view, the public sphere is defined as a system of communication (e.g., Neidhardt 1994), and whether it is a European public sphere does not depend on the geographical boundaries of the media system but on the spatial reach and characteristics of

public communication in the national media. Thus, recent literature has become more empirically-oriented and has focused on media coverage to establish the degree of Europeanization of public communication over time and/or across countries. Many of these studies have narrowed their analysis of public debates about specific European issues at given points in time—cases in point are, for instance, the "Haider debate" (Berkel 2006; van de Steeg 2006), EU Eastern enlargement in general (Adam 2007; van de Steeg 2002) and Turkish EU accession in particular (Wimmel 2004), the EU constitution (Adam 2007), EU summits (Meyer 2010), the EU Commission's corruption scandal (Trenz 2000), or the "Berlusconi-Schulz case" (Downey and Koenig 2006); however, two recent large-scale collaborative research projects offered a cross-sectional and longitudinal examination of the overall patterns of public communication in the national media (Koopmans and Statham 2010a; Wessler et al. 2008).[2]

Despite this impressive accumulation of empirical evidence over the last few years, disagreement remains on how to measure Europeanized communication in the various national public spheres. However, existing indicators can be subsumed into three dimensions: first, from a more quantitative perspective, Europeanization has something to do with the degree of openness and interconnectedness of public communication in national public spheres; second, Europeanization refers to a shared system of meaning; third, Europeanization deals with the inclusiveness of public debates.

Regarding the first dimension, the *degree of openness and interconnectedness* of national public spheres, many scholars agree that Europeanization refers to a process that increasingly enlarges the scope of public communication beyond the boundaries of the nation-state in vertical and horizontal directions. The vertical dimension was already present in Gerhards's (1993) early conception of Europeanized national public spheres and implies EU institutions and policies are becoming increasingly visible in the national media. Visibility of EU-level politics allows citizens to become aware of Europe, to scrutinize EU decision-making, and to form an opinion. In that sense, it is often seen a precondition for anything that could meaningfully resemble a European public sphere and contribute to the democratization of the EU (e.g., Trenz 2004). Yet, it is not the only possible form of Europeanization and, arguably, not a sufficient one. Given the strong intergovernmental elements within the EU, national actors and policies of other EU member countries become increasingly relevant for one's own country. As a consequence, on the horizontal dimension, Europeanization means that public debates in the national media should gradually open up to other EU countries and become more entwined or interconnected. According to Eder and collaborators (Eder et al. 2000; Eder and Kantner 2002; Trenz 2004), communication connectivity can be achieved when the same political issues are discussed at the same time and under a common frame of relevance. Critics have argued that such a synchronization of public debates does not qualify as Europeanization. In these critics' view, synchronized public debates appear to be purely national debates from the perspective of the individual citizen if there are no cross-references to other countries. Hence, public communication in the different national public spheres should not only be parallelized but also interconnected through "discursive interaction" (Risse 2002; Sifft et al. 2007; van de Steeg 2002, 2006; Wimmel 2004) or "communicative linkages" between actors from different countries (Koopmans and Erbe 2004; Koopmans and Statham 2010b). In addition, some treat the appearance of actors from one country in the national media of another country, without any explicit communicative linkages, as a "weak variant" of horizontal Europeanization (Koopmans and Erbe 2004; Koopmans and Statham 2010b). In this view, the visibility of foreign actors is an indicator of the openness of national public spheres toward one another, but this visibility of foreign actors as Europeanization only if it increases relative to international (i.e., non-European) news coverage.[3]

Although most empirical studies find that EU institutions and topics get little attention in the national media, the studies point to significant increases over time in all countries (for a

review, see Meyer 2010, 34-5), especially in policy fields where the EU has gained strong supranational competences (Koopmans et al. 2010). Horizontal Europeanization in the form of discursive interaction, in contrast, has overall stagnated at low levels (Koopmans et al., 2010; Sifft et al., 2007)—even though it can occasionally reach high levels, as in the case of public debates about Turkey's accession to the EU (Wimmel 2004). Thus, although EU actors and policies are playing an increasing role in the national media, public debates in different national public spheres are rather disconnected from each other and have so far not integrated into a common, European discourse. Some interpret this situation as "segmented Europeanization" and evidence of the persistence of the public sphere deficit in Europe (Sifft et al. 2007). This pessimist interpretation is grounded in the assumption that discursive integration is an "integrated" form of Europeanization that would lead to "collective identification" and a sense of belonging to the same community. From this perspective, therefore, horizontal Europeanization is a "crucial prerequisite for the development of a common European opinion formation" (Sifft et al. 2007, 131), whereas vertical Europeanization is a weaker variant of Europeanization and merely generates parallel universes of EU-focused public communication ("EU-ization")(for similar views, see van de Steeg 2002; Wimmel 2004). Other researchers interpret their broadly similar findings in a more positive light and argue that horizontal exchanges are not necessarily a stronger variant of Europeanization. On the contrary, in fields where the EU has supranational features, more vertical forms of Europeanization are needed to alleviate the public sphere deficit (Statham 2010, 287).

Similar contrasting perspectives also persist for other defining features of a Europeanized public sphere, which relate to more qualitative aspects of public communication in the national media and have been less explored empirically. As mentioned above, the second dimension of Europeanization pertains to the existence of *shared meaning structures*. When Gerhards (1993) first outlined his model of Europeanized national public spheres, he mentioned two defining criteria: the growing visibility of EU actors and topics (vertical Europeanization) and the evaluation of these themes and actors from a European perspective that extends beyond the interests of a particular country. This perspective has been criticized as unnecessarily restrictive. In fact, even within the nation-state context, much communication from special interest groups is not oriented toward a common, national good, but is still considered part of a national public sphere (Eder et al. 2000; Koopmans and Statham 2010b, 36). What matters instead, according to Eder and collaborators (2000), is that the same (European) topics are discussed under a "common frame of relevance." In other words, Europeans should agree on the relevance or importance of any given topic and therefore have a shared understanding of issue priorities. For Risse (2002) and van de Steeg (2002, 2006), a shared system of meaning refers to a common definition or interpretation of a specific issue rather than to its perceived importance, and can empirically be captured through frame analysis (see also Downey and Koenig 2006). Frames also refer to identity constructions and provide answers to the question of what Europe stands for (e.g., a community of values, an economic space, a political union) (Risse 2002, 8). Empirical evidence of this dimension is scarce, especially compared to the many studies on vertical and horizontal Europeanization, and highly contradictory. Whereas some found that the framing of the EU in national public spheres is broadly similar across countries, cross-sectionally (Díez Medrano and Gray 2010), and with respect to the interpretation of the "Haider case" (van de Steeg 2006), others highlighted the continuing predominance of distinct national patterns of interpretation and the absence of distinctly European framings in national public spheres (Downey and Koenig 2006; Trenz 2000).

A third, more qualitative dimension against which the public sphere deficit has been evaluated in the literature deals with the degree of *inclusiveness* of public debates in the national media. This dimension has been conceptualized in two fundamentally different ways.

Inclusiveness can refer to "the inclusion of the other in the demarcation of the polity" (van de Steeg, 2002, 511). This aspect relates to the extent to which fellow Europeans are accepted as legitimate speakers in the public sphere and treated as part of the same community, indicating there is some degree of collective identification (Risse 2000, 8). Similarly, Sifft and coauthors (2007) refer to "collective identification" as a second, qualitative aspect of horizontal Europeanization. In their view, communicative exchanges beyond national borders should be "acknowledged by its participants" 'subjectively' as a common discourse" (2007, 131), as revealed by references to a common European public ("we Europeans").[4] However, inclusiveness can relate to the type of actors who have a voice in Europeanized communication in national public spheres (Koopmans 2007) or who can act as agenda-setters or initiators of Europeanized news stories (Trenz 2004).

Conceptualized in either way, inclusiveness is the missing element in Europeanized public communication and lies at the heart of the public sphere dimension of Europe's democratic deficit. In fact, identification with a common European public is virtually non-existent (Sifft et al. 2007), and European public communication in the national media is dominated by powerful government and executive actors, who are systematically overrepresented in Europeanized debates compared to purely national public debates (Koopmans 2007) and act as the most powerful agenda-setters (Trenz 2004).

Overall, the empirical evidence of the existence and extent of a public sphere deficit in Europe is mixed, depending on the applied criteria and normative standards. Although the Europeanization of public spheres is under way in the form of the increasing visibility of EU institutions and issues in the national media, this process has hardly satisfied the more demanding qualitative requirements for Europeanized public communication, in terms of interconnectedness, framing, and inclusiveness. The question is whether these standards can realistically be met in the foreseeable future. In fact, there has been a tendency in the literature to set the normative barrier for finding adequate Europeanization very high—and often higher than for national public spheres (for this criticism, see, e.g., Eder and Kantner 2002). The aim of the present article is not to decide what would be normatively desirable for a European public sphere, but to draw on the nation-state context of multilingual Switzerland to get empirical insights into what the European public sphere might realistically look like. Although Switzerland has been characterized as "pocket-size Europe" (Kriesi 1992, 576) due to the presence of four national languages and a linguistically segmented media system, a strong denominational cleavage, important divisions between urban and rural areas, extensive cantonal autonomy, and a collegial executive body, the Swiss case is far less complex than the European multi-level polity. For this article, this lack of complexity is not a disadvantage, however. If the normative standards set for a European public sphere are not even met in a similar but less complex context of one of the oldest and most stable democracies, then we should perhaps reconsider existing conceptualizations and requirements for a public sphere at the European level. Before I turn to an empirical assessment of the Swiss case, I present my data and measurements in the next section.

Data and measurements

In line with the dominant approach in the European literature, I focus on the print media as the main forum for representing the public sphere. Newspapers have been the primary data source in virtually all recent empirical studies on the European public sphere. On the one hand, newspapers are readily available and can easily be retrieved and coded over a long period. On the other hand, and most importantly, newspapers have a broader thematic scope, offer more space, are less event-oriented, and allow greater discursive elaboration and argumentation than television or radio (Jarren and Donges 2002, 195). In Switzerland, newspapers are of "paramount importance" in the media system (Marcinkowski 2006, 398), not least because they are the main source of (political) information for most citizens,

especially in the run-up to federal referendum votes (Tresch 2008, 119). Given newspapers' crucial role as agenda-setters and opinion leaders within the print media market, I concentrate on the leading quality paper from German- and French-speaking Switzerland—the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (NZZ) and *Le Temps* (LT).

Thematically, I mainly focus on European integration policy during the period between February 2000 and March 2001. At the time, the European integration policy was one of the most salient issues in Switzerland and figured at the top of the political agenda, not least because the Swiss were called to the polls twice. In May 2000, Swiss citizens had to vote on a set of bilateral agreements with the EU for the reciprocal opening of the markets in seven specific areas, and in March 2001, Swiss had to decide on the popular initiative "Yes to Europe" asking for immediate membership negotiations with the EU. In-between the two popular votes, in addition, the federal parliament debated on "Yes to Europe" during the summer and autumn sessions in June and September 2000. Whereas the political elites in both language regions largely agreed with each other during the parliamentary debate and the subsequent voting campaign on the bilateral agreements, center-right parties were deeply divided along the language borders in the case of the popular initiative "Yes to Europe" (Tresch 2008, 104-8). Both votes gave rise to very intense campaigns and higher-than-average electoral participation. At the ballot box, the bilateral agreements were finally approved by a large majority of 62.7% of the voters, whereas the popular initiative "Yes to Europe" was massively rejected by 76.3% of the voters and all Swiss cantons.[5] The European integration policy is an issue well-suited for confronting the normative standards for a European public sphere with the Swiss reality: this policy repeatedly opens deep divisions between the language regions as well as between urban and rural areas and therefore comes close to the situation within the EU where member states often have contrasting positions and interests.

The data gathering process followed a two-step procedure. First, all news articles dealing with the Swiss European integration policy and published in the national news sections between February 2, 2000, and March 17, 2001, were retrieved (full sample). Second, the selected articles were coded with "political claims analysis" (PCA) (Koopmans and Statham 1999). PCA allows political opinions expressed by political actors in the media to be identified—regardless of the form this expression takes (verbal statement, demonstration, political decision, etc.) and regardless of the nature or the scope of the actor (supranational/national/regional/local government, parliamentarian, political party, interest group, etc.). Ideal-typical claims can be broken down into seven elements: the location of the claim in time and space (where/when), the claimant (who), the form (how), the addressee (at whom), the substantive position on an issue (what), the actor concerned (for/against whom), and the justification (why). However, many claims are less differentiated and miss one or several elements (Koopmans and Statham 2010b, 54-7). In the case at hand, 491 claims were coded in the NZZ and 594 in LT, but given the fragmentary structure of many claims, the number of cases included in different analyses can vary depending on which claim element is studied.

According to the literature, the public sphere deficit in the EU does not primarily result from the insufficient visibility of EU-level politics. The deficit should rather be seen in terms of lacking openness toward and interconnectedness with other European countries, divided meaning structures, and the limited inclusiveness of civil society actors. Therefore, these three normative requirements will be applied to the Swiss case. The degree of *horizontal openness and interconnectedness* is measured two ways: first, I look at the geographical scope of the claimants and, for individual actors from Switzerland, their regional origin. In this way, I assess the degree of openness of mass-mediated communication in the European integration policy toward foreign, national, and regional actors as well as toward actors from the different language regions. This operationalization comes close to the "weak variant" of horizontal Europeanization (Koopmans and Erbe 2004), which refers to the appearance of actors from a

given country in the national media of another country. To put the results into perspective, I additionally rely on the PCA of public communication on immigration, pensions, and education in the NZZ and LT during 2000-2002. Second, I examine the degree of interconnectedness by analyzing the presence of addressees. The proportion of claims with a (positively or negatively evaluated) addressee gives an impression of the extent of discursive exchanges in public communication on European integration in general and the share of discursive exchanges between a claimant and an addressee from different language regions informs about the degree of discursive interconnectedness between language regions. The existence of *shared meaning structures* is analyzed based on the justification of the claim (see Díez Medrano and Gray 2010). Justifications were coded with an open-ended list and then grouped into broad, general issue frames (see, Tresch 2008). To assess the degree of *inclusiveness* of public communication in the Swiss European integration policy, I follow Koopmans (2007) and examine which types of actors appear as claimants in the media. The next section presents empirical findings for these three dimensions.

Empirical results

      Whereas vertical Europeanization refers to the increasing visibility of EU actors and policies, a weak form of horizontal Europeanization relates to the increasing visibility of actors from other EU member countries, indicating how open various national public spheres are toward one another. In a similar way, Table 1 shows the geographical scope of actors appearing as speakers in public communication about the European integration policy in Switzerland compared to debates on immigration, pensions, and education.

-- Insert Table 1 about here --

      In general, public debates in the Swiss quality press are quite closed and nationally-oriented. Even in the field of European integration, foreign and EU-level actors are quite invisible and clearly dominated by Swiss actors from the national level, which account for at least three quarters of all claims in both papers and all policy domains. Regional actors (from the cantonal or local level) have a significant share only in public debates on education, a policy field that falls mainly as the responsibility of Swiss cantons. However, even in this policy field, public debates are strongly dominated by national-level actors and institutions. This result confirms the idea that national politics serve as a common focal point, able to integrate regional public spheres vertically (Kriesi 1992). Going one step further, Table 2 focuses on Swiss actors and, wherever possible, looks into their regional origins.[6]

-- Insert Table 2 about here --

      Named actors from a newspaper's language region are clearly dominant: in the NZZ, German-speaking actors appear more than twice as often as speakers than French- or Italian-speaking actors, whereas French-speaking actors have the most prominent position in LT. Admittedly, the regional composition of claimants is much more balanced in LT than in the NZZ. Except for public debates on education, French-speaking actors are only slightly more visible in LT than German-speaking actors. In terms of horizontal openness toward the other language regions, LT can therefore be characterized as more open than the NZZ. Yet it can be argued that LT is not sufficiently open toward German-speaking actors who represent a clear majority in the country. In fact, given that less than a quarter of the Swiss population is French-speaking and that only about 23% of all seats in the national parliament are occupied by French-speakers, they seem to enjoy a disproportionately high visibility in public debates reported by LT. This relative overrepresentation of French-speaking actors can be understood from the perspective of news value research (e.g., Galtung and Ruge 1965): the "cultural proximity" between French-speaking actors and LT contributes to their newsworthiness and increases their chances of getting a voice in this newspaper.

      Table 3 analyzes the degree of interconnectedness in the form of discursive exchanges between a claimant and an addressee.

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First, only a minority of all claims on European integration policy in Switzerland contain any discursive elements at all (about a third in the NZZ and 44% in LT). Second, even in a consensus democracy like Switzerland, discursive exchanges are for the most part negative in tone; claimants mostly address other actors to express their criticism, not their support. This finding substantiates Gerhards and Neidhardt's (1991, 66) theoretical expectations and underlines that the public sphere mostly is a "critical public sphere" (Neidhardt et al. 2004, 27). Third, and most importantly for this article, discursive references are almost always directed at national institutional actors (more than 70%), especially at (a member of) the national government. Discursive exchanges between actors from the same language region are very exceptional; discursive interaction between actors from different language regions virtually inexistent. Overall, thus, public communication regarding the European integration policy appears to be a series of monologues rather than a dialogue (see also Neidhardt 1994, 20). Interconnectedness is the exception rather than the rule, and goes mostly in a vertical, not a horizontal, direction.

Thus, with regard to the degree of horizontal openness and interconnectedness, the regional public spheres in Switzerland appear to be as much disconnected from one another as the various national public spheres in the EU. Table 4 shows to what extent the framing of public communication in the run-up to the votes on the bilateral agreements and the popular initiative "Yes to Europe" point to the existence of shared meaning structures.

-- Insert Table 4 about here --

In both newspapers, the bilateral agreements are framed in a highly similar way, and citizens from both language regions were exposed to a common discourse. Most often, the agreements with the EU were interpreted (by supporters and opponents alike) from an economic perspective, underlining the advantages and costs of market liberalization with the EU for the Swiss economy. With regard to "Yes to Europe," in contrast, some notable differences in issue framing appear between the two newspapers. In the NZZ, the three most visible frames are directed against the popular initiative, but only one ("bad moment") is also prominent in LT (although at a lower level). Conversely, the second-most important frame in LT ("generally pro-European") is hardly ever used in the NZZ. The reason for these differences is that political actors were divided on "Yes to Europe" along linguistic lines: French-speakers were much more supportive of the popular initiative than German-speaking actors. Given that political actors get more media attention in their home region (see Table 2), dominant issue frames can diverge. However, even French- and German-speakers campaigning on the same side tended to use different frames (results not shown); for instance, French-speaking opponents framed their rejection of the popular initiative much more often in tactic terms whereas German-speaking opponents more frequently justified their position with generally anti-EU arguments.

Last, Table 5 investigates the degree of the inclusiveness of public communication in Switzerland and shows which types of actors appear as claimants during different phases of the policy cycle.

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Although state actors clearly dominate public communication on the European integration policy in Switzerland, this dominance is less pronounced than in other European countries (see Koopmans 2007). At least part of the explanation lies in the Swiss system of direct democracy, which not only is a mechanism of vertical integration between the language regions (Kriesi 1992) but also reinforces the position of non-state actors in the mass-mediated public sphere (Höglinger, 2008). Overall, intermediary actors make up about a third (NZZ) and 44% (LT) of all claims on Swiss-EU relations. In both newspapers, this proportion drastically declines during parliamentary sessions, but significantly increases during voting campaigns, when intermediary actors have an even higher share of claims-making than state

actors. Thus, direct democracy is a clear opportunity structure for intermediary actors and may help alleviate the public sphere deficit in terms of inclusiveness—at least occasionally for the duration of a voting campaign.

Discussion

Since the beginning of the 1990s, the EU has been increasingly criticized for its democratic deficit, which is intrinsically linked to the absence of a public sphere at the European level. Whereas scholars consider the emergence of such a public sphere a necessary requirement for democratizing the EU, they tend to set the normative barrier for finding adequate Europeanization very high.

Against this background, the aim of this article was to draw on the nation-state context of multilingual Switzerland to get empirical insights into what a European public sphere might *realistically* look like. Based on a content analysis of the leading quality paper from German- and French-speaking Switzerland with political claims analysis, this article tested to what extent three of the most often cited criteria for a European public sphere—horizontal openness and interconnectedness, shared meaning structures, and inclusiveness—are met in the Swiss context. First, the openness of public debates toward actors from other language regions is relatively limited. Discursive exchanges virtually never reach across the language borders; the exchanges only go up to national decision-makers. Horizontal integration, in other words, is largely missing—within Switzerland as much as between European countries. In light of the relative absence of discursive exchanges in the Swiss case, whether such links will eventually emerge on a European level seems questionable. Although some scholars portray them as a superior form of Europeanization and some sort of final stage toward which the EU should gradually evolve (Sifft et al. 2007), others expect an inverse trend and suggest that increased supranationalization of policy-making in the EU "transforms the communicative structure from horizontal, transnational network structure into a hierarchical, vertical structure, in which actors in national polities are linked indirectly through common references to European actors and policy contexts" (Koopmans et al. 2010, 94). Both perspectives suggest that national public spheres pass through different stages as the European integration process advances, but scholars anticipate this process will go in reverse directions. The findings presented here allow no conclusions to be drawn on these opposite perspectives. Historically, however, a "Swissification of regional public spheres" was possible only through (rejecting and supporting) references to the project of a federal state (Ernst, 1998, 230) and thus the emergence of vertical communicative links.

Second, the frame analysis showed that citizens in the two language regions are not always exposed to the same discourse. In the case of the bilateral agreements, political actors from all over the country framed this issue in terms of economic advantages and disadvantages. In the case of the popular initiative "Yes to Europe," in contrast, different interpretive perspectives dominated the two sides of the language border. On the one hand, generally pro-European frames were more visible in the French-speaking region given that support for the initiative mainly came from this region. On the other hand, even within a political camp, French- and German-speaking actors tended to use different frames (i.e., the "no" tactic of French-speakers vs. generally anti-EU feelings of German-speakers). Despite such different attitudes toward the European integration process, public discourses on Swiss-EU relations are not regionally-oriented. In the same ways as EU member countries often interpret EU politics in terms of domestic consequences (Sifft et al. 2007), Swiss actors also analyze the implications of Swiss-EU relations for the national economy, national political institutions, or, sometimes, for cantonal prerogatives, but not for the language region. In this sense, public discourse in Switzerland is less segmented than at the European level.

Third, although public discourse in the Swiss quality press is dominated by state actors, the discourse is more inclusive than Europeanized (and even nationally-confined)

public communication in EU member countries. In Switzerland, direct democracy strengthens the position of intermediary actors in the mass-mediated public sphere, especially during voting campaigns. Thus, direct democracy may help alleviate the public sphere deficit in terms of inclusiveness. In addition, direct democracy has been shown to synchronize public discourses in the language regions and to draw attention vertically to common, national issues (e.g., Tresch 2008). Whether (and under what conditions) direct democracy could contribute to democratizing the EU and the emergence of a more integrated Europeanized public sphere is the subject of ongoing academic discussions, but recent experiences with no-votes on EU treaty reforms in several member countries clearly show that direct democracy can also slow down the EU integration process. In fact, depending on the constitutional provisions for referendum votes (national vs. European-wide, binding vs. non-binding, required vs. optional, etc.), direct democracy might have an integrative and democratizing potential or, alternatively, reinforce existing legitimacy deficits of the EU (e.g., Biaggini 2005; Hug 2005).

Overall, if one evaluates public communication regarding the European integration policy in Switzerland based on the normative criteria applied to the European public sphere, the existence of an all-Swiss public sphere must be called into question. However, given that Switzerland is an old and stable democracy, I'd rather argue that these criteria, which implicitly seem to be derived from a deliberative public sphere model, set the barrier for finding a Europeanized public sphere unrealistically high and should be reconsidered.

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[1] Encounters or assemblies are other public sphere arenas, but the mass-mediated public sphere is generally considered the key forum for public communication and opinion formation in modern democracies because of its wider reach and greater impact (e.g., Gerhards and Neidhardt 1991).

[2] Note that many more studies look at European public debates in the media, but not from a public sphere perspective (e.g., Kevin 2003; de Vreese et al. 2001).

[3] At first sight, the "weak variant" of horizontal Europeanization might look similar to Eder et al.'s "same time, same topic" criteria. It's not, however, because simultaneous debates can be purely national and do not necessarily imply references to other countries.

[4] Note that Sifft et al. (2007) and van de Steeg (2002) treat inclusiveness in the form of "we-references" as the second aspect of discursive interaction.

[5] For the official results of all referendum votes, see http://www.admin.ch/ch/d/pore/va/index.html.

[6] Of course, this was not possible for collective political actors. Disregarded are named spokespersons of national institutions, such as individual members of the Swiss government (Federal Council). In the case of European integration policy, for instance, both Federal Councillors in charge of this policy field happened to be from French-speaking cantons at the time of study, and this fact would have biased the results. Included, however, are named national parliamentarians who are elected in their home cantons.

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Table 1: Geographical scope of speakers (in %)

	Europe		Immigration		Pensions		Education	
	NZZ	LT	NZZ	LT	NZZ	LT	NZZ	LT
EU / foreign	10.4	11.8	3.0	5.3	1.5	0.0	0.0	0.0
National	83.1	73.4	86.6	92.1	97.0	96.7	79.7	76.7
Regional	6.5	14.8	10.4	2.6	1.5	3.3	20.3	23.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	491	594	67	38	67	60	79	43

Note: NZZ=Neue Zürcher Zeitung, LT=Le Temps

Table 2: Regional origin of Swiss spokespersons (in %)

	Europe		Immigration		Pensions		Education	
	NZZ	LT	NZZ	LT	NZZ	LT	NZZ	LT
German-sp.	67.5	44.0	60.9	50.0	81.8	44.4	69.8	20.8
French-sp.	25.8	51.0	39.1	50.0	18.2	44.4	27.9	79.2
Italian-sp.	6.7	5.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	11.2	2.3	0.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	225	302	23	6	22	9	43	24

Note: NZZ=Neue Zürcher Zeitung, LT=Le Temps

Table 3: Discursive exchanges in mass-mediated communication about Swiss-EU relations

	NZZ		LT	
	%	N	%	N
Proportion of claims with discursive exchanges	36.2	178	43.8	260
- critical exchanges	65.2	116	72.3	188
- supportive exchanges	34.8	62	27.7	72
- addressed at national institutional actors	73.0	130	74.2	193
- intra-region exchanges	4.5	8	3.1	8
- inter-region exchanges	0.6	1	1.2	3
Total number of claims		491		594

Note: The denominator for each percentage is the number of claims with discursive exchanges; NZZ=Neue Zürcher Zeitung, LT=Le Temps

Table 4: Framing of public communication on Swiss-EU relations (in %)

	Bilateral agreements		"Yes to Europe!"	
	NZZ	LT	NZZ	LT
In favor				
Codetermination	22.0	13.9	9.6	11.1
Economic advantages	26.9	30.6	3.5	6.6
Generally pro-EU	2.9	9.0	3.5	**13.2**
Good moment, time is ripe	n.a.	n.a.	6.1	8.3
Tactical "Yes"	5.0	2.1	6.1	6.6
Legal/procedural reasons	12.1	12.5	1.7	2.8
General	12.8	7.6	3.5	3.9
Against				
Self-determination	2.1	2.1	5.3	7.2
Economic drawbacks	11.3	11.8	0.0	5.0
Generally anti-EU	2.8	4.9	**11.4**	5.0
Bad moment	n.a.	n.a.	**21.9**	14.3
BA have priority	n.a.	n.a.	**18.4**	7.7
Tactical "No"	0.0	0.7	1.8	6.1
Legal/procedural reasons	n.a.	n.a.	7.0	1.7
General	2.1	4.9	0.0	0.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	141	144	114	181

Note: n.a. = not applicable; NZZ=Neue Zürcher Zeitung, LT=Le Temps; BA=bilateral agreements

Table 5: Types of speakers in public communication on Swiss-EU relations according to policy phase (%)

	NZZ			LT		
	Parlam. Phase	Voting campaign	Routine politics	Parlam. Phase	Voting campaign	Routine politics
State actors	*95.4*	*41.0*	*60.8*	*72.0*	*41.9*	*57.9*
Executive	14.8	19.5	29.2	15.9	20.2	33.1
Administration	0.0	1.2	2.3	0.0	5.1	2.2
Legislative	80.6	20.3	29.2	56.1	16.6	22.5
Intermediary actors	*4.6*	*48.2*	*39.2*	*17.1*	*53.3*	*41.0*
Political parties	4.6	21.5	21.5	9.8	17.2	11.8
Economic interest groups	0.0	15.9	8.5	0.0	12.3	8.4
Other civil society actors	0.0	10.8	9.2	7.3	23.8	20.8
Media	*0.0*	*10.8*	*0.0*	*11.0*	*4.8*	*1.1*
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	108	251	130	82	332	178

Note: NZZ=Neue Zürcher Zeitung, LT=Le Temps