An emerging transnational network of communication on European affairs? The European public sphere at EC summits 1969-1991

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Abstract

This article uses the network concept in a rather open, metaphorical manner to describe the structure of transnational references across European borders in newspaper commentary. The article takes up the debate on an emerging European public sphere, which is frequently defined as a transnational structure – a network – of communication. Even though the claim of an emergent European public sphere requires a longer-term view, historical research has been conspicuously absent. In an attempt to fill this gap, the article discusses the pattern of transnational references around five selected European summits 1969-1991. While there is evidence of an emerging European network of communication, this development is neither linear nor unambiguous. The growth of the transnational network coincides with a more dense national network of communication on European affairs.

Contents

Biographical note:

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1. Introduction

The study of the European public sphere has made great progress since it first emerged in the mid-1990s.[1] Starting out from a rather fundamentalist debate about the possibility of a public sphere without common media, without a common language and without a shared identity,[2] social scientists developed a sophisticated research agenda, which has produced a plethora of empirical studies on various aspects of political communication on European issues across national borders. Most research has pragmatically focused on the comparative study of national media.[3] Two aspects have been key: first, the similarity in contents across borders – "the same issues at the same time discussed at the same level of relevance"[4] – and the structure of transnational communication.[5] While many researchers have sanguinely declared the European public sphere to be "emerging" – with dynamic processes favouring such an evolution –[6], some studies have called for more differentiated interpretations of the empirical findings. They rather stressed the "segmented Europeanisation" of the public sphere in Europe.[7] First attempts at explaining the findings have recently been proposed, singling out those factors which may contribute to the emergence of a European public sphere, or hamper such a development.[8] Arguably, social science research on the European public sphere is rapidly entering a state of maturity.

Nevertheless, this research has remained remarkably limited to the present. This is all the more surprising, as the central claim in the debate about an "emerging European public sphere" implies evolution and change over time. Most studies only cover the 1990s and 2000s, hardly ever preceding the founding of the EU in the Maastricht Treaty, agreed upon in 1991. Systematic time-series research is largely absent.[9] Thus most claims about the emergence of a European public sphere rest on a very shaky empirical basis. This article seeks to contribute to closing this gap. It provides a historical perspective that reaches beyond Maastricht and goes back to the summit of The Hague in 1969, when after de Gaulle's departure the European Community started to transform itself into a veritable polity, with its own resources and an expanding set of policies. The European Council, created in 1974,

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[1] Essentially with the debate between Jürgen Habermas and Dieter Grimm: Dieter Grimm, "Does Europe need a Constitution?," *European Law Journal* 1 (1995), Jürgen Habermas, "Remarks on Dieter Grimm's 'Does Europe need a constitution?'" *European Law Journal* 1 (1995).

[2] For a summary of these arguments and a rejection of such views see: Cathleen Kantner, *Kein modernes Babel: kommunikative Voraussetzungen europäischer Öffentlichkeit* (Wiesbaden, 2004), Marianne van de Steeg, "Rethinking the Conditions for a Public Sphere in Europe," *European Journal of Social Theory* 5 (2002).

[3] For an overview of the research see: Jan-Henrik Meyer, "Gibt es eine Europäische Öffentlichkeit? Neuere empirische Studien zu Demokratiedefizit, Legitimation und Kontrolle in Europa," *Berliner Journal für Soziologie* 14 (2004), Hans-Jörg Trenz, "European Dilemmas. The European Public Sphere. Contradictory Findings in a diverse Research Field," *European Political Science* 4 (2005).

[4] – emphasised by Klaus Eder and collaborators – Klaus Eder and Cathleen Kantner, "Transnationale Resonanzstrukturen in Europa. Eine Kritik der Rede vom Öffentlichkeitsdefizit," in *Die Europäisierung nationaler Gesellschaften*, ed. Maurizio Bach (Opladen, 2000).

[5] – stressed in particular by Bernhard Peters and Marianne van de Steeg - Stefanie Sifft et al., "Segmented Europeanization: Exploring the Legitimacy of the European Union from a Public Discourse Perspective," *Journal of Common Market Studies* 45 (2007): 129, Steeg, "Rethinking the Conditions for a Public Sphere in Europe," 508f, 513.

[6] Thomas Risse, An emerging European Public Sphere. Theoretical clarifications and empirical indicators (Paper presented to the European Union Studies Association EUSA, Nashville, TN, March 27-30, 2003), Marianne Van de Steeg and Thomas Risse, The Emergence of a European Community of Communication: Insights from Empirical Research on the Europeanization of Public Spheres (Center for Transnational Relations, Foreign and Security Policy, 14 May 2007 2007), Hans-Jörg Trenz and Klaus Eder, "The democratizing dynamics of a European public sphere. Towards a theory of democratic functionalism," *European Journal of Social Theory* 7 (2004).

[7] Sifft et al., "Segmented Europeanization: Exploring the Legitimacy of the European Union from a Public Discourse Perspective."

[8] Michael Brüggemann and Katharina Kleinen-von Königslöw, 'Let's talk about Europe'. Explaining vertical and horizontal Europeanization in the quality press (TranState Working Paper 60, 2007).

[9] Trenz, "European Dilemmas. The European Public Sphere. Contradictory Findings in a diverse Research Field," 415. Only Sifft et al. have drawn small samples also in 1982 and 1989. Sifft et al., "Segmented Europeanization: Exploring the Legitimacy of the European Union from a Public Discourse Perspective."

which emerged out of the series of summits after The Hague provided a more effective direction by the governments. Only such a longer-term perspective provides us with some historical benchmarks which allow us to credibly claim that structural changes have taken place which actually indicate an "emerging European public sphere".[10] However, given the complexity, the normative implications and the diversity of usages, in the following section I will specify the concept of the European public sphere more clearly. I will propose five hypotheses about what we should expect of an emerging European public sphere. In the subsequent empirical analysis, these will be tested. The results indicate that the assumption of a simple linear development is empirically unfounded. In an attempt at explaining the results, the importance of the historical and nationally specific contexts will be emphasised, which in many respects endorse Sifft et al.'s claim of "segmented Europeanisation".

2. The European public sphere – theory and empirical indicators

Given the general predilection among social scientists for current affairs, a lack of attention to the historical evolution of the European public sphere is less surprising than the absence of historical research conducted by historians. To a large extent, this is due to the "realist" focus of historians of European integration on the role of national governments and the widespread scepticism regarding concepts from the social sciences.[11] More importantly, differences in conceptualising the public sphere between social scientists and social and cultural historians, who did address the question, led the latter to largely ignore the history of the political European public sphere.[12]

Essentially, the European public sphere has been defined in two different ways. First, it has been understood as the arena of communication, for which the *European institutions are the institutional point of reference*. Thus the European public sphere can be pragmatically be defined by its contents, namely the discussion of European affairs.[13] Such a definition suits the a liberal conception of the public sphere particularly well. Here, the link to the political institutions is central, the main function of the public sphere is to help citizens form an opinion on European affairs, to provide feedback and input and hold the EU institutions accountable.[14] Alternatively, researchers have considered the European public sphere as a *transnational structure of communication*, a *network of transnational exchange*.[15] In line with a Habermasian, discursive understanding of the public sphere,[16] this view tends to emphasise and normatively appreciate horizontal interaction among citizens, media actors, rather than

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[10] This is the underlying assumption of my PhD thesis, on which I draw with the research presented here: Jan-Henrik Meyer, "Tracing the European Public Sphere 1969-1991. A Comparative Analysis of British, French and German Quality Newspapers Covering European Summits" (unpublished PhD, Freie Universität, forthcoming 2008).
[11] Wolfram Kaiser, "Transnational Western Europe since 1945. Integration as political society formation," in *Transnational European Union. Towards a Common Political Space*, ed. Wolfram Kaiser and Peter Starie (London, 2005), 20.
[12] With the notable exception of: Hartmut Kaelble, "The Historical Rise of a European Public Sphere," *Journal of European Integration History* 8 (2002).
[13] Cf. Klaus Eder, "Zur Transformation nationalstaatlicher Öffentlichkeit in Europa. Von der Sprachgemeinschaft zur issuespezifischen Kommunikationsgemeinschaft," *Berliner Journal für Soziologie* 10 (2000): 181.
[14] Jürgen Gerhards, "Diskursive versus liberale Öffentlichkeit. Eine empirische Auseinandersetzung mit Jürgen Habermas," *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* 49 (1997): 3-5, 9f.
[15] E.g. Sifft et al., "Segmented Europeanization: Exploring the Legitimacy of the European Union from a Public Discourse Perspective," 129, Steeg, "Rethinking the Conditions for a Public Sphere in Europe," 508f, 513.
[16] Gerhards, "Diskursive versus liberale Öffentlichkeit. Eine empirische Auseinandersetzung mit Jürgen Habermas," 3-5. For an overview of the different approaches to the public sphere and their normative bases in democratic theory see: Myra Marx Ferree et al., "Four Models of the Public Sphere in Modern Democracies," *Theory and Society* 31 (2002).

the vertical link to the political system. Social and cultural historians preferred this second definition – however without necessarily accepting, or bothering much about the normative implications –, because it allows to study a transnational "European space of communication" in a longer-term perspective,[17] even before the advent of European institutions since the 1950s.[18] Thus, social and cultural historians have largely focused on transnational exchange regardless whether it was of relevance to the European institutions.[19] While it makes sense to analytically differentiate between these two defining criteria, the study of a political European public sphere needs to combine both of them.[20] In fact, the core defining criterion of a political public sphere is the link to the polity, because it is a precondition for the function the public sphere is to fulfil for democracy. Accordingly, research on a political European public sphere should study both the arena for the discussion of issues relating to European politics *and at the same time* to what extent this takes place within a network of transnational communication.

The concept of the public sphere is a normative one. Thus the notion of the European public sphere implies that the public sphere should not only be European in content and transnational in scope, but also that it should be structured in a way that it is likely to serve European democracy, by enhancing opinion-formation and the accountability of political institutions. In this respect, two normative principles are central: *Equality* and *openness* with regard to actors' participation in the public sphere. Equal chances of participation and openness ensure that public communication will actually lead to the free, uninhibited formation of opinions, of public opinion. It is also a precondition for holding political actors accountable.[21] Bernhard Peters and Jürgen Habermas in particular have emphasised the important role non-governmental actors and civil society play in the public sphere. They argued that public discourse which is not dominated by the governments is closer, and thus more attentive to citizens' needs. The exchange of views in the public sphere is creative and productive in generating new ideas and has the power to challenge the opinions of those in government. Civil society associations[22] – interest groups, public interest groups, and voluntary associations in particular – but more generally all non-government groups or fora – are important not only for public discourse and opinion formation, but also because they ensure that citizens' ideas and preferences will be mediated to those in office.[23] Applying such normative – and admittedly unrealistic – standards for empirical analysis will necessarily lead

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[17] E.g. Hagen Schulz-Forberg, Theoretical Paper on the Notion of a European Public Sphere (EMEDIATE: Media and Ethics of a European Public Sphere from the Treaty of Rome to the 'War on Terror', 2005), 26, Hagen Schulz-Forberg and Bo Stråth, *Democracy without Politics. An Alternative View on European Integration* (Oxford, forthcoming 2008). They draw on: Alexander Schmidt-Gernig, "Scenarios of Europe's future - Western future studies of the the sixties and seventies as an example of a transnational public sphere of experts," *Journal of European Integration History* 8 (2002): 69-71. Jörg Requate and Martin Schulze-Wessel, "Europäische Öffentlichkeit. Realität und Imagination einer appellativen Instanz," in *Europäische Öffentlichkeit. Transnationale Kommunikation seit dem 18. Jahrhundert*, ed. Jörg Requate and Martin Schulze-Wessel (Frankfurt, 2002), 37.

[18] Only Kaelble distinguishes between the European public sphere – after the emergence of European institutions – and a European space of communication characterised by transnational communicative exchange. Kaelble, "The Historical Rise of a European Public Sphere," 13.

[19] The latest example has been a research project coordinated in Zurich, cf. Jens Lucht and David Tréfas, Hat Europa eine Identität? Eine zeitreihenbasierte Untersuchung der öffentlichen europäischen Kommunikation von 1951 bis 2005. (fög discussion paper DI-2006-0001, fög-Forschungsbereich Öffentlichkeit und Gesellschaft Zürich, 2006).

[20] E.g Hans-Jörg Trenz, *Europa in den Medien. Die europäische Integration im Spiegel nationaler Öffentlichkeit* (Frankfurt, 2005).

[21] Bernhard Peters, "Der Sinn von Öffentlichkeit," in *Der Sinn von Öffentlichkeit*, ed. Hartmut Wessler (Frankfurt, 2007 [1994]), 61.

[22] To be sure, Habermas is much more restrictive with respect to whom he includes in "civil society". Jürgen Habermas, *Faktizität und Geltung. Beiträge zur Diskurstheorie des Rechts und des demokratischen Rechtsstaats* (Frankfurt, 1992). 453.

[23] Ibid. 429, Peters, "Der Sinn von Öffentlichkeit," 64f.

to findings which reflect various states of deficiency. However, such criteria can serve as a yardstick for the analysis of change over time. Thus we can assess whether and to what extent the public sphere is moving at least in the direction of the normatively expected state, improving the "democratic quality" of the European public sphere.[24]

Against the backdrop of these normative expectations, five hypotheses can be put forth, what we should expect of an "emerging European public sphere": First, and most simply applying the criterion that in a European public sphere the European polity is the point of reference, we may most basically assume:

1. In an emerging European public sphere, *European issues* should *increasingly* be *discussed*.

The following four hypotheses will focus on the European public sphere as a transnational network of communication on EC-related issues.

2. In an emerging European public sphere, the *views of actors from all EC countries* should *increasingly* be *considered* across borders. A growing network of horizontal transnational communication suggests that the European public sphere integrates the views of the European partners.

3. In an emerging European public sphere, *views from other European countries* should become *similarly important as national views*. Based on the principle of equality, this would be evidence of an increasingly transnational, rather than domestic debate on European issues.

4. In an emerging European public sphere, the views and *positions held by the European institutions* should *increasingly* be *debated*. In a European public sphere, in which the European institutions are the political point of reference, their views should increasingly be discussed.

5. In an emerging European public sphere, the *views of non-government actors* should *increasingly* be *considered*. This demonstrates to what extent a European public sphere has evolved beyond the government-dominated "public sphere of power" towards an "autochthonous public sphere", in which civil society and individual citizens get a chance to voice their opinion and be heard.[25]

Whether and to what extent a European public sphere has been emergent can thus be empirically assessed on the basis of these five hypotheses. In a longer term, historical perspective that goes beyond the temporal focus of the wave of current social science research, I focus on the period between the summit of The Hague in December 1969, when – after de Gaulle's departure – the door was thrown open to a veritable European polity – under Pompidou's slogans "completion, deepening and enlargement" – until Maastricht 1991, when with the founding of the European Union the European polity essentially attained its current state. The period includes phases of very different intensity of European integration, encompassing Eurosclerosis as well as various instances of European relaunch.[26] The analysis

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[24] Bernhard Peters suggested using normative theory this way: Peters, "Der Sinn von Öffentlichkeit," 68.

[25] Habermas, *Faktizität und Geltung. Beiträge zur Diskurstheorie des Rechts und des demokratischen Rechtsstaats*. 366. For a critical discussion see: Gerhards, "Diskursive versus liberale Öffentlichkeit. Eine empirische Auseinandersetzung mit Jürgen Habermas," 6f.

[26] For an overview and various interpretations, see the respective chapters e.g. in Marie-Thérèse Bitsch, *Histoire de la construction européenne de 1945 à nos jours*, 4 ed. (Bruxelles, 2004), Desmond Dinan, *Europe recast: a history of European Union* (Boulder, London,

of transnational communication in the European public sphere is based on the comment, analysis and opinion pieces in British, German and French quality newspapers. Two newspapers were selected to cover a conservative and a left-leaning newspaper, namely: the *Guardian* and the *Daily Telegraph*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro*. Two weeks of coverage were chosen around the summits of The Hague in 1969, the summit of Paris in 1974, the European Councils of Brussels in 1978, of Luxembourg in 1985 and of Maastricht in 1991. The following table provides an overview of the main results, the exact dates and the period of study.

Table 1: Important European summit conferences 1969-1991

Place – Year – Presidency	Main results	Date	Period of study
The Hague 1969, NL	F accepts UK membership, agreement on "own resources", completion, deepening, enlargement	Mon. 1 and Tue. 2/12/1969	Mon. 24/11/ – Sat. 6/12/1969
Paris 1974, F	Introduction of European Councils, direct EP elections, regional fund, Tindemans-Report commissioned	Mon. 9 and Tue. 10/12/1974	Mon. 2/12/ – Sat. 14/12/1974
Brussels 1978, D	Decision to introduce European Monetary System, commission for the preparation of the institutions for enlargement	Mon. 4 and Tue. 5/12/1978	Mon. 27/11/ – Sat. 9/12/1978
Luxembourg 1985, LU	Agreement on Single European Act – achievement of the Common Market by 1992	Mon. 2 and Wed. 4/12/1985	Mon. 25/11/ – Sat. 7/12/1985
Maastricht 1991, NL	Agreement on Maastricht treaty: Economic and Monetary Union, European Union.	Mon. 9 and Tue. 10/12/1991	Mon. 2/12/ – Sat. 14/12/1991

These important and politically consequential summits were selected as recurrent, comparable events, in which a similar ensemble of actors was present and played an important political role. Given the event-driven nature of attention to European politics, it is thus possible to capture the focal points of the debate on European issue in the respective time period. Because these focal points are not randomly and evenly distributed over time, sampling involves the risk of a selection bias, which renders the data incomparable over time.[27]

While the amount of discussion on European affairs (hypothesis 1) can simply be assessed by counting the number of comment pieces dealing with EC issues, transnational communication (hypothesis 2-5) is more difficult to examine. One possible approach is the study of *transnational references*. Based on the idea that transnational discourse in the media takes place, wherever writers in the newspaper discuss views from abroad, Andreas Wimmel suggested to study "discursive references". He defines "discursive references" as incidences where writers (of opinion pieces) present actors' views and positions and discuss these views

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2004), Franz Knipping, *Rom, 25. März 1957: die Einigung Europas* (München, 2004). See also: Jan-Henrik Meyer, "Postwar European Integration. Europe Recast? Review Essay," *Historische Literatur* 4 (2006).

[27] Sampling has been used e.g. by Sifft et al., "Segmented Europeanization: Exploring the Legitimacy of the European Union from a Public Discourse Perspective."

thereafter – voicing a positive, negative or inconclusive opinion.[28] In a similar way, I will consider whose views and positions are discussed in the commentary, distinguishing between domestic (or national), European and transnational references, that is references to national actors from the newspaper's home country, references to actors from EC institutions and references to actors from other European countries. For the discussion of hypotheses 2 and 3, I will not distinguish between government and non-government actors, but focus on the nationality of the actors, because, in fact, only a very small minority of references does not refer to government actors.[29] With respect to hypothesis 4, I distinguish between the different European-level institutions, namely the intergovernmental Council, the supranational Commission, the European Parliament and the European Court of Justice. Moreover, in order to address the fifth hypothesis, I will distinguish between different kinds of non-government actors for each country and the European level: (1) central banks (which are independent actors in some countries at the time), (2) parliaments, (3) courts, (4) political parties. While these groups comprise actors from the institutions at the centre of political decision-making, a second set of actors can be assumed to be slightly more distant from the political centre: (5) Civil society associations – including farmer's associations, labour unions, the church(es), or the European movement – , (6) business groups – including employers' association and industry – , (7) media and journalists, (8) individuals, most of them experts, and (9) public opinion, based on polls, which is frequently mentioned and treated as the voice of an important political actor by the journalists.

What does the empirical evidence suggest: Has there been a development towards the emergence of a European public sphere? In the following, the five hypotheses will be considered in turn.

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[28] For a similar approach see: Andreas Wimmel, "Transnationale Diskurse. Zur Analyse politischer Kommunikation in der europäischen Medienöffentlichkeit," *Zeitschrift für Internationale Beziehungen* 11 (2004): 14-16.

[29] Of course, it is highly expectable to find references and discursive evaluation of views from government actors from abroad in the commentary about summits, just as in international news and commentary on international affairs, the position of the negotiation partner is evaluated and discussed. However, the goal in this study is to assess change over time, considering whether the development we observe points in the direction expected.

3. Empirical evidence

1. *In an emerging European public sphere, European issues should increasingly be discussed.*

   This first hypothesis relates to the definition of a political European public sphere as the arena of communication in which *the EC is the institutional point of reference*. Applying this definition, I select the empirical base for the further analysis of the network of transnational communication on European affairs. Whether EC issues have increasingly be discussed, can be assessed by simply counting the number of comment and analysis pieces which deal with European affairs.[30] The following graph demonstrates, how the number of comment and analysis pieces on European issues has evolved.

Chart 1 Number of comment and analysis pieces dealing with EC affairs around EC summits 1969-1991
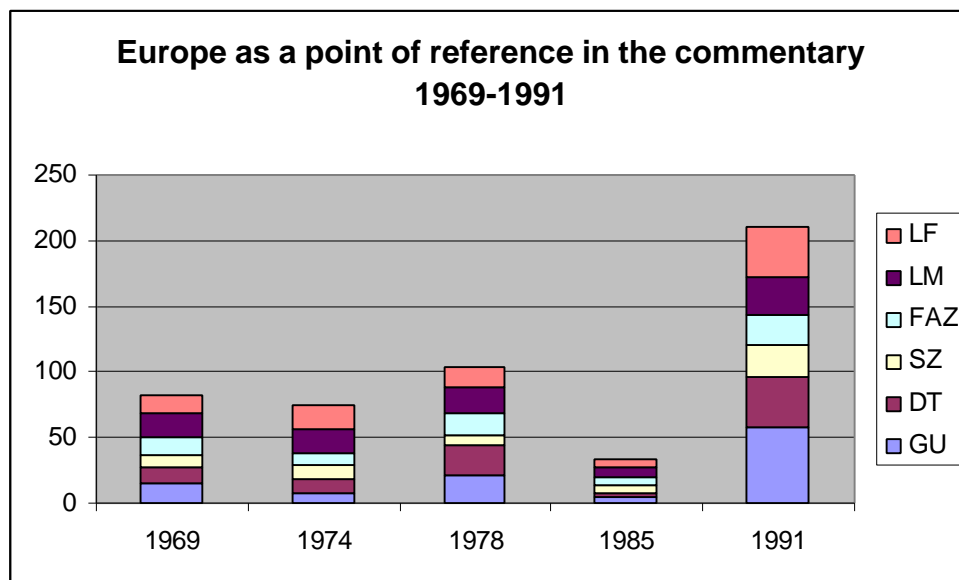
The number of comment pieces on European issues has increased drastically from 83 pieces (across all newspapers) around the summit of The Hague in 1969 to 211 pieces around Maastricht. However, growth is not linear. In 1974, the number of EC-related comment pieces is only at 74, while the total has grown to 103 pieces in 1978. The drastic collapse of the amount of debate in the context of the agreement on the Single European Act to a mere 33 comment pieces is all the more puzzling, when juxtaposed to the drastic increase at Maastricht.[31] At the same time, the newspapers essentially essentially agreed on which summits are more worthy of comment, and which are less so. Between newspapers, there are differences in the amount of commentary. The German newspapers, in particular, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, tend to comment less frequently on European issues than French and increasingly also British newspapers. Newspapers' interest in commenting on European

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[30] I included those comment and analysis pieces, which cover the institutions, policies, politics and political actors of the EC, or deal with European integration (namely EC integration) as a process or problem in the headlines or the first paragraph.

[31] An attempt at explaining this development has been undertaken in: Jan-Henrik Meyer, "The Fall and Rise of the European Public Sphere. Path dependent responses to European Integration," in *Dialogo sull'Europa Vol. III*, ed. Federica Di Sarcina, Laura Grazi, and Laura Scichilone (Florence, forthcoming 2008).

affairs is subject to change. While until 1985, among the French newspapers, Le Monde has commented more frequently on European affairs, in 1991, it is Le Figaro. However, whereas these differences are clear and visible, they are only differences in degree. All in all, the amount of newspaper commentary points towards the emergence of a European public sphere, in which EC affairs are increasingly discussed. However, this development is not a linear one. The substantial amount of EC commentary at important summits in the 1970s, but also the low level of discussion of EC affairs right at the beginning of the relaunch of European integration with the Single European Act should be noted. These observations are a necessary base for the subsequent discussion, which focuses on the European public sphere as an *emerging network of transnational communication.*

2. *In an emerging European public sphere, the views of actors from all EC countries should increasingly be considered across borders.*

This hypothesis can be broken down into a number of questions: First, is the number of transnational references growing over time? Secondly, are the European countries being referred to similarly frequently? Thirdly, does the number of countries referred to increase in line with the successive enlargement?

Table 2 Development of the total number of transnational references in the commentary

	1969	1974	1978	1985	1991
Transnational references	108	59	94	37	174
No. of transnational references / no. of comment pieces	1,30	0,80	0,91	1,12	0,82

First, the table above indicates that – along with the number of comments on European affairs – the total number of transnational references increased from 108 in 1969 to 174 in 1991. However, the increase was not linear. Declining to 59 transnational references in 1974, the number recovered to 94 in 1978, only to fall to 37 in 1985. Nevertheless, if we put the number of transnational references in proportion to the growing number of comment pieces on European integration, we can observe that there is a relative decline from the maximum of 1.3 transnational references per comment piece in 1969 to 0.8 in 1974, followed by a small increase in 1978 to 0.91. The European relaunch of the Single European Act in 1985 was accompanied by a substantial rebound of the share of transnational references of 1.12 per commentary. However, at Maastricht 1991, the share has shrunk back to 0.82. Hence, while we observe an absolute increase in transnational references, there is a substantial relative decline, in particular, when juxtaposing The Hague – at the beginning of the period of study – to Maastricht – at the end of it.

Secondly, the following graph – which presents the number of transnational references to the different EC countries as a share of the total number of comment pieces at the respective summit – shows the differences in the share of transnational references to the different countries.

Chart 2 Transnational references to EC countries – transnational references to the respective countries divided by no. of comment pieces per summit
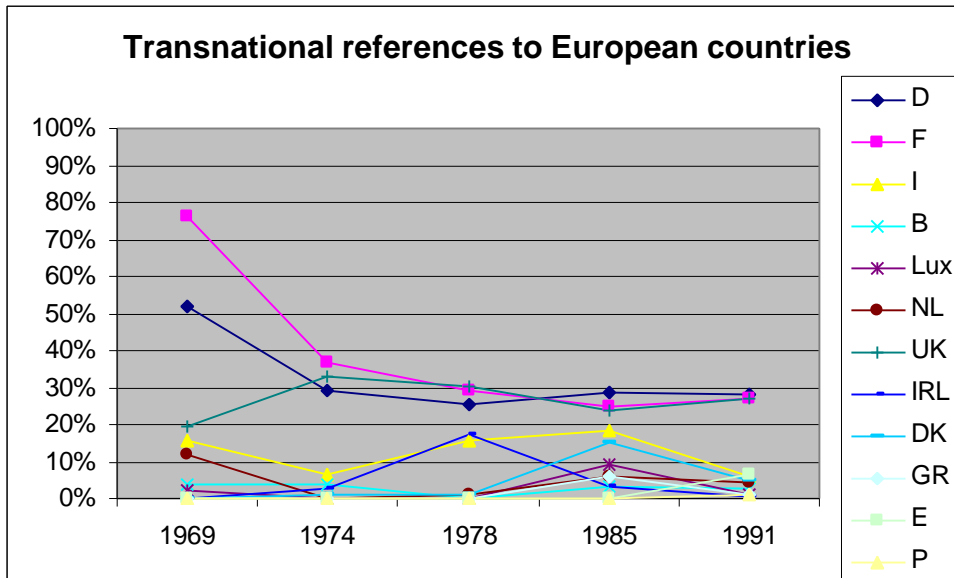

Instead of an equal transnational awareness across borders, the graph demonstrates the great *asymmetry* of attention between the big and powerful and the small countries. While French and German, and increasingly also British actors' views are considered in around 30 % of the comment pieces on EC affairs, attention to the positions of the smaller and politically less potent countries is on average found only in less then 10 % of the articles. Views from Italy, which is a large country judging by its population size and its economy, are discussed substantially less frequently than views from the "Big Three". Its position seems to be of intermediate importance to the commentators. However, by 1991, Italy is found among the political dwarfs, with less then ten per cent of the comment pieces containing references to Italy.

However, over time, among the three big and politically important countries there seems to be *convergence* with respect to the share of comment pieces referring to them. In 1969, three quarters of the articles discussed the French position, and more than half of them the German position, while British views were only treated in about 20 % of the French and German comment pieces. In 1969 transnational references largely focused on President Pompidou – emerging from the shadow of de Gaulle, who had repeatedly affirmed the pivotal French position within the EC as the decisive veto-player – and new German Chancellor Brandt as the key actors. However, from 1974 onwards the share of references to British, German and French views converges slightly below 30 per cent. Transnational references hence mirror the changes wrought by the entry of Britain in the EC. Still, the entry of other big countries – like Spain in 1986 – has not led to a similar increase in the level of transnational references. From the vantage point of British, German and French journalists, the Franco-German axis has been replaced by a *directoire* of three core actors, whose views require attention and need to be discussed.

Besides such apparently structural changes[32] with respect to the large members – the context of the events seems to matter for transnational references to the smaller countries in particular. Politically less decisive countries appear more prominently, whenever decisions are taken which affect them or a shaped by them: In 1969, the larger share of transnational references to Italy is due to Italy's demand for agricultural compensation on the fruit market. The greater prominence of the Netherlands is due to the role of the Dutch Presidency as a mediator. In 1978, Italy and Ireland appear as *demandeurs* for financial aid in compensation for the rigours of EMS membership. Particularly in the British press, Ireland is treated as the counterexample of the British governments' position not to join the EMS. In 1985, the French and British newspapers discuss Danish scepticism concerning institutional reform more extensively.

Thirdly, despite the great asymmetry between big and small states, the number of countries referred to in transnational references has increased in line with the successive enlargements of the EC, as the following graph indicates. It shows the share of EC countries addressed with transnational references.

Chart 3 Share of EC countries addressed by way of transnational references
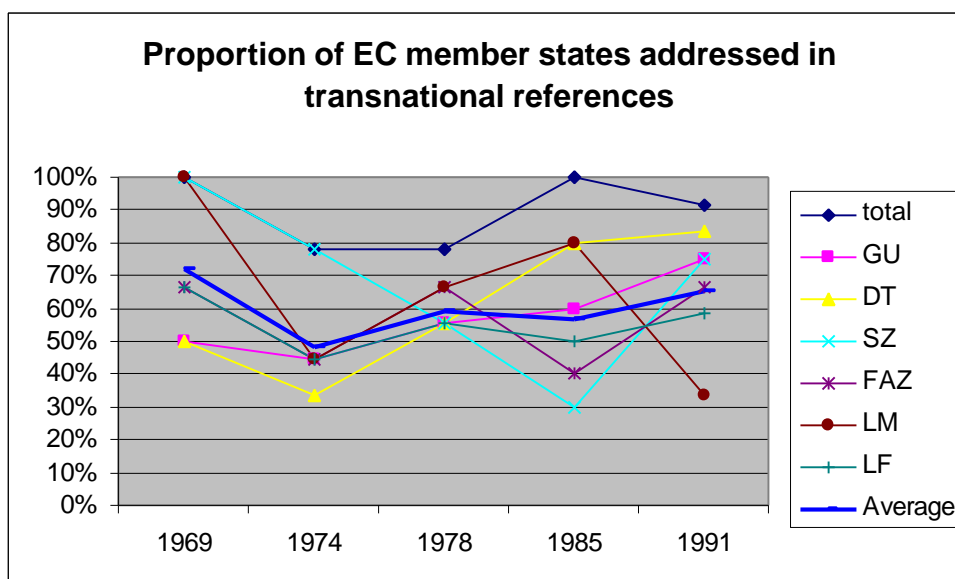
On average across the six newspapers, the proportion of the original Six states covered by transnational references in 1969 was 72 per cent. After enlargement to nine member states, at the summit of Paris in 1974, this value declined to a mere half of the member states (48 %). The share increased to 59 % in 1978 and remained roughly stable at 57 % of the then ten member states in 1985. Despite enlargement to twelve member states, the share of countries covered by way of transnational references increased to two thirds (65 %) in 1991, that is to only slightly below the level of 1969. Comparing between papers, there is no clear pattern as to whether some newspapers tend to address a narrower or a broader range of EC members in their commentary. However, we can observe the bilateral discursive integration of Britain via transnational references after it entered the EC. Not only are British actors' views increasingly

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[32] Whether these changes are in fact structural is difficult to reliably confirm on the basis of the limited data of this study.

referred to in German and French newspapers, but British newspapers also address an ever larger share of EC member states in their transnational references after 1974. In 1985 and 1991 the scope of their transnational references to EC members even surpasses the average of the six newspapers.

Three conclusions can be drawn. First, while the absolute number of transnational references is growing – even though not in a linear fashion – between 1969 and 1991, in relative terms it is declining substantially. In 1969 and similarly also in 1985, the ratio of transnational references to comment pieces was substantially higher than in 1991. Secondly, there is a great asymmetry in the number and share of transnational references to the UK, Germany and France on the one hand, and the other countries on the other. After entering the EC in 1969, the shares of transnational references to Britain, Germany and France are converging at a similarly high level. Thirdly, the number of countries addressed by means of transnational references growth roughly in line with the successive enlargements. While more than 70 % of the original Six had been covered – on average – by transnational references in 1969, after an intermittent decline, the figure grew back to two thirds of the twelve member states in 1991. Does the decrease of the proportion of transnational references over time imply a growing domestication of the debate on European affairs, rather than the evolution of the European public sphere as a transnational network of communication?

3. *In an emerging European public sphere, views from other European countries should become similarly important as national views.*

To what extent views of the European partners are similar in importance to views of domestic actors can be elicited by comparing the share of transnational references to the most important addressees Britain, Germany and France to the respective proportion of domestic references. This indicate whether national media and fellow European media perceive the views of actors from that country similarly worth discussing.

Chart 4 National/domestic vs. transnational references to British, German and French actors
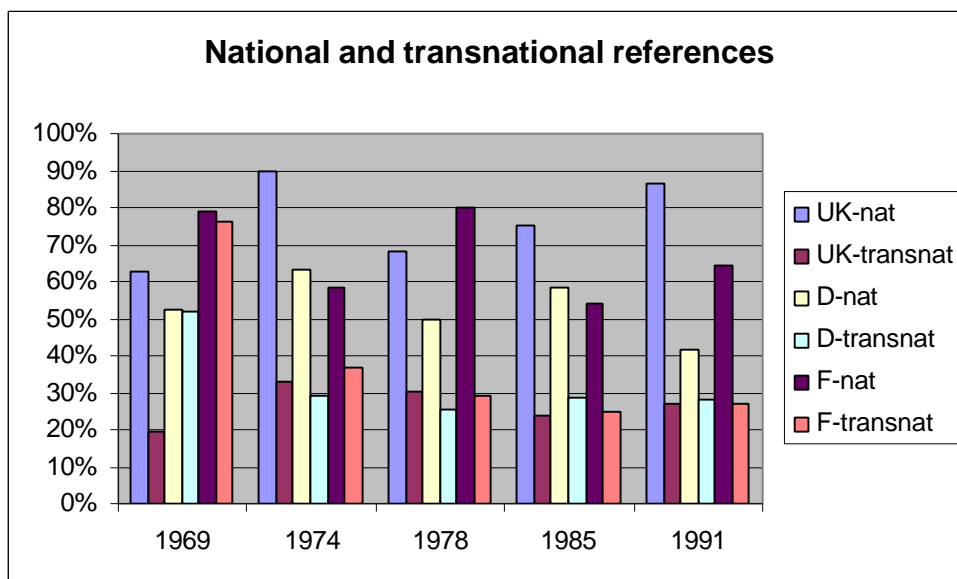
Only the summit of The Hague comes close to the ideal of a European public sphere in which national and transnational references are of equal magnitude. However, this only holds true for German and French actors, for which the proportion of transnational and domestic references is similar. The dominance of French and German political actors at that summit and their central importance for the partners may explain this apparently exceptional situation. As Britain is not yet a member, and thus not a decisive player, but rather the object of debate, references to British views are at a relatively low level. In particular, this regards transnational references. But also the national ones are at the lowest level of all summits. At all the ensuing summits, the share of national references is at least by twenty percentage points higher than the proportion of transnational ones. The only exception are references to Germany around the summit of Maastricht: In 1991, the transnational references to German actors are found in 28 % of the French and British comment pieces, while in 42 % of the German commentary there are references to German domestic actors. Most of this attention is probably due to the important role Germany plays in the negotiations on EMU. However, also at earlier summits, domestic references by German newspapers were at a lower level – namely between 50 % (1978) and 63 % (1974) – than domestic references in the commentary elsewhere. Particularly in the British newspapers, domestic references regularly account for between 63 % (1969) and 89 % (1974). National references to France take a middle ground, surpassing the British level only in 1969 and 1978, when the founding of the EMS was accompanied by a vibrant domestic debate on EC affairs and the start of the campaign for the European Parliament elections.

All in all, attention to British actors seems to be furthest away from the ideal of equal attention to within and beyond borders. This is not least due to the high level of domestic references in British newspapers. Attention to Germany is slightly closer to the ideal of equality between transnational and domestic references. Apparently, it is even moving closer to the ideal in 1991, in part because German newspapers focus less on domestic actors, but also because Germany is a pivotal player at Maastricht. Conversely, in the British and French case, the difference between the level of domestic and transnational references has increased in 1991, particularly due to a growing level of domestic references. Hence, on this – admittedly very demanding – indicator, there is little evidence of an emerging European public sphere. By this standard, in 1969 the European public sphere was closer to the ideal. Apparently, the network of communication has become more domestic, rather than transnational. While in the last two sections I considered horizontal transnational references to national actors, I will now look at vertical transnational references to actors from the European institutions.

4. *In an emerging European public sphere, the views and positions held by the European institutions should increasingly be debated.*

European references may point to the views of the intergovernmental European Council (respectively the governments assembled at the summit, however, acting as an EC institution, or the Council of Ministers), the supranational European Commission, the European Parliament, and the European Court of Justice. Taking all European references together, the following table presents findings that are similar to the ones for transnational references, namely numerical growth, coinciding with relative decline.
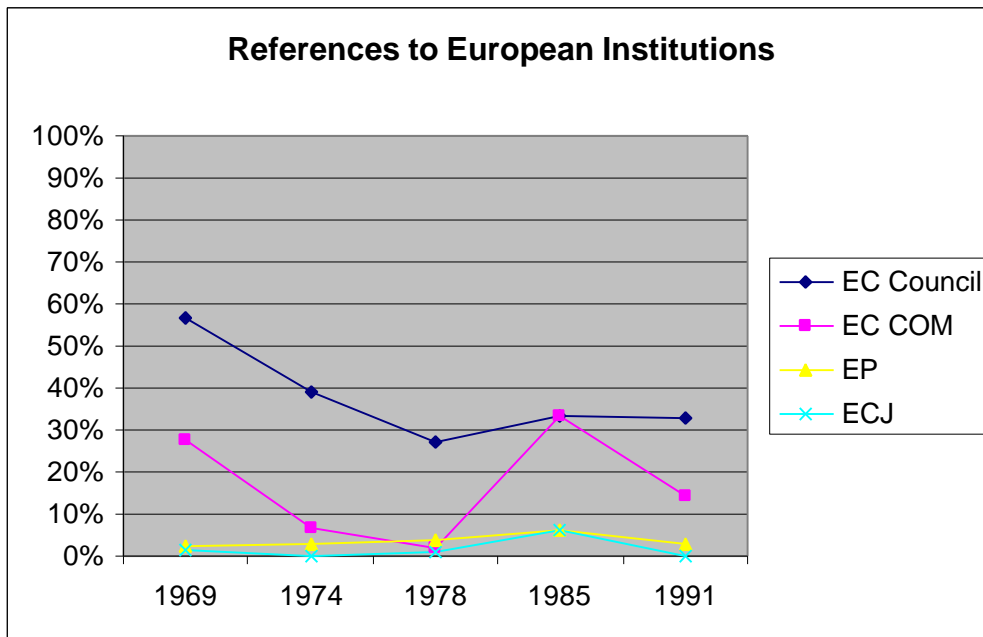
Table 3 Development of the total number of European references in the commentary

	1969	1974	1978	1985	1991
total European references	73	36	35	26	105
European references / no.of comment pieces	0,88	0,49	0,34	0,79	0,50

The number of European references shrunk drastically from 73 in 1969 to 36 in 1974, remaining at that level with 35 in 1978 and 26 in 1985. Only in 1991 – in the face of a vast increase in the number of comment pieces – the number surpassed the level of 1969 with 105 European references in 1991. However, in relative terms this amounts to a steep decline from 0.88 European references per comment piece in 1969 to a mere 0.5 in 1991. In between, only in 1985, the share came closer to the 1969 level with 0.79. In 1974 (0.49) and in particular in 1978, the relative level of European references was at its lowest with only a third of the comment pieces containing a reference to a European institution. This reflects the intergovernmental focus and the national leadership in the negotiations about the European Monetary System in 1978. In 1985 and 1969 in particular, journalists took note of the Commission initiatives and the view of the Council as a collective. This becomes apparent in the following graph, that shows, which European institutions' views are considered in the commentary.

Similar to the case of transnational references, there is also an *asymmetry* between the different institutions. Not surprisingly, as I chose the intergovernmental summits for the case studies, references to the summit, namely the collective of the governments, the European Council or the Council of Ministers, account for the largest share of European references. The supranational Commission comes second at all summits except for in 1978, when the European Parliament is referred to more frequently. The European Court of Justice is only rarely referred to.

Chart 5 European references – references to the respective institutions as share of all comment pieces

References to European Institutions

Legend: EC Council, EC COM, EP, ECJ

X-axis: 1969, 1974, 1978, 1985, 1991

Y-axis: 0% to 100%

Considering the development over time, the share of references to the Council as a collective has decreased from 57 % of the comment pieces in 1969 to 39 % in 1974 and to its lowest point of only 27% in 1978. Only rising slightly from this level, the share grew back to a third in 1985 and 1991. References to the Commission were also relatively frequent at The Hague at 28 %, when the Commission's proposals concerning agriculture, in particular the Mansholt plan were discussed.[33] In 1974, the Commission was referred to in only 7% of the comment pieces, and a mere 2 % in 1978. With Europe's relaunch, in 1985 the share of references to the Commission even rose back to the level of references to the Council, however, declining to 14 % – albeit not back to the low level of the 1970s. The level of references to the Commission reflect the changing role of the Commission – in particular its relative marginalisation in the 1970, and its pivotal role in the relaunch from the mid-1980s. As the case studies are limited to the debate around the summits, the level of references to the European Parliament (EP) is low, however, the share is steadily increasing from a mere 2% in 1969, to 3 % in 1974 and 6 % in 1978, at the eve of the first direct elections. In 1985, references to the second directly elected EP could be found in 6 % of the comment pieces. In the context of Maastricht, MEP's views received relatively less attention, the share declined to 3%, even though this meant an increase in the absolute number of references. The European Court of Justice is only occasionally referred to: In 1% of the comments in 1969 and 1978, and in 6% in 1985, while there are no references at the other summits. Except for the references to the European Council, which can be found across all newspapers – except for the *Daily Telegraph* in 1985, not all newspapers contain references to the other institutions: References to the Commission can be found in all newspapers in 1969, in 4 (out of six) in 1974, in only one in 1978, in all of them again in 1985, but only in five in 1991. For the EP

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[33] Cf: Guido Thiemeyer, "The Mansholt Plan, the definite Financing of the Common Agricultural Policy and the Enlargement of the Community, 1969-1973," in *Beyond the Customs Union: The European Community's Quest for Completion, Deepening and Enlargement, 1969-1975*, ed. Jan van der Harst (Bruxelles, 2007).

and the ECJ, the distribution is even more unequal. References to the EP are present in two newspapers in 1969, one in 1974, two in 1978 and two in 1985. However, even though the share of references declined, five out of six newspapers consider the EP's view in 1991. Commentators make references to the ECJ in one newspaper in 1969, in one in 1978 and in two in 1985, when references to the ECJ are as frequent as to the EP.

All in all, there is some indication for an emerging European public sphere, in which the European institutions are more frequently considered, most importantly in absolute terms in 1991. In relative terms, the share of EC commentary containing references to the European institutions was higher in 1969. Similar to the relative decline in transnational references noted above, this also points to a *domestication* of the debate on European affairs. However, the rise – after a steep decline of both absolute and relative values in the 1970s, when the governments dominated EC policy making – from 1985 is notable. What also points towards an emerging European public sphere, is the increased, more widespread consideration of the European Parliament's views since the direct elections. This is an – albeit relatively weak – indication that commentators have started taking the European representatives more seriously. With a view to democracy and the participation of societal actors in the debate about European politics, what is the evidence of references to non-government actors, particularly to civil society?

5. *In an emerging European public sphere, the views of non-government actors should increasingly be considered.*

Three aspects of references to non-government actors need to be considered: First, has the number and the share of references to non-government actors increased? Secondly, has the pattern of references to non-government actors followed the trend towards a domestication of the debate? Thirdly, which groups of non-government actors are being referred to? Is there a trend towards a diversification of the actors referred to? Is there a shift towards the inclusion of non-institutional actors?

Table 4 Development of the total number of references to non-government actors in the commentary

	1969	1974	1978	1985	1991
references to non-government actors	32	18	46	8	91
references to non-government actors / no. of comment pieces	0,39	0,24	0,45	0,24	0,43

First, unlike in the case of transnational and European references, between 1969 and 1991 there is an increase both in the number and in the share of comments containing references to non-government actors. While in 1969, a mere 32 references to non-government actors could be found (39%), by 1991 this number tripled to 91 references representing 0.43 references per comment on European affairs. However, in relative terms, this level was slightly surpassed in 1978 with 46 references and 45%, when particularly the political debate on European affairs in France involved a large number of references to French party politicians and the French parliament. In the debate around the summits of 1974 and 1985, in less than a quarter of the comment pieces, the views of non-government actors were considered, with 18 references in

1974 and a mere eight in 1985. These findings point to an opening of the debate on European issues towards the consideration on non-government actors views. However, has this shift led to a domestication of the debate?

Chart 6 Share of comment pieces containing European, transnational and national references 1969-1991
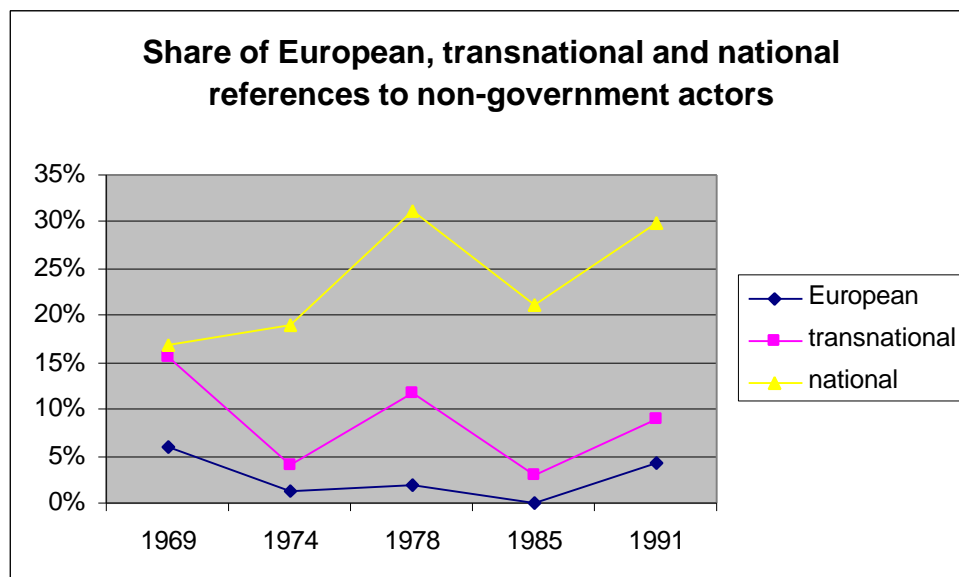

After 1969, there is a clear trend towards a domestication. While in 1969, the share of references to domestic actors was still at 17%, it grows to 19 % in 1974 and to a peak of 31 % in 1978, when the European Monetary System was debated, and in the European election campaign was kicked off in France. In 1985, the share of domestic references decreases slightly to 21%, but grows back to almost the 1978 peak at 30 %. Considering the higher overall number of comment pieces in 1978 and particularly in 1991, around both summits the commentary reflects important domestic debates involving non-government actors. The trend towards domestication is aggravated by the decline in the share of transnational references to non-government actors. While in 1969, the share of transnational references is still similar to the level of domestic references at 16%, it declines to a mere 4 % in 1974. However, the more intense domestic debate in 1978 is also accompanied by a more notable share of transnational references (12 %). Apparently, the French debate is being observed from elsewhere. In 1991, the level of transnational references at 9 % is clearly inferior to the level of domestic references. Despite a recovery from only 3 % in 1985, the decline vis-à-vis 1969 and 1978 is notable, despite the increase in absolute terms. References to European level non-government actors only account for a very small share of references. The development here is a decline and a rebound at Maastricht: from 6 % in 1969, to 1 % in 1974, 2 % in 1978, nil in 1985 to 4 % in 1991. At Maastricht, in absolute terms, European level non-government actors are increasingly considered. This could be interpreted as an increased awareness for European(-level) civil society.

Even if the share of non-governmental references has not grown by 1991 beyond the 1969 level – except for in 1978 – , commentators have referred to an increasing diversity of actors.

The number of different kinds of non-government[34] actors referred to has increased between 1969 and 1991, however, not in a linear fashion. While in 1969, only 14 of the different kinds of actors (such as "French civil society", or "British business") were referred to, this number declined to eight in 1974, but grew back to 18 in 1978. From a mere six different kinds of actors in 1985, there was an increase to 28 kinds of actors referred to in the commentary across the six newspapers in 1991. Hence, the growing awareness for non-government actors in 1978 coincided with a growing diversity of societal and other political actors considered. Which kinds of actors exactly did commentators refer to? Can we observe structural changes in that respect? The following graph presents the absolute number of references to the different kinds of non-government actors, regardless of their nationality.

Chart 7 Absolute number of references to different kinds of non-government actors
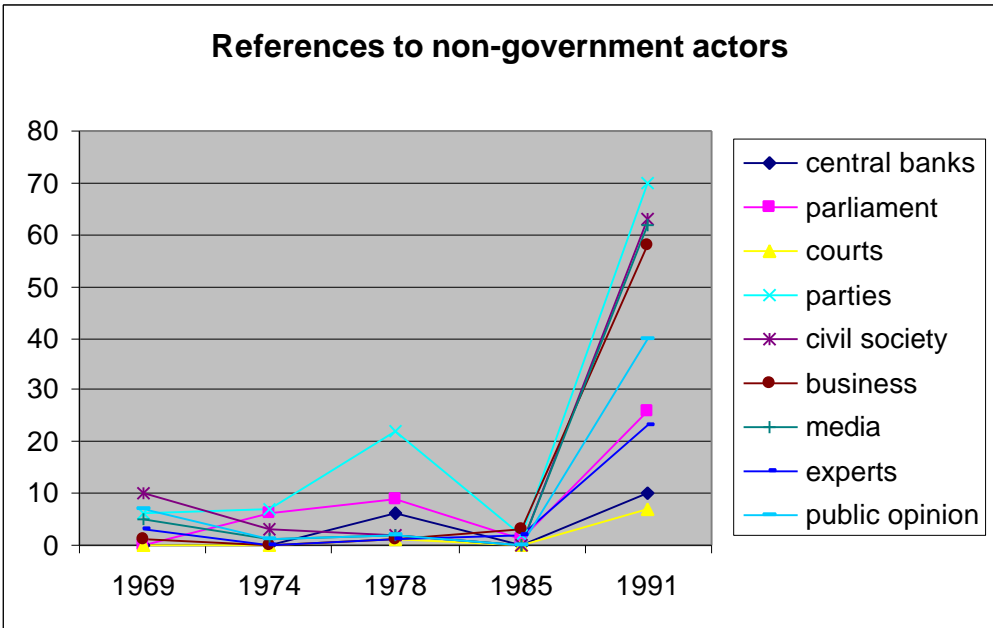

While in 1969, the largest number of references to non government actors was to civil society (particularly farmers and the European movement meeting in Saarbrücken), public opinion (poll data) and media and journalists, thereafter, in 1974, national parliament and party views were more frequently considered, whereas civil society views became less important. In the context of monetary negotiations in 1978, but also in 1991, the views of the central banks mattered to the commentators. Business and experts' views were more frequently considered in the context of the more economically relevant debates around the Single European Act and particularly Maastricht. At Maastricht, when the number of references to non-government actors of all categories grew drastically, besides parties, business and civil society (particularly labour unions), also media and journalists and – again public opinion – are referred to at a substantial level. Does this diversification also imply a structural change –

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[34] As explained at the end of part 2, references to non-government actors have been distinguished by nationality and the kinds groups of actors, the first four of which the are arguably related to the state: 1. the central bank, 2. parliament (excluding EP, which is treated in the previous section), 3. court (excluding ECJ which is treated in the previous section), 4. parties 5. civil society and interest groups (incl. farmers, labour unions) 6. business and their associations 7. media and individual journalists 8. individuals and experts 9. public opinion / poll data.

from the political institutions (central banks, parliament, court, parties) to the non-institutional actors (civil society, business, media, experts, public opinion)? The following graph juxtaposes these two categories.

Chart 8 References to non-government actors – political institutions vs. non-institutional actors
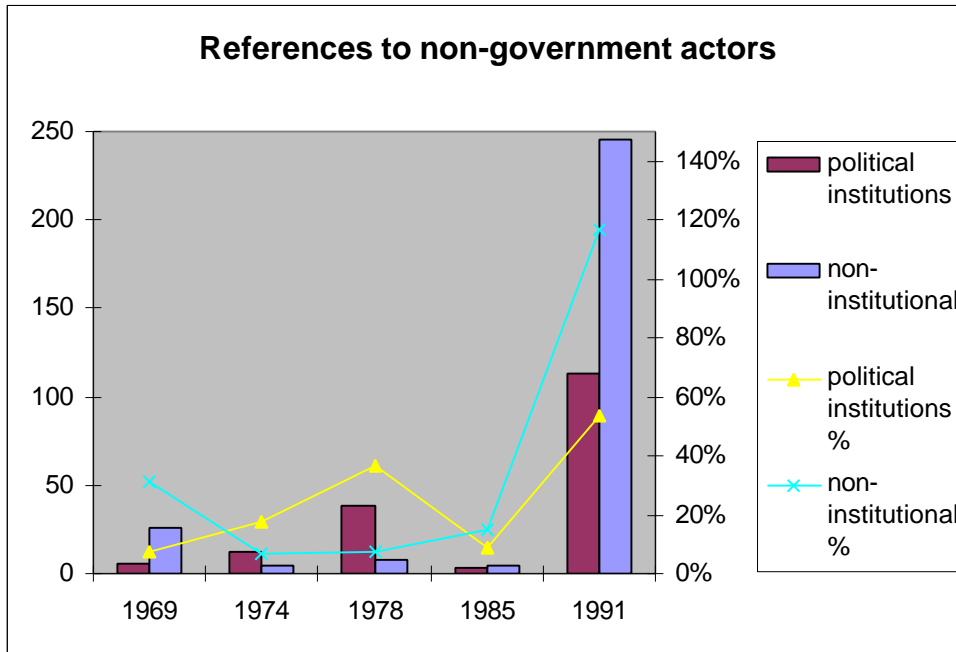
The data in fact indicate structural change, however, not in the linear fashion implied by the idea of an emerging European public sphere. Rather, from 1969, when non-institutional actors were more frequently referred to, this balance shifted in the 1970s. Then, the views of political institutions, most of all parliament and political parties, who were involved in the debate about British renegotiation, the EMS and the imminent EP elections, accounted for the lion's share of the references. With the European relaunch of the 1980s, this changes again. Already in 1985, the number of references to non-institutional actors is substantially higher than the number of references to political institutions. In 1991, this is even more notable, clearly surpassing the level of 1969 in both absolute and relative terms. Hence, if we agree with Habermas that the more peripheral, non-institutional actors' presence in the debate will improve its democratic quality, then this finding should indicate the emergence of an increasingly "democratic" and participatory European public sphere. Also the growing number and share of references to non-government actors, and the diversification point into the direction of an emerging European public sphere. However, the trend towards domestication indicates that the emerging European public sphere as a transnational network of communication is more densely knit at the national than at the transnational level.

4. Conclusion and discussion

All in all, is there evidence for the emergence of a European public sphere as a transnational network of communication on European affairs? Considering the five hypotheses, we find:

First, across British, German and French quality newspapers, the EC has increasingly become a point of reference. The number of comment pieces on EC affairs around the EC summits has substantially increased from 1969 to 1991, however, not in a linear way, but – astonishingly – with a very low level of debate right at the beginning of the European relaunch of the 1980s in 1985.

Secondly, the evidence of an emerging transnational network of communication is mixed. While in absolute numbers, there is an increase between 1969 and 1991 – not a linear one –, the number of transnational references has not kept pace with the overall increase of commentary on European affairs. There is a great asymmetry in the share of references to EC member states. The lion's share of the references is to British, German and French actors, while the views of other countries are only occasionally considered. However, the network of transnational references expands in line with the successive enlargements.

Thirdly, there is a trend towards domestication, most notably in the British and French newspapers. While in 1969, the share of transnational references is at the same level as of domestic references, from 1974 onwards domestic actors remain substantially more relevant in the debate.

Fourthly, this trend of domestication can also be observed with respect to the references to European institutions. While the number of references to European institutions expands, the share declines from its highest level in 1969 until 1991. However, from 1985 onwards the number of references to the Commission as the core supranational actor and the European Parliament as the European sovereign is growing. This indicates that with Europe's relaunch, its institutions are increasingly, subjected to commentators' scrutiny.

Finally, references to non-government actors – astonishingly frequently present already in 1969 – increase substantially, both in absolute and in relative terms, by 1991, after having been frequently discussed also in 1978. Here, the trend towards domestication is equally visible. While the share of national references increases, the share of transnational and European ones decreases vis-à-vis the 1969 level, (even though in absolute terms this still means an increase). However, there is a diversification in the kinds of actors included in the commentary. Most notably, structural change is taking place twice: Whereas political institutions (parties, parliament actors) dominate the debate in the 1970s, still in 1969 and from 1985 onwards, non-institutional non-government actors account for the larger share and number of non-government references. From a Habermasian perspective, this points to a network of communication of higher democratic quality, which is less dominated by actors from the political centre.

Two major conclusions can be drawn: First, there is some evidence of an emerging European public sphere as an increasingly transnational network of communication. This is

characterised by a rising level of transnational exchange, of holding European institutions accountable in the commentary and of a growing awareness of commentators for the views of non-institutional actors on European politics – even if the latter still remain relatively close to the political centre and quite elitist in composition. At the same time, there is a clear trend towards domestication. While the transnational network of communication on European politics expands, it becomes ever more densely knit domestically. This is an ambiguity, which may however be welcome from the perspective of democracy, if the national debate on European affairs contributes to holding governments and European actors accountable and discuss European issues more in-depth.

Secondly, the "emerging European public sphere" has not emerged in a linear fashion. In some respects, at the summit of The Hague in 1969, the European public sphere as a network of transnational communication was relatively more transnational than the public sphere at later summits. In any case, it was less domestic. In the 1970s and also in 1980, by some of the measures, the European public sphere "retreated", and only "re-emerged" in 1991.

How can we explain these findings? The history of the political European public sphere is closely linked to the history of European integration, which is the object of the debates in the public sphere. The period between 1969 and 1991 is characterised very different phases of European integration. This context – the concomitant structural as well as specific conditions – may help with the explanation. Three aspects in particular are worth noting:

First, the *style of European politics changed*. Particularly in the 1970s – aggravated by the founding of the European Council – the role of national governments became ever more important. However, with the advent of Delors in 1985 the role of the Commission, which teamed up with business lobbies and core governments, increased again. This may account for the predominance of references to the governments in the 1970s and the resumed attention to the Commission only from the mid-1980s.

Secondly, the *contents of policy making changed*. In the 1970s, the summits regarded inter-governmental problems such as British renegotiation and highly technical issues of monetary policy, with the EMS. Thus, mainly the views of government actors, actors from parties, parliament, and the central banks are considered by the commentators. Particularly in those cases, when socio-economic affairs were at stake – such as in 1985 and in particular 1991 – commentators included references to non-government actors, and in particular to business and labour unions.

Thirdly, *national sensitivities* and *nationally specific problems* account for domestic, but also transnational references to these countries. The British renegotiation debate in 1974, the debate at the eve of the EP election campaign in France in 1978, and the debate about EMU and social policy in Britain in 1991 are the reason for the selective increase of domestic references. However, commentators frequently also observe these debates across borders, which leads to an increase in transnational references. The relatively low share of German domestic references is most likely due to the continued consensus and the lack of a domestic controversy on European affairs.

After Maastricht, the style of European politics has arguably not changed much, the contents of policy making has even expanded, while national sensitivities have continued, if not aggravated and diversified – as a consequence of the successive waves of enlargement. We can expect that these factors will continue to matter. Hence, the European public sphere will continue to be emerging, characterised by the ambiguity of a network that is both transnational and strongly domestic. However, unlike in the 1970s and 1980s, the political structures of European integration have not only expanded but also institutionalised. This makes it slightly more likely, that the emerging European public sphere will develop in a more linear – stable or expanding – fashion.

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