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ABSTRACT

The article explores how enlargement of the European Union has affected the development of the European public sphere. At the initial stage of enlargement, communication between the ‘old’ and ‘new’ democracies was hampered by prejudice and estrangement from the western side and illusionary expectations from the eastern side. Different historical experiences after the Second World War had raised barriers to mutual understanding. While experiences of ‘building capitalism’ brought post-Communist nations closer to the values of the European welfare society, the eastwards enlargement at the same time strengthened the influence of identity politics among the ‘old’ democracies of Europe. As a result, there is now less difference between the ‘old’ and ‘new’ members of the EU than was expected at the beginning of the enlargement process. The new members of the EU are even more interested in the development of the European public sphere than are many people in the West, because they see in this process their chance to be included in the European communication space as equal members. In order to reach this goal, the process of ‘horizontal integration’ between national public spheres and the development of the common social imaginary of the new Europe is considered to be very important.

Key Words eastwards enlargement of the EU, EU communication, European public sphere, post-Communism, social imaginary
Introduction: ‘return to Europe’ revisited

The desire of the nations freed from Soviet rule after 1989 was to ‘return to the West’. ‘The West’ and ‘Europe’ were understood as virtually synonymous, as a cultural and political entity, different from the ‘eastern’ Communist type of civilization (Sztompka, 1996). Europe was perceived as a ‘promised land’, as an embodiment of common ‘western’ values: freedom, democracy, solidarity, justice, prosperity. The metaphor of ‘return to Europe’, often used by politicians and social scientists from the former ‘eastern bloc’, expressed belief in the ‘normalcy’ of belonging to Europe (Lauristin, 1997: 29).

An important element of this imaginary was integration into the European Union (EU) as a legitimate and desired end-goal of ‘return’, as an ultimate recognition of ‘belonging to the European family’. Participation in European public institutions, in European cultural dialogue and common events was perceived as having a highly symbolic value, often without critical reflection on their political content or social and cultural preconditions. Membership in the Council of Europe, invitation to the pre-accession negotiations by the EU, victory in the Eurovision Song Contest or hosting a European sporting competition – all these events were equally important as signs of recognition, proving the success of the ‘return’.

The development of a political culture in the post-Communist societies in the early 1990s was characterized by a mythological way of thinking, by a tendency to perceive events in a metaphorical way as proving historical predestination and pointing at nationally shared values and desires (Vihalemm et al., 1997). Henry Vogt put it in the other terms, speaking about the inclination of the post-Communist peoples to build new utopias in place of the vanished Communist one (Vogt, 2005). Access to the European public sphere, the right to participate in debates on European affairs, was also perceived as a part of the ‘utopia of return’. However, the utopian way of looking at reality is vulnerable to disillusionment and disappointment. The dream of return turned into a ‘rude awakening’ (Jakubowicz, 2007). The ‘new Europeans’, who had anticipated membership in the EU as ‘joining the European club’ on an equal footing, were faced with the asymmetry of East–West relations and perceptions, often rooted in centuries-long images of the barbarian ‘backyard’ of Europe (Ekecrantz, 2004; Wolff, 1994). The whole process of the post-Communist transition before accession was a reminder of a one-sided vertical relationship between mentors and pupils, astoundingly different from the participatory dialogue anticipated. New members of the EU were viewed with suspicion, their values, lifestyles and interests were perceived as alien and ‘non-European’. Lack of a common
communication space between East and West was one of the disturbing legacies of the European postwar divide. This is why the new members of the EU have even more interest and trust in the bold ideal of the European public sphere envisaged by Habermas (1992, 2001) than do many people in the West.

The European public sphere: a mission impossible?

In contrast to the Habermasian vision, the real perspectives of the European public sphere (EPS) are often described as gloomy and irrelevant. Even media professionals, whose everyday work is directly related to the mediation of European affairs, have expressed a quite ironic and estranged attitude. When asked about the formation of a European public sphere, a European identity or European journalism, journalists have frequently judged all kinds of ‘Europeanization’ as political projects imposed on the media from outside or from above by the EU authorities and institutions, serving the strategic political interests of the latter (AIM, 2007).

A sceptical discourse also dominates academic discussions on the European public sphere. Eriksen has summarized this prevalent attitude well:

The lack of a collective identity renders the prospect for a viable European public sphere rather bleak. There is no agreement on common interests; different languages and disparate national cultures make opinion formation and common action unlikely. The intermediate structures of civil society are lacking as well as a common language. . . . A common public debate – which enables the citizens to take a stand on the same issues, at the same time and under the same premises – is, thus, not achievable. (Eriksen, 2005: 343)

The democratic deficit in the system of EU decision-making is blamed for not giving European citizens the opportunity to participate in an EPS. And vice versa, the weakness of the EPS is the reason why there is a deficit of democracy in the EU:

In the absence of transnational interest groups, parties, and social movements, we are unlikely to see an emerging European public sphere in which the issues are discussed from a European rather than the various national perspectives. The result is clear: We need to fix the democratic deficit of the EU first, before we can fix the deficit in [the] European public sphere. Others, however, see the emergence of a European public sphere as a precondition of being able to tackle the European democratic deficit. Is this then a ‘chicken and egg’ type of problem? (Risse, 2003: 6)
This vicious circle is acknowledged not only by academics, but now also by the European Commission (EC), who in its communication strategy is making efforts to promote dialogue, debate and democracy (the so-called ‘Plan D’) in order to enhance the formation of an EPS. However, the efforts to encourage democratic debate by means of public relations efforts are hampered by a policy to maintain ‘the one voice’ in representing the EC to its publics (AIM, 2007). The EU Commission and European Council try to avoid public interference in their debates; they conduct these behind closed doors, while at the same time presenting themselves as the ultimate guardians of the ‘European public good’. In order to create more ‘transparency’, EU institutions developed a system of direct communication with lobby groups, reminiscent of a process that was analysed by Habermas as a tendency to ‘refeudalization’ of the public sphere in welfare societies by quasi-political organizations representing private interests:

The actual operations of the new European institutions, however, have often turned out to be less transparent, less accountable, and less amenable to popular participation than those of most member states. They reflect the influence of an internal technocratic elite, and they also appear to be more susceptible to the influence of business corporations and closely related external elites. This is why they are criticized for a ‘democratic deficit’. (Calhoun, 2003: 244)

To enhance the development of an EPS, the EU communication strategy also envisages greater opportunities for direct access by EU citizens to EU institutions by using Internet or participating in various all-European campaigns. However, the lack of political solutions for fighting the democratic deficit could not be compensated for by a better communication strategy by existing EU institutions, rather the reverse: better communication presupposes institutional changes, enabling democratic deliberations to develop and giving citizens incentives for active participation. According to the powerful vision of Jürgen Habermas, deep institutional reforms, as well as changes in political culture, are needed for development of a European public sphere in its true sense (Habermas, 1992, 2001). The timid constitutional process in the EU shows little promise of a realization of his ideas.

Limits to Europeanization of the national media

The pessimistic view on the future of an EPS is disputed by scholars who have studied the growing Europeanization of the national media (Koopmans, 2004; Risse, 2003; Trenz, 2005):
[A] European public sphere . . . does not fall from heaven and does not pre-exist outside social and political discourses. Rather, it is being constructed through social and discursive practices creating a common horizon of reference and, at the same time, a transnational community of communication over issues that concern ‘us as Europeans’ rather than British, French, Germans, or Dutch. (Risse, 2003: 5)

Calhoun has distinguished three forms of the visibility of a European public sphere in the media. First, there is the official Europe of the EU and the common affairs of its members. It is a top-down affair in which Europe is represented to Europeans from Brussels (and to some extent Strasbourg) but there is little multidirectional flow. Second, there is an elite discursive community that is much more active in public communication, is often multilingual (on the continent, at least), reads more and more internationally, and consists of leaders in business, higher education, the media themselves and to some extent government. This public does indeed debate European affairs, but largely in technocratic terms and with considerable attention to specific interests. Third, there are networks of activists committed to many different causes, from whole foods to human and indeed animal rights (Calhoun, 2003: 266–7).

Limits to the expansion of Europeanization are found in the lack of interest among ordinary people in EU information, and in the domination of nationalistic approaches to EU issues. While the normative concept of the EPS depicts it as a realm of ‘pure’ public interest, free from private or nationalist (‘culturalist’) interests, empirical evidence shows quite a different picture from this ideal standard: the general public usually become engaged in European issues only if they involve some national interest or are initiated by scandal or campaigns (Eriksen, 2005: 350). The prevalence of the national viewpoint in reporting the EU was strongly confirmed in our recent research project (AIM, 2007).

The belief is widespread that development of a truly democratic and transnational EPS is hampered by lack of popular interest in European matters. European debate is believed to be of interest only to narrow groups of ‘Europeanized’ elites, who comprise the audiences of the influential quality press and also dominate the ‘voices’ speaking about European matters in the media as a whole (Habermas, 2001; Koopmans, 2004). But there is also evidence to contradict this presumption of an elite–masses divide. Comparing representations of European integration in the national media with perceptions among local elites and ordinary citizens in three ‘old’ member states – Spain, the UK and Germany – Juan Díez-Medrano discovered that cognitive frames in thinking about positive
and negative effects of European integration differ more between countries than between the elites and ordinary citizens (Díez-Medrano, 2003). Nevertheless, national specificity in EU coverage is not uniform. Differences prevail over issues sensitive to national identities. Common features in media coverage of European affairs have been shown in several comparative studies of media content (Risse, 2003; Trenz, 2005). Also, the aforementioned study by Díez-Medrano confirms the existence of well-established commonalities between countries in the vision of the EU as a support for international economic competitiveness and provider of peace and stability. This particular study is, however, unique in that it finds country-specific dimensions in ‘framing Europe’ not only in the media, but also among the discourses of elites and common people alike. The gap between elitist and popular attitudes towards the EU seems to be overestimated, at least in situations where national identity is involved (Díez-Medrano, 2003). We have to admit that eastwards enlargement has strengthened the influence of identity politics, even in the most prominent ‘old’ democracies of Europe. In this sense, there is less difference between the ‘old’ and ‘new’ members of the EU than was expected at the beginning of the enlargement process. The failed constitutional referendums in France and the Netherlands have demonstrated that instead of the desired ‘constitutional patriotism’, the old Europe is revealing growing xenophobia and hostility towards the ‘others’. The feelings of deep disappointment have been well expressed by Ulrich Beck:

How can it be that in Western Europe at this crucial historical juncture hardly any major intellectual voices can be heard vigorously defending the eastwards expansion of Europe against the timid, faint-hearted reservations of nationalists? – Will the spectrum of emotions from benign indifference to open, sometimes hateful rejection be sufficient to absorb the foreseeable fractures and breakdowns to which the project of European transformation exposes itself as it approaches the historic moment of eastwards enlargement? (Beck, 2006: 163–4)

Historical legacies hampering East–West European dialogue

The presence of the post-Communist member states in the European debate has broadened and sharpened the self-perceptions of old Europe. On the one hand, the expectations of the new members had animated an imaginary EU as a ‘community of values’ based on fairness, solidarity and equality between all European nations. In this sense, these new members contribute to the strengthening of the European moral order. On the other
hand, for the new members the ideological strife between left and right has less importance, compared to the distinction between democracy and totalitarianism. In their perception Europe as a ‘community of values’ is strongly related to the notion of Communism as a part of a European common evil, equal in its consequences to Fascism.7

Habermas (2001) argues that a distinctive Europeanness is based on two cornerstones: the concept of the welfare society and the rejection of nationalism, which was linked in the historical memory of West Europeans to the painful historical lessons of Nazism: ‘It is the lasting memory of nationalist excess and moral abyss that lends to our present commitments the quality of a peculiar achievement’ (Habermas, 2001: 18).8 Social imaginaries of West and East Europeans concerning European historical legacies differ most radically in the comparative judgement of Communism and Fascism. For people of Central and Eastern Europe both totalitarian regimes represent equal evil, and the horrors of the Gulag were in their personal experience equal to the Holocaust. In the West, the attitudes of many intellectuals concerning Communism and even Stalinism have remained quite abstract and ambivalent, not comparable at all to an absolute denial of the Nazi regime and trauma of Holocaust. If in the West the historical rhetoric contains the key words ‘Nazism’, ‘nationalism’, ‘Germany’, ‘Holocaust’, then in the East the equivalent discourse contains the key words: ‘socialism’, ‘Communism’, ‘Soviet Union’ (= Russia), ‘Gulag’. In order to go forward and give back to people on both sides of the former East–West divide the feeling of a common European history, these formulas have to be uncoupled from their specific national contexts, which focus on either the German or Russian ‘historical guilt’, and replaced by an analysis of the universal features, the political and social reasons and consequences of Fascism and Communism as totalitarian and anti-human regimes and movements.

So far, the dialogue between the old and new members has been to avoid or soften as far as possible debate on these sensitive historical issues. However, even in the rhetoric related to EU enlargement, the motives of historical justice have emerged. Analysing different discourses in the old member states during enlargement, Milada Vachudova pointed to the importance of historical and moral arguments, including the rhetoric of ‘guilt’: in the early 1990s, observers believed that the EU should enlarge to make amends for the injustices of 20th-century European history, which witnessed Western Europe abandoning Eastern Europe first to Hitler, then to Stalin (Vachudova, 2005: 243). However, comparing the strength of the historical and moral arguments with the materialist and pragmatic ones, Vachudova confirms that the latter form a more reliable ground for European integration, among the new and old members alike:
On a cheerful note, if a majority of EU members did decide that EU enlargement was in their material interest (while also conforming to the identity and liberal values of the EU), this is a much more robust and promising starting point for the success of an enlarged EU than the alternatives: that the new members were admitted because of feelings of historical guilt, or indeed that they were admitted because the majority of EU members were trapped by the EU’s norms. (Vachudova, 2005: 246)

Pragmatic caution in matters of history and identity corresponds well to the essence of the ‘historical learning’ proclaimed by Habermas to be at the core of Western European self-perception (Habermas, 2001). But does this reluctance to disclose the deep gulfs in historical imageries between East and West mean that the image of the ‘new Europe’ is closer to the ‘common market’ than to the ‘community of values’? Is the ‘common European good’ uniting the future of East and West Europe restricted to economic prosperity? Or could the common ground for a new European identity be found not in interpretations of the past but in the social imaginary of a specific modern ‘Europeanness’, represented in lifestyle, social relations and cultural preferences of the European welfare societies?

The experiences of the Communist regime, which legitimized its inhuman practices through reference to Marxism, have corrupted the very notion of socialism in the eyes of many people in Central and Eastern Europe. For that reason, the rhetoric of the welfare society sounded to them similar to the proclamations of ‘real socialism’. Only after the ‘rude awakening’ (Jakubowicz, 2007) of almost two decades’ experience with ‘building capitalism’, as Aslund coined the process of post-Communist transition (Aslund, 2002), are politicians and public opinion in post-Communist countries becoming less suspicious of the ‘socialist nature’ of the European welfare society. Growing susceptibility among Central and Eastern European politicians, mainstream media and publics to the ideas of the ‘European welfare society’, their active involvement in the implementation of the Lisbon strategy and comparatively strong support with regard to common defence and foreign policy point in the direction of a unifying future rather than to a dividing past.

Bridging the gap between national perspectives

As Risse has said, ‘we can speak of a European public sphere, if and when people speak about the same issues at the same time using the same criteria of relevance and are mutually aware of each other’s viewpoints’ (Risse, 2003: 3). The issue of language (in the linguistic sense), which is often brought forth as the excuse for the absence of a common communication space, is not so crucial to mutual understanding when other
conditions (common values, trust, motivation) are present. Research on ‘criteria of relevance’ in selection and interpretation of European information has so far been more limited than studies of media content. The attempt to explore the process of European news selection in the framework of the AIM project has confirmed once more the existence of strong transnational similarities in consumer interests among European audiences and differences in national attitudes concerning European integration. ‘Cosmopolitan’ ideals of a European public sphere are not acknowledged as relevant principles in journalistic practice beyond the close circle of correspondents who belong to the elite international press (Heikkilä and Kunelius, 2006). However, reflecting existing limits in journalistic culture, this type of media-centred research is not very informative concerning changes in audience perceptions. It is also questionable whether an analysis restricted to explicitly ‘European’ topics and references could adequately reveal the level and substance of ‘Europeanization’ going on in people’s minds. For a better understanding of the processes that could form transnational European publics, the input from the media should be studied together with the effects of participation in personal cross-national contacts.

The low level of trust between ‘old’ and ‘new’ members of the EU is one of the main obstacles preventing formation of a common European communication space. Analysis of the Swedish press (Ekecrantz, 2004) has shown that while the national press in Sweden often contribute to existing stereotypes and prejudice, local networks of cross-national contacts involving civil society and local governments are bringing down barriers and feeding mutual trust between the ‘old’ and ‘new’ democracies (Ekecrantz, 2004: 58). The density and scope of everyday interactions between the people from the Central and Eastern European countries and Western Europe are increasing. Enlargement has brought expansion of European contacts among the populations of the new member states (Vihalemm, forthcoming). Project managers, beneficiaries of EU funding, clients or providers of various EU-facilitated services, Erasmus exchange students and professors, people working in other EU countries are all becoming opinion leaders in their own domestic environments, disseminating information about new EU developments. Many of them are also using opportunities to spread their views through Internet portals and blogs. These new international experiences of people are clearly underrepresented in the traditional media. Furthermore, the scope of audiences who are involved in European contacts is undervalued by journalists (AIM, 2007).

But how does this growing density of contacts inside the EU facilitate development of the European public sphere? The simple answer could
be: the more people travel around and meet each other, the more they can imagine how the other lives and how they understand things. However, our empirical data do not support the assumption of a direct link between the amount of international experience in terms of travel and the interest of people to engage in discussion of European matters. An important missing link between the public sphere as a space of critical rational debate on public matters and the realm of everyday practices of ordinary citizens could be found in the concept of the social imaginary, developed in Charles Taylor’s interpretation of the public sphere:

By social imaginary, I mean something much broader and deeper than the intellectual schemes people may entertain when they think about social reality in a disengaged mode. I am thinking, rather, of the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations. (Taylor, 2004: 23)

The concept of the social imaginary links social, cultural and psychological dimensions of public communication. The development of a common ground for participation in a European public sphere involving people who come from different social or cultural backgrounds is not based on abstract ideas, but implies ‘images, stories and legends’ which help ordinary people to ‘imagine’ their social surroundings (Taylor, 2004: 23).

An accumulation of the impulses bringing a European dimension into everyday lives of people is changing social imaginaries more than any campaign. In his model of Europeanization, Ruud Koopmans has distinguished between ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ horizontal Europeanization, meaning by the latter mediation of events happening in other EU countries as if they belonged not to international, but to domestic, ‘our’ affairs (Koopmans, 2004: 6). Even quite minor events in other EU countries are becoming meaningful when included in the context of ‘our world’, and, vice versa, domestic events in our own country are imagined as important not only to ourselves, but to other members of the EU too (the same is true for globalization: for example, the issue of climate change links everyday consumer behaviour in any country with a global level of concern). A good example here would be the appearance of the names of Central and Eastern European cities on EU weather maps.

The real scope of an ‘invisible Europeanization’ affecting the everyday lives of people could be remarkably broader than the results of any survey or media analysis can reveal. Even the minor signs of inclusion by and to a common European space are especially meaningful to the people who have for a long time felt excluded.
Craig Calhoun is right when arguing that not only rational debates but also an emotionally loaded social imaginary of a common Europe ought to be considered as a part of a European public sphere:

I wish to urge a richer conception of the public sphere as an arena of cultural creativity and reproduction in which society is imagined and thereby made real and shaped by the ways in which it is understood. It is because public life can help to constitute a thicker, more meaningful and motivational solidarity that it can help to underpin a modern democratic polity. A thin identification with formal processes will not do. Citizens need to be motivated by solidarity, not merely included by law. (Calhoun, 2003: 244)

Reflecting after the first few years of enlargement its consequences for a European public sphere, one has to recognize the positive effects of mutual communication between old and new members. After enlargement, the initial domination of the western perspective evolved into self-critical international dialogue. Many issues that at the beginning of this dialogue were conceived of as relevant only to the ‘West’ or only to the ‘East’ revealed their common meaning. Good examples of this kind of dialogue can be found in the fields of human rights and environmental protection as common concerns uniting western and eastern parts of Europe. As Habermas foresaw:

Today, moreover, the European nation-states are being brought together by the challenges which they all face equally. All are in the process of becoming countries of immigration and multicultural societies. All are exposed to an economic and cultural globalization that awakes memories of a shared history of conflict and reconciliation – and of a comparatively low threshold of tolerance towards exclusion. (Habermas, 2001: 19)

Ironically enough, the EU summit of June 2007 could be interpreted as a step back from the ideal of the EU as a moral and political community, based on unanimous commitment to common values and constitutional principles. But at the same time, it demonstrated once again that Europe does not need a new utopia, but is open to critical debate about its successful experiences and failures vis-a-vis its ideals and aspirations.

Conclusion

Europeanization of the national public spheres and formation of a new European social imaginary are a process of intercultural and political learning. The outcomes depend on the interplay of the different factors. EU enlargement has played the role of catalyst in this process, though this is still slow and controversial.
A step forwards from the European social imaginary towards a European public sphere is supported by further expansion of cross-national personal contacts between people from the old and new EU member states. Although the national perspective seems to dominate in current media coverage of European matters, incorporation and consideration of other national perspectives indicate a potential for growing reflexivity in a European context.

Contrasting and comparing national viewpoints enables us to identify common interests and concerns. So far this kind of dialogue has been limited and is going on mainly at intergovernmental level. A genuine public sphere based on common European values and interests should involve opportunities for cross-border dialogue and public debate between the people from different European countries about the issues of mutual concern. Development of this kind of dialogue implies two practical conditions: first, broadening practices of interaction between people from different member states through horizontal cross-national real and virtual networks, leading to the further practical Europeanization of politics, business, labour, education and culture; second, reflection of these multinational practices in the minds of people through the European-mediated communication field, including European journalism. From this perspective, the European public sphere is a part of a European transformation, a slowly evolving, open-ended process. It cannot be properly understood when described as a normative project with a determined end result.

Notes

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1. The EU Sixth Frame Programme project ‘Adequate Information Management in Europe’ (AIM) investigated the media’s impact on the development of a European public sphere(s). On the one hand, it focused on the actors (EU institutions and media organizations as well as journalists, correspondents and editors on European, national, regional and local levels) and, on the other hand, on mechanisms (structures and processes of news management). The focus of attention was on how the mass media produce EU coverage in the context of diverse journalistic cultures and professional standards. For more on AIM, go to: www.aim-project.net/

2. The research done in the course of the AIM project explored the active role played by the institutions of the EU Commission (DG COMM and spokespersons) in filtering and shaping the information available to journalists. The EU Commission, according to its new Communication Strategy (European
Commission (2006) has taken responsibility for the evolving European public sphere and is seeking ways to address European citizens directly by using meetings and conferences, creating virtual public spaces through EU websites and by activating local representations of the EU. Trenz and Eder characterized these communicative efforts of the Commission as mere PR:

"... the principal objective of a European communication policy is not to improve information, but to present it. PR and image politics open up new ways of visualizing and popularizing the EU to its citizens. The EU information and communication policy is an experiment in making the EU more attractive and less boring to its citizens. (Trenz and Eder, 2004: 16)"

3. We agree here with Risse:

"The policy conclusions are equally clear: Many political and business leaders in Europe believe that controversial debates on Europe, the EU, and European policies will endanger the European integration process and slow it down considerably. Therefore, one should not touch the European elite consensus which still prevails in many, particularly Continental European countries. This belief is dangerous in democratic terms and plain wrong in empirical terms. Contestation and politicization is constitutive for a democratic polity including the European polity. And it serves a European purpose, since it is bound to increase the issue salience and significance of European affairs in the national polities. The data on frames of reference suggest that raising the salience of the EU in the national polities will not drive the Europeans apart, but pull them together in a European public sphere. (Risse, 2003: 9)"

4. Here organizations strive for political compromises with the state and with one another, as much as possible to the exclusion of the public; in this process, however, they have to procure plebiscite agreement from a mediatized public by means of a display of staged or manipulated publicity. In opposition to this factual trend towards the weakening of the public sphere as a principle stands the redefinition of the functions of constitutional rights – the mandate of publicity is extended from the organs of the state to all organizations acting in state-related fashion. (Habermas, 1992: 232)

5. Trenz (2005) likens the European Commission’s PR efforts to a case of anticipative action on the part of institutional actors trying to mobilize public support and acclamation for their activities. This strategy follows the logic of symbolic politics, staging policy achievements for a public. Enlightened absolutism is a historical case of this type of public sphere. In the EU, similar strategies are applied by the Commission in promoting PR campaigns with regard to central issues like the monetary union and enlargement. Institutions try to outbid the silence of the public by taking initiatives, which again provoke public resonance. When the public becomes responsive, this case is likely to result in an expansion of the public sphere.
6. The findings of AIM research on editorial standards and journalistic practices characteristic of different national newsrooms in Europe show that there appears a strong inclination towards the ‘nationalization’ or ‘localization’ of European affairs. Regarding the reporting of EU-related news and information, national relevance stands out as the primary criterion of newsworthiness, news selection and agenda-setting almost exclusively for every national media, including different types of media. Therefore, most of the information mediated to national newsrooms by European correspondents in Brussels appears to be ‘nationally filtered’ as well (AIM, 2007).

7. The conflict arising between the Estonian and Russian interpretation of the historical role of the Soviet Union in the Baltic countries after the Second World War, caused by the removal of the war memorial in Tallinn from the central square to the military cemetery (‘the bronze soldier affair’), has revealed how deep and persistent are contrasting interpretations of the historical legacies of Fascism and Communism. Reporting on western comments and EU reactions to this case, the Estonian media stressed evidence of solidarity among the EU members with the post-Communist countries in understanding their traumatic experiences.

8. Trenz refers to Giesen, explaining the role of history in contemporary European self-perception:

   ... commemoration of the trauma of Nazism and authoritarian nationalism has become an important element of a transnational discursive practice in contemporary Europe. It consists in the ritual remembrance of the shared memories of the past that is combined with the expression of regret and reconciliation. The challenging thesis of Giesen is further that such a traumatised European community of victims and perpetrators has slowly replaced the triumph of nationalism as a reference point of collective identity formation. (Trenz, 2005: 2)

9. Data from our survey of the Estonian population’s interest in European affairs demonstrate that interest in media coverage of European affairs is more closely linked with participation in domestic politics than with the scale of international travel.

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