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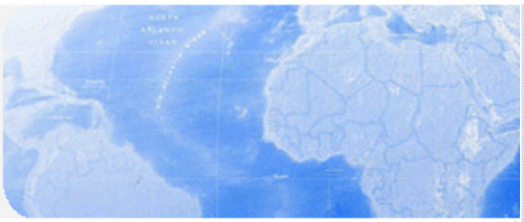

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Digital Publics in Transnational Spaces:

EU Blogs and the European Public Sphere

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Abstract

The paper presents the results of the empirical research conducted on the emerging EU-blogosphere and relates them to the Habermasian notion of the public sphere. Conceptually, it traces the development of the public sphere as a normative category and borrowing from Fraser (2007) establishes a series of criteria that seem to guarantee its effective operation as a democratic bridge between publics and authorities in a transnational context. In the process, it refers to the various empirical works in this area which aim to trace the public sphere in Europe (off/online). The empirical part analyzes the findings of the qualitative research conducted with EU-bloggers (expert interviews and content analysis). The results show that the EU-blogosphere to some extent exhibits characteristics of an effective (if inconsistent) transnational public sphere (extension of democratic debate, promoting an EU-common identity, achieving at times influence). Nonetheless, its deliberative quality is low and overall it remains too small and expert driven. Finally, in order to interpret the findings the paper makes use of Mouffe's (2005) critical examination of the concept of the public sphere.

Introduction

The democratic deficit of the European Union is well documented (Follesdal & Hix, 2006). Decades of supranational institution building and concomitant Europeanization have put issues of legitimacy, participation and accountability at the heart of the European project. Finding ways to address such democratic anxieties has been one of the paramount tasks of EU officials and European leaders. The issue is of course multifaceted and the proposed ways of addressing it vary according to one's institutional focus and definition of the problem (e.g. the European Parliament's powers, the role of transnational party federations, the opacity and remoteness of the European Commission and the Council of the European Union etc). Nonetheless, in the last decade many commentators have come to agree that the democratic deficit of the EU is inexorably linked to the existence and function of a European public sphere.

The notion of the democratic public sphere or publicity (*Öffentlichkeit*) is to a great extent derived from Habermas's seminal work 'Structural Transformations of the Public Sphere' (1989). The concept refers to a space of political communication existing between the state and the private life of citizens, wherein free and fair political communication can take place, leading to the formation and marshalling of public opinion. The opinions expressed in the public sphere are supposed to hold public officials accountable and influence public policy. To the extent that power responds and is influenced by the claims made in the public sphere we can say that the latter is effective and that democratic legitimacy and accountability are increased (de Beus, 2010: 14). The public sphere is linked to visions of deliberative democracy whereby popular debates have an impact on policy, complementing elections as mechanisms of political participation. Traditionally the public sphere has been conceived as coinciding with a well defined (culturally and linguistically) *demos* operating within national political borders. (Fraser, 2007). In addition, in the 20th century the public sphere has been identified with the dominant position and role of the mass print, radio and TV media. The debates captured and opinions expressed in these media have been considered as the cornerstone of the national democratic public sphere.

However, in the last decades this constellation of factors has been challenged by globalization and the spread of the new information and communication technologies – and more specifically the Internet. In effect, one can reasonably argue that the deficit plaguing the EU is in some way the more conspicuous manifestation of the deeper process of Globalization. High levels of interdependency have made the management of problems and policy issues a transnational affair. Affected populations transcend national boundaries and traditional multilateral governance recipes are either not capable of dealing with modern

challenges or not inclusive enough so as to guarantee legitimacy. (Van Langenhove, 2011). Global policy conundrums have created transnational communities of concern which are seeking ways of communication and interaction in order to influence the international making of rules and standards. The process is evidently more intensive in the context of the European Union, since here the construction of supranational institutions that deal with the consequences (but also direct the pace) of transnational integration has been most successful.

Hence, the question that has been increasingly preoccupying theorists and political actors is how to make global or regional governance more democratic via processes that enhance the participation of affected publics. And here enters the Internet and its promise of open, cheap, global and two-way communication; acting as a bridge between publics and authorities and helping establish viable spheres of publicity. (Hauben & Hauben, 1997). The Internet is challenging the grasp of traditional mass media on the formation of public opinion and allows, in principle, affected communities to 'meet' and constitute political publics that can impact global, regional or local policy making. It has been long assumed that the quasi-subversive character of the Internet, or at the very least its presumed openness and two-way interactivity, will enhance public participation and deliberation, therefore revitalizing democracy. (Shirky, 2011; Janssen & Kies, 2005; Tsagarousianou, 1999: 195-96; Rheingold, 1993: 131).

Of course, we now recognize that the early high hopes and expectations concerning the democratic potential of the Internet have not entirely materialized. (Trenz, 2009; Rasmussen, 2007). The internet has not led to a massive increase in political engagement and interaction or to a significant push towards deliberative democracy. (Gerhards & Schaeffer, 2009; Sunstein, 2001; Davies & Owen, 1998). Political authorities and actors do utilize the Internet but mostly as means of communication and for information gathering and fund raising. In addition, the deliberative quality of online discussions – as found in newsgroups, web forums or e-consultation processes – is in many instances low. (Kies, 2010; Tucker, 2008; Wright & Street, 2007; Wright, 2007; Wilhelm, 2000; Davis, 1999; 167; see also Cammaerts, 2006; and Cammaerts & van Audenhove, 2005). Furthermore, despite the fact that their dominance is challenged by independent online outlets, traditional media corporations still enjoy a dominant role in the online world as popular, reliable sources of news and opinion. In the European context digital media and the Internet have not led to a drastic increase in trans-European political communication. The success of pan-European online news media has been mitigated, at best, while in general political communication remains to a great extent a national affair. (Koopmans & Statham, 2010).

Nevertheless, one cannot underestimate the capacity of the Internet to connect people and to transcend traditional boundaries – including the one between receiver and transmitter of political content. (Beckert et al. 2011). Bennett (2012) has shown that the Internet has indeed enabled the construction of digital European communities of concern. Also, Kies's (2010) empirical research points to the fact that the quality of online deliberation rises in proportion to the impact it has on policy making (see also Perez, 2011). The potential of online communication in terms of deliberative quality is also supported by the findings of Gimler (2001) and Dahlberg (2001), while Price equally (2006) provides some evidence that online democracy experiments foster engagement and knowledge gains. Finally, studies about the character of political engagement and expression on the Internet demonstrate that a lot of its value-added lies with the expression of dissent and criticism – in other words with the extension of the democratic parameters of modern political culture (Papacharissi, 2009). Overall, according to recent research it seems that the effectiveness of online deliberation depends heavily on the architecture of the communicative environment and how well it fits the deliberative task (Davies & Chandler, 2011).

There is some modest evidence that the Internet does permit communicative spaces to be organized, where citizens and civil society groups discuss and forward their opinions on ongoing policy-making processes. (Beckert et al. 2011). Of course, further empirical and theoretical exploration of the contribution of the Internet to the constitution of public spheres is necessary. Much more so in the context of (international) regional integration where the public spheres are by definition transnational and thus much more difficult to build and sustain.

This paper studies the emerging EU-blogosphere in relation to the notion of the public sphere. More concretely, it traces the development of the public sphere as a normative category, discusses criteria that would seem to guarantee its effective operation as a political space between publics and authorities in a transnational context. Once this is completed, it will refer to the importance of the public sphere in the European context and to the various empirical works which aim to trace its size and quality. At the same time, it will consider the work conducted on the online dimension of the public sphere in Europe and highlight weaknesses and potential new pathways. Following this, it will critically discuss the results of qualitative empirical research (the expert interviews and content analysis presented in annex one) that was conducted on the EU-blogosphere. The end point will be to establish the degrees of correspondence between the normative criteria of the public sphere and the actual functioning of EU-blogging. The final synthesis will allow the extraction of some valuable lessons concerning the contribution of this type of blogging to the European public sphere and the expression of some critical thoughts over the conceptual core of this normative category.

A few explanatory remarks about the choice of EU blogging as a field of study are however imperative here. Blogging about the EU is a relatively new phenomenon. Despite the fact that some EU-blogs have been in existence for almost a decade the phenomenon is still very much in its infancy (that is assuming that it will grow to a more mature level, which is indeed not certain). The number of blogs about the EU in all European languages is close to a thousand[i] however admittedly only a small number are maintained at an operative level (frequent, steady updates, original comments or opinions). When compared to the size and growing impact of the political blogosphere in the US, European blogging remains its poor relative (Barlow, 2008).

However, there are some points that make the study of this phenomenon worthwhile. To begin with, it would seem that the phenomenon is here to stay. It is safe to assume (especially in light of the EU debt crisis) that as the EU or the Eurozone take further steps towards greater integration, more citizens - albeit educated, cosmopolitan-oriented ones – would digitally express their anxieties and opinions about EU politics and their ramifications. This does not guarantee that the comments would always be in favor of a strong version of the European project nor does it mean that the current form of blogging will be the dominant form of discursive exchanges. Currently both Twitter and Facebook are major hosting platforms of EU conversations. Yet either way, blogging seems to be an embodiment of a new trend of individual participation in European opinion giving, which is unlikely to disappear.

Blogging as a platform for private expression and engagement can be an integral part of a European public sphere. (Coleman, 2005; Barlow, 2008). The very fact that blogging (traditional or micro) allows the user to create and publicly transmit original content and interact with concerned others, does in principle allow for the extension of the boundaries of democracy. (Karpf, 2008). Either as means of independent journalism or simply as a vehicle for informed opinion and interaction, blogging allows citizens to rid themselves of the hold of traditional media and their news outlets (off/online). It also seems to add an extra layer to the field of public opinion, to which political protagonists have to respond to or at the very least recognise. Of course, blogging carries with it the danger of mob rule, or rather of misinformation and cacophony, the transmission of ill founded and calumnious opinion and the lack of an established deontology. (Poell, 2008). Hence, blogging is certainly not a panacea to the democratic challenges besetting our societies. Nonetheless, the extent to which it adheres to some quality standards (and of the capacity of the crowd to enforce such standards) will have to be studied and proven empirically and not excluded as a possibility from the outset.

The demos, transnationalization and the post-Westphalian order

Most contemporary theories about the public sphere take as their starting point Habermas's classic work. According to the thesis presented by Habermas, the 18th and 19th centuries saw the emergence of an educated and economically more confident bourgeoisie which started to become more politically engaged and developed political opinions critical of received paradigms of public authority and power. The highlight of these public spheres were the political salons, coffee houses and Masonic lodges in England, Germany and France, where the bourgeoisie would meet and freely discuss and express their opinions of politics and government. The impact of the critical opinions expressed in the salons was amplified by their re-transmission via numerous pamphlets and newspapers.

The bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as one public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor. (Habermas, 1989: 27).

Habermas makes the point that in this space, private citizens came together to deliberate issues in an environment removed from the influence of government, the economy or the Church. Discussion was open and free and people could participate regardless of their status. It was the power of the better argument that carried the political debates and influenced the formation of opinion. In fact, Habermas points out three 'institutional' criteria which sustained the emergence of bourgeois publicity (Habermas, 1989: 36): a) the disregard of status, b) a domain of common concern (the foundations of power and criticism of the decisions made by public authorities) and c) inclusivity (partial in reality, but potentially universal).

Ultimately, Habermas claims that this critical and rational public sphere became undone in the course of the 19th and 20th centuries. As causes contributing to the dismantling of this critical space of engagement, he cites the interpenetration of state and society – an outcome of the growth of the capitalist economy and of the role of the state in it – as well as consumerism and the commercialization of social and political life. The double entry of big business and governmental bureaucracies in the private sphere allowed them to take over the public sphere and encourage citizens to consumers of goods, services, spectacles and bureaucratic administration. Furthermore, Habermas points to the dominant role of the mass media as

bearers of commercialization and stresses the absence of a rational-critical debate following their dominance (1989: 177-78).

The work of Habermas on publicity has generated a lot of debate and different interpretations, overall having a significant influence on modern theories of deliberative democracy. Nonetheless, recapitulating in detail the main points of this critical dialogue is beyond the purpose of this study (see Calhoun, 1992). Suffice to say that Habermas's work has been mainly criticized for its idealistic depiction of the bourgeois public sphere and for its failure to consider the manifold exclusions that were and still are present in it. Particularly, Habermas's initial discussion of *Öffentlichkeit* seems to be mainly undermined by its failure to reflect upon the existence of structural obstacles that deprive many citizens of the capacity to participate in the formation of opinion on a par with others. And further by its failure to critically discuss the systemic weaknesses that hinder institutional mechanisms from translating public opinion into actual impact (e.g. the role of vested bureaucratic interests or the influence of private economic interests) (see Kies 2010; Fraser, 2007; 1990).

However, as Fraser (2007) noted, when considered in the shadow of Globalization and transnationalization the greatest weakness of Habermas's notion of publicity (and also of the ones utilized by his various critics) seems to be that it was conceived within the traditional parameters of the Westphalian state. Hence, today it is important that we attempt to understand and re-conceptualize the function of the public sphere into a transnational framework.

Building on Habermas's work, Fraser argues that a critical public sphere ought to be judged according to the criteria of legitimacy and efficacy. Legitimacy is achieved when all citizens are free to participate in the formation of opinion in an equal manner. In the Westphalian order questions of legitimacy related to potential or real exclusions (e.g. Feminist and other counter-movements or proletarian public spheres vis-à-vis bourgeois ones etc.) in the national public sphere. The point was to address the issue of participatory parity, and thus bolster the involvement of the less privileged. What remained outside this discussion was the question of the popular locus of publicity i.e. the identity of the *demos*. However, the advent of globalization has invalidated this state of affairs. The fact of the matter is that today affected communities transcend national boundaries and consequently the identity of the *demos* needs to be redefined.

At the same time, transnationalization has made traditional understandings of efficacy redundant. Fraser bases the efficacy of publicity on the mechanisms of translation and capacity. Translation refers to the institutions that guarantee that public concerns and opinions will influence politics, while capacity refers

to the ability of the state to enforce decisions. Once again, in the Westphalian context the capacity of the state to impose its will (or those of its citizens) was to a significant extent taken for granted. National public spheres could thus hold public authorities accountable because a failure to address popular concerns meant a lack of will; the state machinery and institutions being otherwise capable of implementing the desired path. The discussion about the efficacy of the public sphere was thus focused on whether the communicative power of the opinions generated in the public sphere was strong enough to influence legislation. Technically speaking the question centered on finding ways of enhancing the influence of weak publics (public debate) over strong publics (parliaments). However, globalization has torn these certainties apart. The capacity of the post-Westphalian state to impose its will has decreased significantly. Today, in their attempt to steer every day politics national governments have to deal with a multitude of international public and private actors as well as global processes and phenomena. All these pose often insurmountable obstacles to their implementation capacities.

This discussion however comes with a caveat. It is not Fraser's purpose to reject the possibility of transnational public spheres (see also Koenig-Archibughi, 2011). Rather, it is to encourage us to take stock of the deep mutations brought about by globalization and thus re-adjust the foci of our studies. Hence, transnational public spheres can indeed exist (List & Koenig-Archibughi, 2010). The point is that when we study them and evaluate their performance we will have to take extra care to trace the actors involved, the affected communities, and the politico-institutional processes entangled in the issue of concern.

The European public sphere

Returning to Europe, it is a fact that the long and politically fraught process of integration have resulted in the creation of supranational centers of authority which direct and oversee the implementation of regional policies. In their turn, the ramifications of these policies, and the consequent need for accountability, have become an issue of concern for affected communities and publics. Hence, it is reasonable both to reflect on the existence of European public sphere or space and critically evaluate its performance (Trenz, 2008; de Vreese, 2007). In fact, many authors and political actors have insisted on the importance of a European public sphere as a contribution to the democratic quality of the European Union. Habermas has noted that 'the deficit in democracy can only be eliminated if a European public sphere comes into existence in which the democratic process is incorporated. . . . the pan- European political public sphere is the solution to the problem of insufficient social integration in the processes of Europeanization' (2001: 65). Likewise,

in its White Paper on a European Communication Strategy, the European Commission acknowledged the democratic lacunas of integration and the potentially beneficial role of a European-wide public sphere.

The public sphere in which political life takes place is largely a national sphere. To the extent that European issues appear on the agenda at all, they are seen by most citizens from a nation perspective. The media remain largely national, partly due to language barriers; there are few meeting places where Europeans from different Member States can get to know each other and address issues of common interest […]. There is a sense of alienation from 'Brussels', which partly mirrors the disenchantment with politics in general. One reason for this is the inadequate development of a 'European public sphere' where the European debate can unfold. (EC, 2006: 4)

Initially, commentators denied the possibility of a European public sphere (Schlesinger, 1993). Authors like Grimm (1995) and Kielmansegg (1996) argued that linguistic differences gravely hindered the formation of a European space of publicity. Others referred to the absence or failure of European wide media to attract interest (Scharpf, 1999). In general, early commentators pointed to the absence of a common language, European wide media and a common European perspective as the factors prohibiting the emergence of a public sphere (Kantner, 2004: 75-93).

However, as Risse noted (2010: 108) one by one these arguments have been refuted. (Also Van de Steeg, Rauer, Rivet, & Risse, 2003: 2). To begin with, modern social research has emphasized the constructed and discursive role of identities and thus challenged the implicit essentialism that underpinned early discussions about European identity and the European public sphere. (Van Langenhove, 2007). Identities are in fact multi-level phenomena that allow for different points of reference. Hence, while it is true to say that most Europeans identify first with their nation, it should come as no surprise to learn that more than 50 percent of them hold Europeanized national identities (albeit as secondary ones) (Risse, 2010: 5). Equally the absence of a common language and media cannot be an obstacle to transnational public spheres. Europeans can be critically engaging with the same issues in different languages and utilizing similar frames of reference or modes of conceptualization. To the extent that they do so, one can argue that they are part of the same public sphere as much as the different linguistic communities of Belgium, Spain or Switzerland are. Finally, it seems that the lack of stronger claims and opinions about the EU are in reality more related to its limited politicization and to the long term prevalence of a regulatory policy model (which went together with the elite driven 'permissive consensus') (Statham & Trenz, 2012). This state of affairs however began to change in the last few decades, after the introduction of the Single European Act and EMU. More recently, the intense debates over the causes and the ramifications of the

Eurozone debt crisis are the most obvious proof that issues of distribution, solidarity and ultimately deeper integration are the ones that can produce stronger political publics (Statham & Trenz, 2012). One can reasonably expect this to be felt more in the near future (Checkel & Katzenstein, 2009).

Hence, in recent years focus has shifted from debating the existence of European publicity to measuring the extent to which national public spheres are becoming more integrated and become part of a common space of publicity. In other words, research has focused on the extent to which national spheres are becoming Europeanized. In effect, there is an emerging consensus amongst most analysts that the more frequently the same European themes are controversially debated at the same time at similar levels of attention across national public spheres, and the more similar frames of reference, meaning structures and patterns of interpretation are used across national public spheres and media, the more meaningfully we can speak of a European public sphere[ii] (Risse, 2010; Eder & Kantner, 2000).

In recent years a notable number of empirical studies seem to verify the emergence of this European space of publicity – both in terms of increased media attention to EU affairs and observation of what happens in other European countries and in terms of utilizing common frames of reference to discuss EU issues at similar time periods. (Koopmans & Statham, 2010; Bärenreuter et al., 2009; Trenz & Eder, 2004; Trenz, 2004). Of course, there are many pitfalls surrounding this process. The fact of the matter is that domestic issues and elites still heavily dominate national public spheres. This is more obvious if one examines communication in television and the more popular/populist press. Equally, European debates and controversies are mostly presented in the quality press and as a norm involving statements made by and references to elite actors (EU officials, national government officials, intellectuals, business leaders, representatives of large civil society organizations etc.). Moreover, the European public sphere appears to be fragmented. Namely, it is more obvious in issue areas that have become (so to speak) 'more European' (e.g. the monetary union and its consequences, Constitutional reform of the EU, enlargement, including its limits and concomitant issues of identity) and subsequently less obvious in areas where intergovernmentalism and the primacy of national sovereignty are the norm (e.g. foreign policy, immigration, security). Finally, it is clear that the degrees of participation in the public sphere differ from country to country – with the British public sphere being consistently the least Europeanized one. (For the above see Koopmans & Statham, 2010; Risse, 2010).

Nonetheless, despite its uneven and fragmented character one can safely argue that the emergence of a European public sphere has occurred to some extent. Thus, assessing the qualitative function of this European publicity today is a legitimate concern. Consequently, empirical research ought not only deal

with the extent and degree of Europeanization of domestic public spheres but must also seek to establish the political impact and qualitative function of European publicity.

Building on Fraser's elaboration of the conceptual kernel of the Habermasian public sphere, I note that any such work would have to be centered on establishing:

1. Whether the public space is premised on and promotes a certain degree of European community.
2. Its degree of inclusiveness and openness.
3. Its degree of political impact.
4. Its role in fostering criticism or dissent and expanding the boundaries of democratic debate.
5. Its degree of deliberation and capacity to produce informed consensus.

The European public sphere and blogging

In light of the ever increasing importance of the Internet in communications and politics, it is only natural that research on European publicity has gradually turned its attention towards it. The Internet gives everyone instant access to information and enables virtually anyone to publish to a global community. This fact makes the development of a political public sphere as a global communication space beyond and across the borders of the nation state conceivable (Trenz 2008, 2; Bohman, 2004). In the European context, Koopmans and Zimmermann (2010) have investigated the online spheres of political communication accessed via search engines in six EU member states and Switzerland. Further, Van Os, Vergeer and Jankowski (2006) have studied the specific online communication about Europe provided by a variety of political actors on their websites in the context of the 2004 European Parliament election. Similarly, an exploratory investigation by Van Os (2005) was structured around the three frames or 'patterns of interpretation' identified by Eder, Kantner and Trenz (2000). Van Os investigated these frames in websites maintained by the 11 largest French political parties in the context of the 2004 EP election. (For an overview see Van Os & Jankowski, 2005). Finally, Michailidou and Trenz (2010) have examined the role of European online media (particularly newspapers) in promoting participation and public opinion formation. (Also Michailidou, 2010).

I propose to complement this work by studying EU-blogs. A focus on these blogs is important for two reasons. Firstly, it turns attention to a crucial dimension of the Internet mediated public space, which is the expression of opinion by citizens; side-stepping traditional media outlets. The fact that blogging provides a space for the contribution of original opinion and comments by citizens – presented to an *a priori* infinite audience – and free and easy interaction between people with similar concerns, could add (in principle) a new popular layer to the European public sphere. Secondly, it allows us to study a layer of the online public sphere which is directly European. Namely, we can critically evaluate the degree to which the contributions of European citizens conform to the qualitative criteria established above.

For the purposes of this paper I study six EU themed blogs. Of the six aforementioned blogs, three are written in English, two in German and one in French. The criteria guiding the selection of the blogs were: a) EU topic relevance. b) Covering three major European languages, which are importantly also the working languages of the EU. c) A live blog with frequent updates i.e. at least once a month and having posted an entry in the last 3 months.

In terms of methodology the paper is based on a qualitative analysis of content (see annex one) and on semi-structured online interviews conducted with the bloggers (via email) during December 2012 (see questionnaire in annex two). (Flick, 2009; Kvale, 1996). The choice of qualitative methods is warranted by the fact that this is still a developing phenomenon, which lacks systematic empirical and theoretical research[iii]. Qualitative methods allow for the initial exploration of new phenomena and the elucidation of their multifaceted character. (Flick, 2009).

The choice of semi-structured interviews was made with a view of ensuring efficiency and openness. Interviews allow the researcher to have direct access to the protagonists of the field and thus to acquire a better grasp of its emerging character. (Kvale, 1996). The bloggers, as active and experienced agents, are in a unique position to attest to the function of EU-blogosphere in relation to the critical concept of publicity. Moreover, the open ended character of the interviews affords the subject the opportunity to critically expand on the issues at hand and bring to our attention any unanticipated concerns and valuable information.

Of course, the reliance on a small sample and the impossibility of generalization is a self-avowed weakness of this research. Nonetheless, as Van Langenhove argues (2007) the advantage of using large samples is breadth, whereas their problem is one of depth. For the purposes of this investigation it becomes clear that it is more important to trace the depth of this relatively new and still emerging

phenomenon rather than attempt to offer ill-founded generalizations about its functional quality. The goal was to offer an empirically and theoretically grounded, albeit somewhat impressionistic, account.

The interviews were built around 7 themes that relate to the qualitative criteria of a transnational public space (as established above). The 7 themes covered by the interviews were: 1) the motivation and aims driving the bloggers, 2) whether the bloggers felt European and if they thought the phenomenon is contributing to the construction of a European identity 3) the impact the blogs have, 4) how inclusive and open they are in terms of participation and content, 5) success in relation to the status of the blogger *vis-a-vis* the quality and frequency of its posts, 6) interaction with readers and other bloggers and extent of deliberation, 7) convergence vs. divergence with a mainstream news agenda.

In the remainder of this section I will present the bloggers and then discuss the findings of the semi-structured interviews. In annex one, I provide an overview of the content analysis.

EU bloggers

Euro-zone Remarks

The first (predominantly) English-speaking blog examined was 'Euro-zone Remarks' (http://eurozoneremarks.blogspot.be/). The blog is maintained by Ken Dahlberg, who claims to have been 'in close contact to the real economy' for more than twenty years. The blogger also posts in German and has an obvious good grasp of economic issues and concepts. He also maintains a Twitter account (https://twitter.com/andrs_mr) with 382 followers[iv]. The purpose of the blog, which started in 2011, is to present and re-transmit news about the Euro-zone and offer an alternative insight on current Euro-zone affairs.

A fistful of Euros

The blog is maintained by three people and offers opinion about various EU affairs (from politics and economics to culture). For the purposes of this research, I interviewed Edward Hugh, an economist who also maintains a private, economics-focused blog http://www.economonitor.com/edwardhugh/ and a Twitter account https://twitter.com/Edward_hugh followed by 3.227 people. Edward Hugh is a British, Barcelona based economist who has written extensively on the EU-debt crisis and who has, through this

work, been recognized as both an expert and a respected macro-economics commentator[v]. As an outcome, he has been invited to participate in many high level conferences and discussion forums.

Federal Europe, a planner's view.

The blog is maintained by Horatiu Ferchiu, a Romanian urban and regional planner. The aim of the English speaking blog is to offer opinions about EU affairs and European identity issues. The blogger also maintains a Twitter account https://twitter.com/hferchiu with 196 followers.

Lost in EU

The German language blog http://lostineu.eu/ is maintained by Eric Bonse, a professional journalist who has worked as a Brussels correspondent for the German financial newspaper *Handelsblatt* and as a freelance reporter. The purpose of the blog is to comment on the present economic and political crisis affecting the EU and the obstacles it has created for the project of European integration. It particularly prefers to discuss the role of Germany in order to stimulate debate about its choices. The focus is explicitly pro-European. Bonse also maintains a Twitter account https://twitter.com/lostineu followed by 518 people.

Kielspratineurope.

Predominantly German speaking blog (sometimes in English) http://kielspratineurope.eu/ is maintained by political scientist Karsten Lucke, who is a professional in European education for youths. The aim of the blog is to discuss European affairs and German politics mostly from a social democratic perspective. Lucke also maintains a Twitter account https://twitter.com/karstenlucke with 532 followers.

Décrypter la communication européenne.

French language blog http://www.lacomeuropeenne.fr/ kept by Michael Malherbe, a consultant in communications and lecturer at Sciences-Po Lille (Master's 'Communication Publique et Corporate'), at the Sorbonne (Master's 'Affaires Européennes') and at Efap-Paris. This is a niche blog focusing on issues concerning the communication strategy and policies of the European Union. Malherbe maintains in parallel a twitter profile https://twitter.com/lacomeuropeenne followed by 1.934 people. In December 2012 he posted nine entries. Here I will focus on the last five.

Interview results

Motivation

The motivation guiding the bloggers is principally linked to personal expression and communication. Overall, blogging allows the participants to express, crystallize and test ideas about different aspects of (what they identify as the complicated world of) EU affairs. Participants are economists, political scientists, journalists and communication experts and in general have some degree of familiarity with EU-related events and policies. At the same time, it becomes clear that getting other people interested and introducing them to (what they think is) important about the EU is a core goal. Another reason for maintaining a weblog mentioned by one blogger in particular (but one that we expect to play an important role in light of the networked nature of social media) is the desire of establishing a network (Malherbe).

Karsten Lucke: Therefore two aims are relevant. First, I want to share my personal thoughts and secondly I want others to get interested in the European Union.

Edward Hugh: Writing helps me clarify my own ideas, gain reputation and disseminate analysis many people normally might not have access to.

Belonging and contributing to a European identity

With regard to feelings of Europeanness the picture is unequivocal: five interviewees out of six profess to be convinced Europeans. The one person expressing (Dahlberg) some ambivalence makes it conditional on the success or failure of the EU; thus also expressing some commitment to the project of European integration. Of course, this is hardly surprising since most anti-EU blogs or commentaries are found in national blogs.

As regards the contribution of the EU-blogosphere to the building of a European identity the picture is far more complex. Four out of the six bloggers believe that the EU-blogosphere is to some extent helping to generate a European identity. Nonetheless, this affirmation is immediately mitigated by the emphasis put on the Blogosphere's limited size and actual reach. There seemed to be a feeling amongst the interviewees that the EU-blogosphere is small and struggles to find appeal outside a limited circle of

people who are already interested in EU affairs. The bloggers all note that if the sphere's impact is to be expanded, a lot more work and growth is needed. This sentiment is best encapsulated by Lucke:

Karsten Lucke: Well, the EU blogosphere might contribute to build a European identity in the long run but not these days as this community is far too small. But if you never start you will never change things. That's why it's important to keep going. EU Bloggers are already "European". This is something like "convincing the convinced". The exchange of ideas and the mutual criticism is very important. This is an enriching momentum. If those EU blogs reach another audience outside the circle of EU blogging then we could really start to build a European identity. We have to be clear that the EU blogosphere is far too small at the moment.

Impact

Bloggers note that what they do does interest many readers and has on occasion stimulated debates in their networks (in the blog itself or on Twitter and/or Facebook). Nonetheless, in terms of the clear impact achieved outside the blogging community the answers are mostly negative (four out of six). However, it is interesting to note that in addition to Edward Hugh, Michael Malherbe also reports having achieved impact. He notes that in May 2011 the Foundation Robert Schuman published a policy paper entitled '*Facebook, Twitter: des outils incontournables pour l'avenir de la démocratie européenne*?' which plagiarized (at seven different points) material from his blog posts about this subject. After he drew attention to the fact, the Foundation was forced to withdraw its policy paper[vi]. Additionally, in June 2010 he criticized the very top-down and old fashioned character of the EC's manual on social media use, thus forcing the latter to remove the relevant webpage[vii].

Hence, tentatively one could argue that the argument about the irrelevance and weakness of the EU-blogosphere is somewhat exaggerated. While it is true that most of the blogs do not achieve impact outside their community, this does not mean that some of the bloggers cannot become more influential or that the phenomenon itself does not carry any weight with European actors and EU authorities. Indeed, in March 2011 the Hungarian presidency of the Council of the European Union organized a meeting with EU bloggers[viii], whereas in May it had invited them to take part in Council Meetings and ask questions[ix]. On July 26th of 2012, the Cypriot Presidency met with EU-bloggers in a similar manner[x]. Of course, one should always be very cautious when appraising this opening of the Council of the EU to a fragment of the EU-blogosphere (only those who can be physically present in Brussels). While it is indicative of an

increased attention placed on the role of social media as supposed conveyor belts of European public opinion, it does not afford individual bloggers any great degree of influence over EU-affairs.

Openness and inclusiveness

The interviewees noted that in principle blogging about the EU is open to all. The technology is simple to operate and this makes the medium widely accessible. Nonetheless, some degree of caution is warranted here since this assertion seems to take for granted a certain degree of digital and especially literary proficiency which a significant proportion of Internet users lack. Concerning content, the picture painted is more mitigated. Most of the bloggers seem to agree that in theory blog posts can reach large audiences as they are not necessarily particularly scholarly in nature or complicated. At the same time however, they note that in reality similar minded communities of interest constitute the main part of the readership.

Bonse: Yes, I think so. This said, most of the EU bloggers are pro-European, the nationalists rather stay at home (and get more page visits)

Malherbe: As long as the EU sphere is based on virtual communities of interest, it is open to all those who seem to be concerned about the EU and its issues. Those communities tend to be reduced to a few active people online, like a 'foam' of separate bubbles creating an ecosystem.

Status v. quality

With regard to the merits of the blogger's social status vis-à-vis the quality and frequency of posts, the interviewees gave a mixed picture. Most of them (four out of six) do not disregard the importance of celebrities in generating media attention and building a large followership. At the same time however they also stress that quality and frequency are very important. Significantly, they find that with good and systematic work (which of course requires considerable effort) a blogger can slowly build a significant readership.

Dahlberg: The quality and frequency of posts however will enable a slow but constant increase of a sincere readership. Narrowcasting instead of broadcasting if you will. The very concept of my blogs is to attract by CONTENT, not by name, status, mentioning of mentor etc.

Lucke: Both. It's like in real life. If you have already a name or an advanced status people will read (no matter how bad your stuff is) ... Still, people are not born that way; they started from scratch as well. So producing good quality on a frequent basis is relevant as well and maybe the first step to becoming one of the more influential bloggers.

Malherbe: It depends on the reference period chosen to judge: in the beginning, it is easier and faster to grow an audience with a blogger's professional or social status; yet in the long run, the overall reputation is only based on the quality and the frequency of publication.

Interaction and deliberation

The answers to the question about interaction and deliberation reveal an interesting fact about the nature of online EU discussions i.e. that a significant proportion of it takes place on Twitter (primarily) and Facebook. It becomes clear that the degree of intermeshing between the various online platforms for networking and opinion is very high. Additionally, what also transpires is that even though the bloggers are in principle keen on replying to comments, they nonetheless find themselves less capable or inclined to do so.

Dahlberg: Connected by Twitter, read a lot of other posts, sometimes get involved in debates with other bloggers (would like to interact more often, but lack of time).

Horatiu: I aim to reply personally to every comment made on the blog, but I anticipate that if the volume of comments increases past a certain point that will be hard to achieve. Most of the interaction is however conducted on twitter (I realize I might sound obsessive on the issue of twitter but that is the way it works) where ideas flow more easily and significantly more directly.

Edwards: Now I have built a large Facebook community (9,000 plus people link to me) and I find the interaction on Facebook more satisfying.

Malherbe: On second thoughts, the interactions with the readers are limited: few comments and even fewer now with Twitter, where the conversation is taken. Most of my blog posts are only re-tweeted and shared on social media without any comments.

The simultaneous use of Twitter and Facebook indicates that blogs are primarily spaces for lengthier expositions and as such serve as introduction points for further discussions, carried out in various formats. Long comments to blog-posts require effort, personal engagement and time; and the same holds for the replies. Hence, the situation creates an incentive for turning to communication which is faster, shorter and more up to date, with a greater potential in terms of networking and linking (Twitter and Facebook). At the same time, however, it is obvious that this kind of interaction precludes more in-depth reflections and deliberations and can be construed as being more superficial overall. Of course, this does not mean that debates and reflections do not take place or that those discussions which take place on Twitter and Facebook cannot eventually lead to more fruitful exchanges (as noted by the bloggers). On occasions – aided by the political agenda – such debates do take place. However, EU blogging seems to score low in terms of fostering deliberation.

Blogging and mainstream news

All of the interviewees combine commenting on popular EU stories appearing in mainstream media with offering alternative viewpoints and information. In fact, for all of them it is important that they add their voice to, or become part of, the wider debate about issues like European Council decisions, policy initiatives of the European Commission, the EU-debt crisis, *Grexit* etc. However, it is clear that their primary goal is to complement the strict *reportage* with arguments and insights which are often lacking from mainstream media.

Bonse: At the same time, I am trying to offer some alternative thinking, beyond the mainstream of the German media, which has become too strong and uniform in my view.

Dahlberg: Not offering 'alternative' information, but to compile information which is perhaps underreported in mainstream media channels and by providing much more (detailed+broad) information than just one article by one news outlet is capable of doing.

Rationality, spheres and spaces

There is a multitude of issues at stake in the critical examination of the functioning of the EU-blogosphere. To begin with, it seems obvious that bloggers are indeed discussing an issue of common concern, namely the present *modus operandi* of the EU and the future of European integration. They are preoccupied with similar stories (debt crisis, European identity, *Grexit*, the role of Germany, macro-economic decisions, internal politics in major European countries and their consequences for the EU etc.) and over and again refer to the same agents (the European Commission, the Council of the European Union, the heads of state in the European Council etc.). They do so both because they feel part of a European community but also because they want to contribute to the process of European identity building. Indeed, as Trenz and Eder have noted (2004) with regard to the democratic deficit of the EU, from the moment on that people begin to think of 'a need' in terms of an EU identity, then this identity is immediately inscribed in the political imaginary of Europe. In this sense, the online discussion (in its various guises) about the EU is significant in terms of publicly, even if implicitly, promoting a feeling of Europeanness.

At the same time, the blogosphere is making some tentative steps towards becoming a more established part of European public opinion, achieving in the process a minimum amount of influence – mostly as an outcome of its emergence as a collective phenomenon. Additionally, while not all bloggers can achieve individual impact, it seems that the frequency of posts with some quality and public resonance can in principle guarantee greater outreach and popularity.

Meanwhile, the comments made and the opinions expressed in the blogs and then re-transmitted and discussed via Twitter and Facebook, seem to extend the boundaries of democratic debate. Not only in terms of the opinions, facts and information they offer, but also in light of the backgrounds of the participants. Of course, it seems that the independent blogging community is rooted in a trans-European, educated, quasi-cosmopolitan public for which European integration is a laudable phenomenon. However, to discount the debate and opinion generated by this public as an elite phenomenon somewhat misses the point. Firstly, it seems that this educated, multi-lingual public which treats the EU favorably is no longer a very small minority. (Risse, 2010: 37-62). Even if in reality only a fraction of this public actually contributes to the blogosphere that does not mean that the opinions generated leave those who do not blog indifferent. Additionally, while the EU bloggers do seem to score high in terms of social capital (in light of their education, command of different languages, literary capacities and some understanding of EU

public affairs) that does not make them elites in terms of expressing and marshalling EU opinion. On the contrary, it would be more correct to say that the political and economic actors (national and supranational) and the journalists that currently dominate mass media publicity are the ones constituting opinion making elites. Some members of these elites do take part in the EU-blogosphere (e.g. European Commission officials, prominent MEP'etc.) but do not dominate it. Hence, the addition of the bloggers' opinions and voices to the debate about the EU seems to be pointing to an enlargement of the circle of control of opinion making. Of course, EU bloggers constitute a small community whose reach is to a good extent limited only to the 'already converted' (Waggener Edstrom, 2010). However, as the EU becomes more politicized one can reasonably expect the aggregate volume of EU focused online commentary to rise.

Related to these are concerns about the deliberative quality of the EU blogosphere. On the face of present evidence (admittedly limited), it is fair to say that EU talk and opinion in blogs – and by extension on Twitter and Facebook – is weak in terms of deliberation. The EU blogosphere does not preclude building a reputation on the basis of good arguments and hard effort. But, it does not seem to be the case that EU blogging performs what is arguably the most crucial function of the public sphere, namely that it enables fruitful discussion that leads to rational, informed consensus via the victory of the better argument. Deliberation is more than a mere exchanging of words. It should be reciprocal, reasonable, and reflexive. In contrast, EU blogging seems to be operating as a space for the exposition of opinion that can be used as a gripping point in a process of digital networking and cross referencing.

In order to understand this phenomenon however, I argue that we have to turn to Mouffe's (2005; 2000a; 2000b) critique of the rationalist biases of the Habermasian notion of the public sphere (biases shared to some extent by Fraser). (See also Dahlgren, 2005). In particular, according to Mouffe, Habermas's model is premised on an idea of reasoned and reflexive debate taking place amongst people who are willing and capable to transcend their personal interests in search of collective solutions to social problems. That is to say it is premised on the capacity of public reasoning producing consensus over an issue of common concern.

The idea of the public sphere in Habermas is of course basically rationalist. I am particularly interested in the role of what I call 'passion' in politics. For Habermas, this is exactly what the public sphere should not be; it is not the place where passion should be expressed. It is seen more in terms of a communicative model of rationality, with a will to consensus, and deliberation at work. For me this is not at all what public spaces should be about. Public spaces should be places for the expression of dissensus, for

bringing to the floor what forces attempt to keep concealed. I also disagree with the principle of universalization in Habermas, referring the idea that only things that can be universalized should be part of the deliberation. So, ultimately, our end and starting points are very different. (Mouffe in Carpentier & Cammaerts, 2006).

Mouffe's analysis departs from a discursive ontology of difference wherein social objectivity is constructed in and through hegemonic struggles. What is at stake in this conflictual social vision is the production of a moral-intellectual leadership through the promotion of a particular category/signifier as the universal signifier. In order to achieve this, however, some degree of closure to what can be included in the hegemonic discourse is necessary. Thus, exclusion and the construction of 'us/them' relationships become predominant parts of discursive hegemonic struggles. According to this argument, the Habermasian notion of the public sphere – and deliberative democracy in general - does not sufficiently recognize the constitutive nature of disagreement. Ultimately, for Mouffe any social objectivity is political and governed by the logic of antagonism and exclusion. Power should not be conceived as an external relation taking place between two pre-constituted identities, but rather as constituting the identities themselves. (Mouffe, 2000b: 14). But if we accept that relations of power are constitutive of the social then the main question for democratic politics is not how to eliminate power but how to constitute forms of power more compatible with democratic values. (Mouffe, 2000b: 15)[xi].

The degree of compatibility and divergence between the Habermasian public sphere (and deliberative democracy) and Mouffe's public space is subject to some debate. (Karppinen, Moe & Svensson, 2008; Dahlberg, 2005). However, ultimately there is a difference in emphasis. For Mouffe (2005) the public space is a political battleground which involves a multitude of publics entering into various discourse coalitions in their attempt to hegemonize or resist social reality. The endpoint is to recognize the beneficial role of dissent and disagreement (against an emphasis on consensus), when it is premised on a minimum of respect for the other and the recognition of elements of community (turning enemies to adversaries). It needs to be noted that similar comments about the ineluctable presence of (counter) publics struggling against domination have also been voiced by Fraser. Her understanding of the public sphere also builds on the idea of the public as a site of contestational politics, a space in which 'a plurality of competing publics' encounter and combat each other (Fraser, 1990: 61).

Thus, with regard to EU blogs, we have to agree with Cammaerts and Papacharissi when they note that while digital (social) media do not revive the public sphere, they nonetheless seem to inject a good dose of plurality to the model of representative democracy (Papacharissi, 2009: 241; Cammaerts, 2008; see

also Dahlberg, 2007; 2005). EU bloggers seem to be less concerned with public accord and more with self-expression and voicing disagreement (Papacharissi, 2009: 241). As such they seem to conform better to Mouffe's vision of conflictual politics involving multiple publics and less with a vision of public reason, deliberation and consensus. Of course, the EU-bloggers do not constitute a quintessential counter-public. (Dahlberg, 2007). What they do however, seem to constitute is a discursive pole which is simultaneously posited against: a) an anti-EU, nationalist discourse that features heavily in domestic debates, and b) an elite-driven EU policy agenda that remains opaque for many citizens.

It is obvious that at this point these judgments can only be tentative. Further systematic studies and explorations of the phenomenon, including the use of quantitative tools and a more profound study of the content produced, are more than necessary if we are to have a more balanced picture.

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Annex 1.
Content analysis

Euro-zone Remarks

In the month of December 2012 the blogger made the following posts:

'Paul de Grauwe: Bedenken über Bankenaufsicht'. This is a translation into German of an op-ed article written by renowned economics Professor Paul de Grauwe for the Belgian (Dutch-speaking) newspaper De Morgen. The piece discusses the implications of banking supervision in the Euro-zone and the personal concerns of de Grauwe over its weaknesses.

'Opposition sucks'. This examines the political line adopted by the German SPD over the Euro-debt policies of Chancellor Merkel (particularly about Greece). The piece accuses the SPD of following an incoherent line and references a similar opinion expressed by the German speaking blog 'Lost in EU'.
'The Euro-zone's design failures, can they be corrected?' The entry offers a link to a speech given by Paul de Grauwe at the London School of Economics.

'Some blind spots of ECB and Bundesbank'. The entry critically examines the policy of both institutions with regard to inflation and offers alternative economic proposals.

A fistful of Euros

In the month of December 2012 one could find the following posts[xii]:

'Menace to solvency'. The entry refers to American politics and in particular to a failed legislative initiative of the Republican Party concerning the US Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation.
'Only a madman could doubt the integrity of'. A post recounting a case of cash smuggling whistle-blowing involving a Bavarian branch of the German HypoVereinsBank.

'Some French links'. Links to critical insight about French political affairs.

'502: French conservatives temporarily unavailable'. Offering a critical appraisal of the events following the tumultuous internal primaries for the Presidency of the French conservative *Union pour un Mouvement Populaire (UMP) party.*

'Thinking about the austerity trap'. It discusses economic issues, with a particular reference to Keynesian ideas about the austerity and liquidity traps. The reference point is the post 2008 economic crisis.

'Direction: France. Target: the fiscal consolidation pony'. It discusses politics and economics in the Euro-zone (France, Germany and the European south are all mentioned) in the context of economic recession.

Federal Europe, a planner's view.

December 2012 included the following entries:

'Home or bunker?'. The entry critically discusses the Euro-zone crisis and the bitter debates over the EU budget. It also references a similar post by a different EU blogger (with whom Ferchiu was also in contact).

'Funding innovation: sidelines and ultimate goal'. The piece comments on EU level policies for innovation. It refers to the proposals made by two other EU bloggers on this subject (following exchanges and discussion involving all three bloggers).

'A skeleton-scheme for funding innovation'. Same as above.

'How much innovation is the EU losing?'. The post discusses the blogger's personal anxieties about the possibility of taking up a PhD on European federalism in relation to innovation policies and funding.

Lost in EU

In December the blogger posted a total of 57 posts all related to EU economic and political affairs. Here, I will focus only on the last five entries of the month.

'Leere Rettungs-rhetoric'. A critical assessment of the year's attempts at dealing with the financial crisis, with a critical reference to the policies of Angela Merkel.

'Vor der Klippe'. Refers to American politics and the issue of the fiscal cliff.

'Risiko UK?'. Draws attention to comments made by Herman van Rompuy concerning a potential British EU-exit. The purpose is to criticize the management of the crisis by EU officials – including van Rompuy.

'EU begünstigt Geldwäsche'. Refers to trade agreements signed by the EU with Peru and Colombia in relation to money laundering dangers.

'Warten auf "full Monti"'. Critically examines the deficiencies of the European press in presenting the content of Italian PM's, Mario Monti, reforms.

Kielspratineurope.

December 2012 contains the following entries:

'Ein Jahr Iron Blogger Berlin – ein Résumé'. Refers to the decision of the blogger to join the Iron Blogger Berlin, a community of bloggers who are committed to post at least once a week (otherwise they have to pay a fine of 5 Euros, which is used for beer drinking).

'A Bavarian Europe'. The entry (in English) offers a very critical assessment of the Bavarian Christian Social Union's (the governing party in Bavaria) proposals about the future of the EU.

'Rüstungsexporte á la SPD – es geht auch anders!'. Discusses the policy of the SPD regarding arms sales and its implications for the economy and foreign policy.

'Wirtschaft wendet sich von Steinbrück ab – Herzlichen Dank!'. An entry about German politics and the difficulties of the social democratic party with attracting the business milieu.

'Die FAZ und die Ein-Mann-Demokratie'. Another piece about German politics, criticizing an opinion article by German conservative newspaper Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ) on the choice of Peer Steinbruck as SPD's candidate for the Chancellorship.

'It's just football but it's Europe'. (In English). Commenting on UEFA's decision to have the 2020 European Championships played in different European cities – as opposed to one or two states.

'Budget, Greece and Palestine or no real European spirit'. (In English). Talking about the inability of European heads of states to reach unanimity or compromise on issues ranging from the EU budget to Greece and Palestine.

Décrypter la communication Européenne.

In December 2012 he posted nine entries. Here I will focus on the last five.

'*Quelles ont été les nouveautés de la communication de la Commission européenne en 2012?'*. Entry recapitulating the new elements in the European Commission's strategy on communication policy.

'*La communication européenne en 2012 : bilan sur l'opinion publique européenne'*. Discusses the findings of two separate Eurobarometer surveys – one on the image of the EU amongst Europeans and the other on the knowledge of French citizens about the EU.

'*Comment Twitter s'est imposé dans la communication des présidences tournantes du Conseil de l'UE ?'*. Recounts the increasing utilization of Twitter by EU officials and leaders.

'*La communication européenne en 2012 : bilan sur la transparence des budgets'*. Offers an overview of information published in 2012 about the money spent by EU institutions and lobbying firms on communication.

'*Y a-t-il un effet « prix Nobel » pour l'UE dans le web social ?'*. Assesses the social media impact of the EU's Nobel Prize for Peace.

Annex 2.

Questionnaire EU blogosphere.

1. Why do you write a blog about the EU? What is your aim?
2. Do you feel European? Do you think the EU blogosphere contributes to the building of a European identity (amongst bloggers or readers)?
3. Do you think what you do has impact? What or who do you wish to influence? And have there been cases where you made an impact?
4. Do you think the EU blogosphere is inclusive, i.e. is it open to all?
5. Do you think the success of a blog depends on the person's status? Or simply on the strength of the argument and the quality and frequency of posts?
6. What is the degree of your interaction with other bloggers and commentators of your posts?
7. Do you blog to take part in ongoing debates, as found in the mass media? Or do you blog to offer alternative perspectives and information?

[i] According to EU blogs aggregator http://www.bloggingportal.eu/reader

[ii] To these Risse adds a third criterion, namely that 'public spheres Europeanize the more a transnational community of communication emerges in which European or other national actors … recognize each other as legitimate participants in transnational discourses'. (Risse, 2010: 12). A minimum degree of recognition of being part of a community is necessary. Explicitly nationalist perspectives that refuse to engage with other Europeans in a public dialogue cannot be said to be part of the European public sphere.

[iii] The only attempt at studying the phenomenon is by Soler (2012).

[iv] All data for Twitter followers were collected on January 22, 2013.

[v] http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/09/business/global/09blogger.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

[vi] http://www.lacomeuropeenne.fr/2011/06/06/le-plagiat-atteint-il-aussi-l-espace-public-europeen-en-ligne/

[vii] http://www.lacomeuropeenne.fr/2010/06/22/les-recommandations-du-manuel-de-lue-pour-communiquer-dans-les-medias-sociaux-au-banc-dessai/
The page that was retired was
http://web.archive.org/web/20100404055435/http:/ec.europa.eu/ipg/go_live/web2_0/index_en.htm

[viii] https://netzpolitik.org/2011/aktueller-stand-der-netzsperren-plane-fur-die-eu/

[ix] http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/may/11/eu-justice-and-home-affairs-council-bloggers

[x] http://www.consilium.europa.eu/cy2012eublogs

[xi] The theory of agonistic pluralism expounded by Laclau and Mouffe is inscribed in this logic.

[xii] It needs to be noted that they were not written by Edward Hugh, but are indicative of the content of the blog.