The Communicative Construction of Europe

Cultures of Political Discourse, Public Sphere and the Euro Crisis

Andreas Hepp
Monika Elsler
Swantje Lingenberg
Anne Mollen
Johanna Möller
Anke Offerhaus
Transformations of the State

Series Editors: Achim Hurrelmann, Carleton University, Canada; Stephan Leibfried, University of Bremen, Germany; Kerstin Martens, University of Bremen, Germany; Peter Mayer, University of Bremen, Germany.

Titles include:

Joan DeBardeleben and Achim Hurrelmann (editors)
DEMOCRATIC DILEMMAS OF MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE
Legitimacy, Representation and Accountability in the European Union

Karin Gottschall, Bernhard Kittel, Kendra Briken, Jan-Ocko Heuer and Sylvia Hils
PUBLIC SECTOR EMPLOYMENT REGIMES
Transformations of the State as an Employer

Andreas Hepp, Monika Elsler, Swantje Lingenberg, Anne Mollen, Johanna Möller and Anke Offerhaus
THE COMMUNICATIVE CONSTRUCTION OF EUROPE
Cultures of Political Discourse, Public Sphere and the Euro Crisis

Achim Hurrelmann and Steffen Schneider (editors)
THE LEGITIMACY OF REGIONAL INTEGRATION IN EUROPE AND AMERICA

Achim Hurrelmann, Steffen Schneider and Jens Steffek (editors)
LEGITIMACY IN AN AGE OF GLOBAL POLITICS

Achim Hurrelmann, Stephan Leibfried, Kerstin Martens and Peter Mayer (editors)
TRANSFORMING THE GOLDEN-AGE NATION STATE

Lutz Leisering (editor)
THE NEW REGULATORY STATE
Regulating Pensions in Germany and the UK

Kerstin Martens, Alessandra Rusconi and Kathrin Leuze (editors)
NEW ARENAS OF EDUCATION GOVERNANCE
The Impact of International Organizations and Markets on Educational Policy Making

Kerstin Martens, Philipp Knodel and Michael Windzio (editors)
INTERNATIONALIZATION OF EDUCATION POLICY
A New Constellation of Statehood in Education?

Kerstin Martens, Alexander-Kenneth Nagel, Michael Windzio and Ansgar Weymann (editors)
TRANSFORMATION OF EDUCATION POLICY

Steffen Mau, Heike Brabandt, Lena Laube and Christof Roos
LIBERAL STATES AND THE FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT
Selective Borders, Unequal Mobility

Aletta Mondré
FORUM SHOPPING IN INTERNATIONAL DISPUTES

Christof Roos
THE EU AND IMMIGRATION POLICIES
Cracks in the Walls of Fortress Europe?
The Communicative Construction of Europe
Cultures of Political Discourse, Public Sphere and the Euro Crisis

Andreas Hepp
Monika Elsler
Swantje Lingenberg
Anne Mollen
Johanna Möller
Anke Offerhaus
# Contents

[List of Tables] vi
[List of Figures] viii
[Series Preface] xi

1 Introduction 1
2 Approaching the Communicative Construction of Europe: Cultures of Political Discourse, European Public Sphere and the Euro Crisis 13
3 Journalistic Practices: National and European Cultures of Political Discourse 39
4 Representing Europe in the Press: The Multi-segmented European Public Sphere 71
5 Citizens’ Online Engagement: The Euro Crisis in Online Forums 109
6 Appropriating Europe: Communication Repertoires, Citizens’ European Public Connections and the Euro Crisis 141
7 Challenging Europe: Understanding and Solving the Euro Crisis 193
8 Conclusion: The Contested Communicative Construction of Europe 217

Appendix: On Methodology 233
References 275
Index 295
List of Tables

3.1 Newsrooms under investigation 41
3.2 Country-specific practices and orientations of nationalisation 58
3.3 Modes of addressing audiences 69
4.1 Dimensions and indicators of Europeanisation 76
4.2 References to speakers from political institutions 78
4.3 References to political issues 80
4.4 Origin of referred speakers 85
4.5 We-references 89
4.6 Newspapers behind the different modes of addressing audiences 94
4.7 References to speakers from political institutions 95
4.8 References to countries 96
4.9 References to collective identities 98
4.10 References to transnational political institutions 101
4.11 References to countries 102
4.12 References to collective identities 104
5.1 Online forum selection 123
6.1 Qualitative interview sample 143
6.2 Patterns of citizens’ communicative activation 189
A.1 Newspaper sample newsroom studies 235
B.1 Newspaper sample with number of coded articles, sampling period, selection of articles and sample size 237
C.1 Online forum selection based on the analysis of hyperlink networks and contextual data 245
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C.2</td>
<td>Sample of comment threads for the interaction analysis</td>
<td>248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D.1</td>
<td>Interviewees’ sample for the audience study</td>
<td>254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D.2</td>
<td>General categories</td>
<td>272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D.3</td>
<td>‘Appropriating Europe’ – typology of the public connections</td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Figures

4.1 Vertical Europeanisation, based on the percentage of references to ‘EU institutions’ by country from 1982 to 2013 79

4.2 Vertical Europeanisation, based on the percentage of references to ‘EU issues’ by country from 1982 to 2013 81

4.3 Horizontal Transnationalisation, based on the percentage of references to ‘countries’ from 1982 to 2013 83

4.4 Horizontal Europeanisation, based on the percentage of references to ‘EU member states’ by newspaper type from 1982 to 2013 84

4.5 Horizontal Europeanisation, based on the percentage of references to ‘speakers from EU member states’ by newspaper type from 1982 to 2013 87

4.6 European identification, based on the percentages of ‘European we-references’ by newspaper type from 1982 to 2013 90

4.7 Transnational identification, based on the percentages of references to ‘collective identities’ from 1982 to 2013 91

4.8 European identification, based on the percentages of references to the ‘collective identity “The Europeans”’ by newspaper type from 1982 to 2013 92

4.9 Vertical Europeanisation, based on the percentage of references to ‘speakers from EU institutions’ from 1982 to 2013 95

4.10 Horizontal Europeanisation, based on the percentage of references to ‘EU member states’ from 1982 to 2013 97

4.11 European identification, based on the percentages of references to the ‘collective identity “The Europeans”’ from 1982 to 2013 98
5.1 Hyperlink network for Germany 114
5.2 Hyperlink network for France 115
5.3 Hyperlink network for Poland 116
5.4 Hyperlink network for United Kingdom 117
5.5 Hyperlink network for Austria 118
5.6 Hyperlink network for Denmark 119
5.7 Hyperlink network for Europe 120
5.8 *The Guardian*, 29 June 2012, Eurozone crisis live, part I 125
5.9 *The Guardian*, 29 June 2012, Eurozone crisis live, part II 126
5.10 *Facebook Le Monde*, 25 June 2012, Athens could have cheated by employing civil servants A 127
5.11 *Facebook Spiegel Online*, 25 June 2012, Europe: Perfect solutions take a long time 128
5.12 *Facebook Le Monde*, 25 June 2012, Athens could have cheated by employing civil servants B 129
5.13 *Charlemagne*, 28 June 2012, Europe on the rack A 130
5.14 *Financial Times*, 26 June 2012, EU plan to rewrite eurozone budgets 132
5.15 *Spiegel Online*, 25 June 2012, All hope rests on the plan of the four 132
5.16 *Charlemagne*, 28 June 2012, Europe on the rack B 133
5.17 *The Guardian*, 25 June 2012, Cyprus seeks eurozone bailout 134
5.18 *Berlingske Blogs*, 29 June 2012, Important Signal 135
5.19 *Financial Times*, 29 June 2012, Europe agrees crisis-fighting measures A 135
5.21 *Financial Times*, 29 June 2012, Europe agrees crisis-fighting measures B 137

6.1 Political communication repertoires 152
List of Figures

6.2 Media-related network map of the 44-year-old Danish Poul Omegn, Denmark 155
6.3 Media-related network map of the 28-year-old Amina Zündler, Austria 157
6.4 Media-related network map of the 24-year-old Polish student Janusz Ruchniewicz 161
6.5 Media-related network map of 24-year-old Dane Mette Kongekjær Engholm 162
6.6 Media-related network map of 32-year-old Danish student of theology Mikkel Poul Karstensen 171
6.7 Media-related network map of 56-year-old Polish lawyer Bogdana Kruczaj 172
6.8 Media-related network map of 29-year-old British political science student Dennis Cooper 179
6.9 Media-related network map of 32-year-old German artist Bela Maschmann 180
6.10 Media diary of Sławomir Kaszubski (65, PL) – ‘Wednesday, December 7th, from 7.30 to 20 pm, TV, at home, news – mainly on the crisis in Europe as well as the European summit’ 191
6.11 Media diary of Sławomir Kaszubski (65, PL) – ‘Thursday, December 8th, from 7.30 to 20 pm, TV, at home, news – European summit as well as follow-up talks on the crisis in Europe’ 191
6.12 Media diary of Sławomir Kaszubski (65, PL) – ‘Friday, December 9th, from 9.30 to 10.15 am, TV, at home, news on Polsat News on the European summit and the Euro zone’ 191

8.1 The European legitimation pyramid 229

D.1 Representative page from the media diary filled out by Anja Gerber (31, GER) 272
Series Preface

Over the past four centuries, the nation-state has emerged as the world’s most effective means of organizing society, but its current status and future are decidedly uncertain. Some scholars predict the total demise of the nation-state as we know it, its powers eroded by a dynamic global economy on the one hand and, on the other, by the transfer of political decision-making to supranational bodies. Other analysts point out the remarkable resilience of the state’s core institutions and assert that even in the age of global markets and politics, the state remains the ultimate guarantor of security, democracy, welfare, and the rule of law. Does either of these interpretations describe the future of the OECD world’s modern, liberal nation-state? Will the state soon be as obsolete and irrelevant as an outdated computer? Should it be scrapped for some new invention, or can it be overhauled and rejuvenated? Or, is the state actually thriving and still fit to serve, and just in need of a few minor reforms?

In an attempt to address these questions, the analyses in the Transformations of the State series separate the complex tangle of tasks and functions that comprise the state into four manageable dimensions:

- the monopolization of the means of force;
- the rule of law, as prescribed and safeguarded by the constitution;
- the guarantee of democratic self-governance; and
- the provision of welfare and the assurance of social cohesion.

In the OECD world of the 1960s and 1970s, these four dimensions formed a synergetic constellation that emerged as the central, defining characteristic of the modern state. Books in the series report the results of both empirical and theoretical studies of the transformations experienced in each of these dimensions over the past few decades.

Transformations of the State? (Stephan Leibfried and Michael Zürn (eds), 2005), Transforming the Golden-Age National State (Achim Hurrelmann, Stephan Leibfried, Kerstin Martens and Peter Mayer (eds), Palgrave Macmillan 2007), State Transformations in OECD Countries: Dimensions, Driving Forces and Trajectories (Heinz Rothgang and Steffen Schneider (eds), Palgrave Macmillan 2015) and The Oxford Handbook of Transformations of the State (Stephan Leibfried, Evelyne Huber, Matthew Lange, Jonah Levy
and Frank Nullmeier (eds), 2015) define the basic concepts of state transformation employed in all of these studies and provide an overview of the issues addressed. Written by political scientists, lawyers, economists, and sociologists, the series tracks the development of the post-World War II OECD state. Here, at last, is an up-to-date series of reports on the state of the state and a crystal-ball glimpse into its future.
The euro crisis, as it is widely known, has been an important focus for media coverage both within Europe and beyond. Since 2009 we have been confronted with an ongoing discourse dramatising the crisis surrounding the euro in Europe and the EU. In 2003 The Sun was already writing about the ‘EU in crisis’ (12 December 2003) – a discourse that intensified when the financial crisis erupted. On 13 December 2008, for example, the German Bild talked of a ‘crisis domino-effect’, reflecting ongoing problems with the eurozone currency and financial politics in general. In Poland, one could read on 13 December 2008 that the member states of the EU should ‘jointly struggle with the crisis’ (Dziennik Zachodni). And in France, Ouest France called upon ‘the state to rescue the crisis’ (25 March 2008), while Le Monde anticipated that ‘in Southern Europe, the crisis further weakens confidence in the state’ (7 May 2013). More recently, on 4 November 2014 the Polish Gazeta Wyborcza agreed with politicians that ‘the euro crisis has not been solved’, asking what could be done. The German Spiegel Online calculated on 6 January 2015 that the euro crisis had ‘destroyed 3.8 million jobs’. All in all, this throws up more questions than answers. Is the EU really under so much pressure? Do we risk the derailment of European integration? And is a process of re-nationalising Europe taking place, with the state acting the part of a trouble shooter? How can we interpret the various forms of Euroscepticism?

Questions like these are also the subject of intellectual debate – and some of Europe’s best-known public intellectuals became involved. For example, Anthony Giddens (2012) argued in the Guardian that ‘stabilising the euro should be a bridge to longer-term change’ of Europe and the EU. In his book Turbulent and Mighty Continent (2014) Giddens imagines a different kind of Europe. He argues that the EU is a ‘community
of fate’ (2014: 18), in which the dominance of (German) austerity policy is problematic. Instead of being a centralised top-down polity, the EU should become more devolved, with the initiative being taken at the bottom: ‘Citizens must at this point become more deeply involved in the process of European reform – the bottom-up element must be strong and persuasive, not confined to occasional consultations or even elections.’ (2014: 46) In parallel, and also as a reaction to the euro crisis and the related politics of the German government, in 2014 Ulrich Beck published *German Europe*. Here he criticises the increasingly dominant position of Germany in the EU and the related ‘national view’ upon Europe. For him, this perspective weakens the originally transnational and partly cosmopolitan orientation of the European project. Spurred on by his conviction, Beck became politically active in building an initiative for a ‘bottom-up Europe’ – together with other politicians and intellectuals, such as Zygmunt Bauman, Jacques Delors, and Richard Sennett (cf. Delors et al. 2012). Jürgen Habermas (2012) also published various interviews and articles about the present situation of the EU, many of which were translated into English and as a consequence became part of the wider European debate. His book *On the European Constitution* (Habermas 2011) adds two academic essays to some of these newspaper articles, outlining the possibility of a post- or supranational Europe in a worldwide society. Besides calling for a deepening of European integration, these intellectual statements coincide with two arguments: first, that Europe and the EU should be considered a *transnational* rather than a *national* project and, second, that the euro crisis should stimulate a rethinking of Europe from a *citizens’ perspective*.

**Our research questions**

This is the debate in which we want to position our book. We want to temper the emotionalism surrounding this debate by grounding it in empirical analysis drawn from a 12-year comparative research project that was conducted from 2003 to 2014. The overall project, ‘The Transnationalization of Public Spheres in the EU’, was part of the Collaborative Research Centre 597 ‘Transformations of the State’ at the University of Bremen. Being funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG), we had the opportunity to investigate the media coverage of Europe from 1982 to 2013 in the quality, tabloid, and regional press, studying the practices of journalists producing this media coverage as well as the online activities of citizens and their media appropriation. This allowed us to present the European public realm as a communicative
space. About half way through the project, what is now called the euro crisis blew up. It became an important reference point for our research. We had four principle research questions: First, is there such a thing as a European public sphere and, if so, what is its character? Second, how can we explain the character of such a European public sphere through the production practices of journalists? Third, how do citizens relate to the European public sphere and react to its character? Finally, did the subsequently revealed patterns undergo change in the context of the euro crisis?

In pursuit of answers to these principal questions, we conducted our research in and across six countries: Austria (AT), Denmark (DK), France (F), Germany (GER), United Kingdom (UK) and Poland (PL). We wanted to include the economically strongest founding member states of the EU including two EU-positive members (France and Germany) and one EU-sceptical member (UK), two smaller member states of which one is pro-EU (Austria) and the other EU-sceptical (Denmark), and one of the eastern latecomers to the EU (Poland). Our argument for selecting this sample was to focus our research on a varied selection of the countries that build the economic core of Europe and are main actors in constructing Europe as a society and the EU as its political institution. From today’s perspective one might argue that at least one Southern European state is missing, partly because of differences in media systems (Hallin/Mancini 2004: 89–142; Hepp 2015: 51–59) and partly because of the deeper impact of the euro crisis on Southern European states, resulting in a different kind of media coverage and public discourse (Breeze 2014; Kaitatzi-Whitlock 2014). Such a criticism would have been justified if the aim of our study had been to draw comparisons of the Europeanisation of national public spheres in Europe with reference to their differences of media systems or if our research had been occupied with comparing the different consequences of the euro crisis on national public spheres. However, our interest is another one, namely, to investigate the communicative construction of Europe during the course of the euro crisis. Having such a research objective, it is much more appropriate to focus on those countries which are the dominant actors within this process of construction. And the Southern European states are present in our data at least indirectly as a topic of media coverage and online discourse, and thus also reflected in citizens’ media appropriation.

Methodologically, we worked according to what we call a ‘transcultural perspective’ (Hepp 2009; Hepp/Couldry 2009). By this we understand an approach that does not take the ‘nation state’ and its ‘national culture’ as the unquestioned unit of comparison, structuring all the
data from the very beginning in ‘national containers’ – something that has been widely criticised (cf. Beck 2000; Wimmer/Glick Schiller 2002). Instead, we analysed the data set in total, looking for transcultural patterns of similarity and difference across all the researched countries, including national differences where they are significant. At the level of newspaper coverage, our data in all six states is based on a quantitative content analysis of the media coverage during two artificial weeks of the years 1982, 1989, 1996, 2003, 2008, and 2013, including quality, tabloid, and regional newspapers. At the level of journalists, in the autumn of 2008 we conducted 216 interviews with EU and foreign news editors, chief editors, and foreign correspondents of 23 quality, tabloid, and regional papers. We also undertook participatory observations in two newsrooms per country and documented this in research diaries. This data was analysed according to the standards of grounded theory research (Glaser/Strauss 1967).

The same analytical approach was applied to our data gathered at the level of audiences: We carried out 182 in-depth interviews, qualitative network maps (interviewees’ drawings of their communicative networks), and media diaries (interviewees’ documentations of their media use over a period of one week). This fieldwork was undertaken from September to December 2011, a period when discourses surrounding the euro crisis initially peaked associated with a possible withdrawal of Greece from the Eurozone.

Finally, we completed a WebCrawler analysis of hyperlink networks for each of our research countries as well as on a transnational European level, and conducted an interaction analysis of 125 comment threads from 28 online comment forums, encompassing European as well as national forums. These comment forums were selected from blogs, mainstream news media, and the Facebook pages of political news media. The comments for the analysis were then sampled from these forums during a week of the so-called European Crisis Summit – the summit of the European Council – in June 2012.

All in all, these data offer a deep insight into what we have chosen to call the ‘communicative construction of Europe’. The European public sphere is first of all a communicative space in which the joint transnational construction of Europe takes place. Of course, there are also further issues related to the social construction of Europe, for example, institution-building as it takes place in Brussels or policies like the Erasmus programme which motivate and facilitate European mobility. These are means of social construction familiar from the advent of the nation state (cf. Anderson 1983). However, the joint communicative construction is
as important as are these other means, because it is through communication that we build our understanding of what the 'European society' (Vobruba 2012) is or might be. As this European society is still emerging, and as its communicative construction is an ongoing process, all research faces the problem of determining what already can be identified as European, and what cannot. In the ensuing process, we must reconstruct this specific European character through careful empirical analysis (cf. Neverla/Schoon 2008: 20). Our analysis will show that the euro crisis cannot be seen as causing a collapse of this communicative construction. Nonetheless, it might be a ‘tipping point’ (Eder 2014: 221), or at least a point of increased ‘politicalisation’ (Risse 2015b: 12). Maybe Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens are right: The euro crisis has unleashed a clear desire for a ‘Europe from below’ (Beck 2014: 7), in which citizens’ uncertainty, anxiety, and indignation should become a prime point of reference for politics.

**Some basic concepts**

For our analysis we need to clarify some interrelated but nevertheless distinct concepts. First, there is the difference between Europe and the European Union (or EU). When we use the term ‘Europe’, it refers to Europe as a society that is still in emergence, and that has borders less clear than those of the EU. Here we are rather at the beginning than at the end of a long-term process of social construction (cf. Vobruba 2012). Europe as a society is more than institutionalised politics. It has very much to do with everyday social relations, with partly conflicting understandings of what Europe is (or might be), and with varying attitudes towards it. In a certain sense Europe as a society is the everyday dimension of this unfinished project. In contrast, we reserve the term ‘European Union’ or ‘EU’ for the evolving political institutions of a European society. In this sense, the term is more specific and focused, not covering all aspects of the (communicative) construction of Europe, but only those related to political institutions. As Peter Golding (2008: 25f.) points out, this terminological distinction ‘between the EU and Europe as objects of perception and aspiration’ is of great help for any empirical analysis.

For both Europe and the EU, the European public sphere is a fundamental communicative space. The next chapter discusses in detail our understanding of the public sphere. However, at this point we need to provide at least a rough outline. In our view, a public sphere is best understood as a ‘thickened space of political communication’ (Hepp et al. 2012: 25).
As communicative spaces, public spheres are not exclusive phenomena in the sense that involvement in one precludes involvement in another. Rather, various public spheres ‘overlap and interconnect’ (Risse 2015b: 9) – and they are partly articulated through each other. The latter is especially the case for the European public sphere, which is a thickened communicative space articulated mainly through certain patterns of transnationalisation within local, regional, issue-related, and especially national public spheres (Koopmans/Statham 2010b; Wessler et al. 2008). Based on our previous distinction between Europe (the European society) and the EU (its political institutions) we can say that the European public sphere is the space in which a dual communicative construction takes place: On the one hand, it is the space in which the European society is communicatively constructed in its political dimension; on the other hand, it is the space in which the communicative construction of the legitimacy of EU politics takes place.

By means of such a definition of the public sphere we indicate that not every form of public communication – understood as generally accessible mediated communication – should be considered as constitutive for a public sphere. In parallel to recent reflections by others (cf. Lunt/Livingstone 2013), we argue that public communication becomes constitutive for a public sphere when it is related to common issues and related decision-making – in the case of the European public sphere, the common issues of an emerging European society. Hence, from the perspective of audience and user studies, the issue of to what extent everyday people have a ‘public connection’ (Couldry et al. 2007b: 5) to the European public sphere becomes an important question – how far they are involved in common European issues, and how controversial those issues might be. Only through an involvement with these issues do the various ‘media audiences’ in different European states become a European ‘citizen audience’ (Lingenberg 2010b: 45), and thus part of the European public sphere.

If we follow the present public discussion, one of the most-used words in relation to Europe is ‘crisis’. Again, some analytical precision is necessary here if we are to avoid misinterpretation. In general, discourse about crises seems to be a constitutive moment of Europe and the European public sphere (cf. Triandafyllidou et al. 2009). This is not a new phenomenon, but an ongoing European narrative. To recall other recent crises: At the beginning of the 1990s there was a crisis of European foreign and security policy during the so-called Balkan conflict. In general, the eastern enlargement of the EU was understood as a process of ongoing smaller crises. And there was a crisis when the constitution for
a pan-European institution was rejected in 2005 through referenda in France and the Netherlands. When in the following sections we talk in general about crises as one moment of the communicative construction of Europe, we point to the various crisis events which were and are a reference point of communicative construction within the EU. In a narrower sense, we use the term ‘euro crisis’. By this, we understand the crisis we have witnessed since 2008 in the eurozone, an outcome of the financial crisis of 2007 caused by the breakdown of the US housing market and the consequent collapse of Lehmann Brothers. The euro crisis is not one single crisis but a multilevel phenomenon, including at least a banking crisis, a sovereign debt crisis, and a market crisis (Vobruba 2014b). That’s why the euro crisis has no single meaning; it is – as our analyses will show – a signifier for various financial and economy-related phenomena, and open to different interpretations. As a signifier, the euro crisis is an important point of reference for the present communicative construction of Europe, and of the EU within the European public sphere.

An overview

Based on these fundamental analytical considerations, we develop the argument of this book in eight chapters. Chapter 2 outlines what we call a communicative constructivist perspective on Europe and the EU. Such a perspective does not mean that we want to reduce Europe and the EU to a semiotic phenomenon. European integration is a complex, multilevel social, cultural, economic, and political process that has to be theorised as such. Instead, the idea of communicative constructivism argues that the everyday meaning of such processes of integration becomes articulated in an ongoing process of communication, resulting in further processes of institutionalisation and social objectivation. To understand this communicative construction of Europe, we have to analyse both the European public sphere in which this process takes place and the different cultures of political discourse that are the fundament of this process of communicative construction, explaining its multi-segmentation. In the same way, the public discourse surrounding the euro crisis has to be understood as a phenomenon of communicative construction.

Chapter 3 presents the results of our newsroom studies of cultures of political discourse. Through our qualitative newsroom research, first, we demonstrate the stability of national cultures of political discourse as they are re-articulated in journalists’ practices; second, we determine
that transnational cultures of political discourse are related to certain modes of addressing audiences and reflect at least in part a stratification-related segmentation of Europe; and third, we decipher the emergence of a European discourse culture, which manifests itself in the way transcultural European references and patterns of European coverage become a daily routine within the journalists’ practices.

Chapter 4 links the newsroom studies with our content analysis of political news coverage in the press. Here we take a long-term perspective and look back at the way this coverage has been transformed from 1982 to 2013. We demonstrate that a European public sphere emerged across all the nation states studied: The European public sphere manifests itself as an increasingly transnational coverage of EU political activities and an increased discussion that takes place across national borders. European identity references are sparse, but visible. However, this European public sphere remains quite segmented. On the one hand, it is grounded in national cultures of political discourse in which countries differ in their news coverage, thereby creating national segmentation. On the other hand, we see transnational segmentation by types of newspapers. In general, our research demonstrates that the euro crisis did not result in a breakdown of the European public sphere. Considering the entire timeframe of our analysis, it became obvious that while the euro crisis year 2008 has gained special prominence for political institutions, trends towards Europeanisation that were already apparent had been consolidated, there being only a small degree of instability, if any.

In chapter 5, we present our research on the way in which citizens take part in the discussion of the euro crisis in online comment forums, taking one euro crisis summit of the European Council in 2012 as an example. Overall, we analysed 125 comment threads from 28 political online forums from mainstream news media, political blogs, and political news media’s Facebook accounts, four from each country in our sample, as well as four from the transnational European level. By first analysing hyperlink structures, we isolated main online forums where citizens can discuss political matters. From forums isolated in this way, we then selected 125 articles and posts that dealt with European issues during a week of a so-called European crisis summit and conducted an interaction analysis of citizens’ online comments in reaction to these articles and posts. In this way we could identify different forms of interaction in citizens’ online activities. Overall, our research demonstrates that the euro crisis creates a context for citizens’ online engagement in a process of common European communicative construction. Discussion of the euro crisis can, for example, trigger conflict in citizens’
interaction, but it can just as well evolve into expressions of mutual solidarity. Transnational forums provide a central context for the expression of conflict and solidarity in terms of national belonging. But at the same time, we see lines of conflict in the user bases of national forums.

Chapter 6 presents the qualitative audience research undertaken in late 2011. This research is based on 182 in-depth interviews on media appropriation, the EU, and its legitimation, on media diaries kept by the interviewees, and on a qualitative analysis of the interviewees’ communicative networks. We can demonstrate that having a public connection to Europe is a common ground: Through their media use, but also everyday interaction, almost all interviewed persons have access to current events in Europe, especially in relation to the euro crisis. Across all countries, this chapter shows different forms of European public connections characteristic for particular types of people. These different forms of public connections cannot simply be understood as national patterns; they intersect with other factors (age, class, education, mobility, biography, etc.) and provide a more complex picture that goes beyond a simple causal model. This can be shown across the patterns, and also in how the euro crisis activates the public connection of European citizens.

Chapter 7, the final empirical chapter, focuses on one particular aspect of our qualitative audience research: How do European citizens construct the euro crisis differently? We undertake a dual-level analysis: First, we identify the constructions of the euro crisis and how citizens make sense of ‘what’s going on in Europe’. This process of making sense is marked by perplexity, anxiety, and speculation. These patterns relate to concerns about how it all began and what is now going on, worrying about possible effects on both personal lives and the future of Europe and, finally, speculating about the complex nature of the euro crisis. Then we analyse different solutions that citizens propose for solving the euro crisis. These solutions point to citizens’ constructions of what a future EU, both legitimate and capable of overcoming the euro crisis, might look like. Here we can distinguish four anticipated solutions, or ‘legitimation constructions’: Firstly, an EU made up of national cultures, involving national solutions for the euro crisis that treat the different European nation states as the main agents for overcoming the euro crisis. Accordingly, each national government should first of all solve its own financial problems. Secondly, an EU of economic cooperation, highlighting the need for intensified economic cooperation between the EU member states in order to prevent and overcome economic crises such as the euro crisis. Thirdly, an EU of welfare and solidarity, pointing to European solutions for the euro crisis. Here the
The euro crisis itself is understood mainly as a European problem, and can therefore only be resolved through European action and solidarity. And fourthly, the United States of Europe, promoting the idea that it is only by fostering a European integration process corresponding to the US model that the EU can become a real Union of Europeans and solve its current and future economic problems. In sum, this chapter shows what a legitimate EU might look like from a citizens’ perspective. The euro crisis represents an activating moment in citizens’ communicative constructions, so that citizens begin questioning and renegotiating the legitimacy of the EU.

The conclusion reintegrates our various research results in an overarching understanding of the communicative construction of Europe. While this process is rooted in different cultures of political discourse as they take shape in journalists’ practices, communicative construction as such takes place as public political communication orientated to common issues, political decision-making, and its legitimation – in short, within the multi-segmented European public sphere and the public connection that citizens have. As our research shows, the euro crisis continues to challenge this process of communicative construction. But it does not signify its end; rather, the euro crisis has a catalysing influence.

In addition, this book has an appendix with further information on our methodology. While each chapter includes sufficient guidance for a critical reading of our empirical analysis, we provide further details about our newsroom research, content analysis, online interaction analysis, and audience studies in this appendix. We wish our work to be as transparent as possible, without interrupting the argumentative flow of the chapters.

Acknowledgement

This book is the outcome of joint research and as a consequence we share intellectual responsibility jointly. However, each chapter had different lead authors who wrote first drafts which were then discussed and revised several times. The lead author of the introduction, chapter 2, and the conclusion was Andreas Hepp, and the lead author of chapter 3 was Swantje Lingenberg, supported by Johanna Möller. Chapter 4 was written under the lead of Anke Offerhaus. Anne Mollen was the main author of chapter 5. The principal responsibility for chapter 6 was with Johanna Möller, Swantje Lingenberg, and Monika Elsler and for chapter 7 with Swantje Lingenberg, Monika Elsler, and Johanna Möller.
However, while certain persons were responsible as lead authors, the whole book is based on the common research of our team, and each chapter is rooted in this common research. Thus, the overall argument of the book is a shared intellectual outcome of our team.

It would have not been possible to realise such a project without support and help from several sources. First of all, we would like to thank the DFG for having funded our project over 12 years until its third and final phase, and our committed reviewers who critically supported the project over such a long time. We are especially grateful to Stephan Leibfried and his tireless commitment to the Collaborative Research Centre, as well as to Dieter Wolf for his constant support, help, and cooperation. Without Bernhard Peters’ essential work (Forst 2015; Peters 2008) in having initiated this research and that of Hartmut Wessler in continuing and further conceptualising Bernhard Peters’s, the project would have never been realised. Furthermore, we profited from a mutual and ongoing exchange with our sister project, ‘Legitimating States, International Regimes, and Economic Orders’, especially in conversation with Frank Nullmeier, Dominika Biegon, Jennifer Gronau, Sebastian Haunss, Falk Lenke, Tanja Pritzlaff, Henning Schmidtke, and Steffen Schneider.

Chapters 3 and 4 are in particular based on work that was conducted in two previous research phases. Katharina Kleinen-von Königslöw and Michael Brüggemann, who left the project after its second phase, took a central position in conceptualising and conducting the content analysis and the newsroom studies in these previous phases. Furthermore, we want to thank Sune Blicher, Gabriel Moreno, and Stefanie Trümper who supported the research team in conducting the newsroom observations and journalists’ interviews. An earlier version of chapter 7 was published as “I just hope the whole thing won’t collapse”: “Understanding” and “overcoming” the EU financial crisis from the citizens’ perspective’ in the book Money Talks: Media, Markets, Crisis (Gripsrud and Murdoch 2015). We would like to thank Jostein Gripsrud and Graham Murdoch for permission to develop chapter 7 from that essay.

For their helpful comments and recommendations on the results of our last phase during the Collaborative Research Centre’s concluding conference on ‘Transformations of the State’, we would like to thank Jostein Gripsrud, Barbara Pfetsch, and Kim Christian Schrøder. In 2008 we held a workshop in which Peter Golding, Risto Kunelius, Paolo Mancini, Juan Diez Medrano, Barbara Pfetsch, and Hartmut Wessler provided valuable feedback, especially regarding our newsroom studies. And we would especially like to thank Daniel Smith and Keith Tribe for their brilliant proofreading and suggestions for stylistic improvement.
Our work is, furthermore, embedded in the ZeMKI (Centre for Media, Communication and Information Research) at the University of Bremen and, therein, especially in the research lab ‘Media Culture and Globalisation’. Several – also former – members have supported our work with valuable comments, suggestions, and advice. We are especially thankful to Matthias Berg, Çiğdem Bozdag, Julia Gantenberg, Marco Höhn, Sigrid Kannengießer, Leif Kramp, Sebastian Kubitschko, Katharina Lobinger, Cindy Roitsch, Monika Sowinska, and Laura Suna. For organisational and administrative support we are grateful to Heide Pawlik.

Finally, all this would not have been possible without the help of numerous student assistants. For their essential help in coding the newspapers, for the transcription of the interviews with citizens across Europe, for the support in sampling users’ comments from central online comment forums across Europe, as well as for general project administration tasks, we thank Elodie Bergot, Sara Blass, Jérémy Caro, Cécile Duparfait, Lara Gahlow, Ulrike Gerhard, Patricia Glabischewski, Alicja Grabowska, Katharina Gronemeyer, Ole Hammersland, David Heidenreich, Maria Heine, Martin Helbich, Helene Hoffman, Jeanne Hoffmann, Jakob Hörttagl, Kathrin Hövel, Susann-Carmen Huff, Lisa Jürgensen, Dorra Kassem, Kira Kettner, Lukas Klose, Agnieszka Kowalska, Eva-Katrin Landscheid, Marit Langheim, Susann Lukas, Martyna Malak, Simone Michel, Alexandra Mondry, Insa Müller, Ana Niederer, Charles Noirot, Gerda Marie Notholt, Michał Palacz, Sarah Pauly, Johanna Pawlik, Ramona Reichel, Johanna Reimers, Mareike Remus, Franziska Römer, Sophia Schulze, Eva Schurig, Linda Siegel, Svenja Steenken, Emilia Szczypior, Catalina Vazquez, Anna-Lena Vinke, and Nele Wolter. Some of these students worked on our project for more than two years, providing essential support for our research work.
In this chapter, we outline a communicative constructivist perspective on the European public sphere, Europe and the EU. As already emphasised in the introduction, this perspective does not mean that we reduce Europe and the EU to a semiotic phenomenon. Other processes of social construction are also taking place and are of great importance. Beyond any reductionism, the idea of communicative constructivism proposes that the everyday meaning of a European society is articulated in ongoing processes of communication. These communication processes are increasingly mediatised: mediated by and related to the institutions and technologies of the media, and also moulded by them. Furthermore, communication processes such as these are rooted in different cultures of political discourse: the culture producing a certain kind of political discourse, both national and transnational. The latter involves the various transnational cultural patterns of media communication which mark the transnational stratification of an emerging European society. We also suggest that something like a European culture of political discourse emerges. Considered in a long-term perspective, the euro crisis seems to be not so much a collapse of the communicative construction of Europe, but a potential ‘tipping point’ (Eder 2014: 221) in the practice of communicative construction. It has been observed that the euro crisis has brought about a ‘politicisation’ (Risse 2015b: 3) of the European public sphere: a general shift to a public sphere in which more citizens find their voice.

To substantiate this overall approach – which is the theoretical frame of our subsequent analysis – we argue as follows. First we outline a concept of the European public sphere which goes beyond its understanding as a space of functional legitimation. In contrast, we regard the European public sphere as ‘a complex, thickened space of
communicative construction’. In studying this social space we have to consider how people – the citizens of an emerging European society – become involved in this European public sphere and hence in the process of constructing Europe communicatively. However, the European public sphere remains ‘multi-segmented’ in various ways. Following on, we secondly discuss how far the European public sphere is rooted in different cultures of political discourse. This idea offers the chance of explaining the multi-segmented character of the European public sphere. Finally, we discuss to what extent the euro crisis as a ‘mediatised conflict’ might mark a kind of tipping point in the process of communicatively constructing Europe and the EU – a tipping point which possibly does not result in the breakdown of this process, but in its change of character. Here increasing political activity might alter the manner in which the legitimation of Europe and the EU is constructed.

2.1 Theorising the European public sphere: from functional legitimation to communicative construction

Today the discussion surrounding media, communication and Europe is greatly influenced by Jürgen Habermas’ idea of the public sphere as Öffentlichkeit, an understanding which has a normative dimension. Habermas was originally interested in the transformation of the ‘bourgeois public sphere’ (Habermas 1989; cf. for a critical discussion Calhoun 1992; Fraser 1993), but later refined the concept of the public sphere into one of a communicative space that ‘can best be described as a network of communicating information and points of view’ (Habermas 1996: 360). Within this public sphere the ‘streams of communication are, in the process, filtered and synthesised in such a way that they coalesce into bundles of topically specified public opinions’ (1996: 360, italics as in the original). The public sphere is ‘reproduced through communicative action’ and it is ‘tailored to the general comprehensibility of everyday communicative practice’ (1996: 360). This concept of the public sphere has an obviously normative dimension; it is not just any space of communication. It is a space of political communication which is plural, contested and sustained by various institutions (Lunt/Livingstone 2013: 92). At the same time, this space of communication remains oriented towards certain ethics of deliberative communication and, in consequence, towards the production of a legitimate and therefore legitimating public opinion (Fraser 2007).
This understanding of the public sphere builds on democratic theory (Habermas 1996: 356; Peters 2008: 33–67; Risse 2010: 107–120): Public spheres are integral parts of late-modern liberal democracies. In these democracies there are legal and political institutions that ensure the deliberative quality of public political discourse (Kantner 2004: 46). These institutionally secured procedures of deliberation serve to ensure ‘at least two normative requirements for a public sphere in liberal democracies’ (Risse 2010: 115): first, openness to participation; and second, the possibility of demanding that public authorities legitimise their decisions.

This sense of the public sphere represents how the general understanding governing discussion about the European public sphere was (and is) positioned. Work on this started in the 1990s, with the fundamental question: Would the constitution of the EU as a supranational political institution be accompanied by the emergence of a European public sphere that would fulfil democratic functions at a European level (Meyer 1999)? To a certain degree, this work was stimulated by various media policies on the part of the EU which aimed at the ‘production’ of this public sphere in order to avoid any possible ‘democracy deficit’ in the EU (Brüggemann 2008; Lodge/Sarikakis 2013; Sarikakis 2007). In particular, there were three sceptical arguments against the existence of a European public sphere that might perform this function (Gerhards 1993, 2000). First, due to the absence of European media, a European public sphere would have no institutional foundation. Second, the lack of a common European language would make common understanding and reasoning impossible. And third, even if there were such an understanding, the dominance of national perspectives on Europe and the EU would work against any shared deliberation.

Criticism of this kind involves a normatively framed ‘national ideal’ of the public sphere which is then more or less applied directly to Europe and the EU (cf. Gerhards 2000: 288–292; Schlesinger/Deirdre 2002). This ideal falls short, however, when we consider multilingual nation states in Europe. Switzerland, for example, has no common native language (Kantner 2015: 86). This ideal applies even less at the European level (Mihelj 2007). Research has demonstrated that a European public sphere – understood as a thickened transnational space of political communication (Hepp et al. 2012: 22) – emerges through the transnationalisation of national public spheres that were formerly more strictly separated. Therefore, we cannot describe the European public sphere by employing criteria relating to a national ideal. Instead, we have to find criteria by which it becomes possible to describe the European public
sphere through processes of transnationalisation. At this point, it is possible to distinguish analytically at least four dimensions of European transnationalisation (cf. Wessler et al. 2008: 11). While these criteria were originally developed with mass media – and especially newspapers – in mind, they can also be applied to other kinds of mediated communication, as, for example, in public internet forums (Bennett et al. 2015: 115). The four dimensions are:

1. **Europeanisation by vertical transnational connectivity**: The vertical dimension of transnationalisation means a Europeanisation of national public spheres through intensified ‘communicative linkages between the national and the European level’ (Koopmans/Erbe 2004: 101; Koopmans/Statham 2010a: 38). Transnationalisation takes place through a shared intensified ‘monitoring of governance’ (Wessler et al. 2008: 11) from Brussels. As political decision-making at the level of the EU gains in relevance in the various nation states, this results in intensified coverage and discussion about European politics across the nation states. This takes place in mass media coverage, for example, newspapers. But today there are other kinds of media – increasingly, online media and the various ways in which people are involved in online communication.

2. **Europeanisation by horizontal transnational connectivity**: Together with the vertical axis, horizontal transnationalisation means intensified ‘communicative linkages between different member states’ (Koopmans/Erbe 2004: 101; Koopmans/Statham 2010a: 38). Across the different national public spheres there is an increasing amount of mutual observation and mutual discursive exchange. In addition, we might also notice increasing references between different national actors (other members of the EU), resulting in intensified mutual recognition as part of the EU – the horizontal dimension of Europeanisation. Again, this is currently not just a matter of media coverage – it is also a matter of communicative connectivity of the internet, as, for example, in online forums.

3. **Europeanisation by transnationally converging discourse**: A third dimension of transnationalisation is ‘discourse convergence’ (Wessler et al. 2008: 11, 15f.). This means that there is not only vertical and horizontal connectivity of the different national public spheres; in addition, we notice a certain rapprochement in the discourse that constitutes these public spheres. This happens, for example, through shared ‘frames’ of media coverage (Kantner 2015: 97–105); ‘not only [. . .] the same themes are discussed at the same time transnationally
but [...] the same frames of reference are available and in use in the various public spheres in Europe’ (Risse 2010: 119; cf. also critical Downey/Koenig 2006). But it also occurs, for example, through converging forms of interaction, converging constructions of Europe in online forums, or even converging constructions of Europe, the EU and its legitimacy in everyday talk. Therefore, transnationally converging discourse implies that, hand-in-hand with increasing horizontal and vertical connections, the character of this discourse converges upon Europe and the EU.

4. Europeanisation by transnational collective belonging: A fourth dimension of transnationalisation is the expression of a sense of European collective belonging. In media coverage and online discourse, this means, for example, shared references to ‘us as Europeans’ or other expressions of a shared European identity. With regard to audiences and media users, this means that they understand themselves to be members of Europe, define the consequences of EU politics as meaningful for them, and through that become ‘citizen audiences’ (Lingenberg 2010b: 45). At its best, this results in what Thomas Risse calls the emerging ‘European community of communication’: ‘when “foreigners” are no longer treated as such, but actively participate in debates about issues of common concern’ (Risse 2010: 157).

Across these four dimensions, research demonstrates that there is a Europe-wide process of transnationalising public spheres, i.e. Europeanisation. This process has brought about a multilingual and transmedial European public sphere: a thickened space of political communication layered across other public spheres – national, regional, local or thematic – which is at the same time centred on European politics and European political decision-making. This is demonstrated by studies which can only be briefly reviewed. They cover such different areas as media coverage (for example Adam 2007; AIM 2006; Gripsrud 2007; Kantner 2015; Koopmans et al. 2010; Pfetsch/Heft 2015; Wessler et al. 2008), media events (for example Bolin 2006; Eder 2000; Hahn et al. 2008), citizens’ communication through the digital platforms (for example Bennett et al. 2015; Rasmussen 2013; Trenz 2009; Wodak/Wright 2006), the manner in which journalists are involved in the transnationalisation of the public sphere (for example Heikkilä/Kunelius 2006; Offerhaus 2011; Raeymaeckers et al. 2007; Sarrica et al. 2010; Statham 2010a), as well as the related audiences (for example Lingenberg 2010b; Scharkow/Vogelgesang 2010).

In our own research, we call the resulting public sphere a ‘multi-segmented European public sphere’ (cf. Hepp et al. 2012). ‘Multi-segmented’ for the