# The Transformation of Political Mobilisation and Communication in European Public Spheres: A Research Outline

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[1] Crucial input that was used in writing the proposal came from preparatory meetings of the authors with Donatella della Porta, Hanspeter Kriesi, and Barbara Pfetsch.

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# PART B.1: GENERAL OUTLINE OF THE PROJECT

## 1.1 Objectives: Descriptive, Explanatory, Prospective, and Prescriptive

In this project, we want to make a significant and innovative contribution to our scientific and practical knowledge of political mobilisation and communication in European public spheres and their relations to European policies and institutions. The project is proposed against the background of the increasing Europeanisation of governance structures, on the one hand, and the lagging behind of the development of an active European form of citizenship, on the other – a problematic often denoted as the EU's 'democratic deficit'. It goes to the core of the issues addressed in *task 6* ("Governance, citizenship and the dynamics of European integration") of the present call, with its emphasis on the emergence of a European public space, on deliberation and participation, and on the development of active European citizenship. In addition, it aims to provide key information on interactions between European policy-makers and institutions, on the one hand, and intermediary collective actors and media, on the other. Thereby, we also aim to contribute important insights into the problematic of *task 1* ("Toward improved management of societal change"), which highlights such interactions and the role they play in instigating learning processes on both sides.

In order to contribute to resolving these issues, we propose to analyse the role of *intermediary public spheres*, and *mass media* and *collective mobilisation* in particular, in the process of European integration. We want to focus on public spheres both as channels for citizen participation and the expression of citizenship identities, and as arenas in which EU policies and institutions can be held accountable and where their legitimacy is at stake.

The problematic of the *democratic deficit* is often discussed in terms of institutional design and reform (e.g., extending the powers of the European Parliament), or of a lack of interest in, and identification with the European Union among European citizens (e.g., low turnout in European elections). While we do not want to deny the importance of these factors, we argue that the success of both institutional reforms, and efforts to strengthen citizens' identification with Europe depend on the development of an intermediary public sphere of political communication and mobilisation that can help bridge the gap between European policies and institutions and the European citizenry. As the seminal work of Habermas (1990) and those who have followed in his footsteps (Calhoun 1992) have shown, the emergence of the nation-state as the predominant unit of political space superseding formerly important local and regional levels of political organisation was not just a question of institution building from above or pre-existing identifications among the citizenry, but depended crucially on the development of a civic public sphere, which increasingly involved citizens in national public debates and collective action.

From a top-down perspective, public debates and political mobilisation can serve as an input in the European policy process in the form of information on the demands, opinions and interests of the citizenry and may thereby increase the *responsiveness* and *legitimacy* of policies and institutions. From the point of view of the citizenry, information about, and critical evaluation of EU policies and institutions provided by the mass media, interest groups and social movements are crucial to ensuring the *accountability* of policies and policy makers. Moreover, the public sphere offers citizens possibilities for active *participation* in public debates and collective action concerning the EU's policies and institutions and may thereby strengthen identifications with Europe.

Political discourse which is constructed in the public sphere is more than an intertextual activity, it is a cultural field where specific actors are able to exert power over others. It is in

the public sphere that political actors mobilise claims, 'frame' social problems, and engage in conflict over the basis of social relationships. Dahlgren's emphasis on the interactional basis of the public sphere is pertinent (1995: pp.50): 'A 'public' is not an inert mass of people, nor is it a product derived from opinion polling. Publics exist only in so far as there are active exchanges of views and information among citizens: this is the interactional dimension of the public sphere.'

To study the Europeanisation of public spheres, **we compare degrees and forms of Europeanisation of political mobilisation and communication in seven countries, across six selected policy domains** characterised by different degrees and forms of involvement of European institutions, **as well as over time**.

Our *first* **aim** is to fill the empirical void that presently exists in discussions on the topic, by providing a detailed map of emergent tendencies towards a Europeanisation of public spheres along the three comparative dimensions of countries, policy domains, and time. We will thus be able to show differences in degrees and forms of Europeanisation across countries and policy domains, differences in the positions of collective actors with regard to European institutions and policies, as well as developments, convergences and divergences in these aspects over time.

In a *second* step, we take the patterns of Europeanisation thus found as a dependent variable and try to explain them by drawing on theories of 'political opportunity structures' as developed in the sociological and political science literature on political mobilisation and social movements, and theories of news production and media agenda setting drawn from mass media and political communication research.

*Thirdly*, on the basis of interviews with collective actors we want to assess chances and constraints for the further development of Europeanisation tendencies of public spheres of political mobilisation and communication. In a field that is undergoing rapid transformations involving the emergence of historically new and unprecedented patterns of political mobilisation and communication, such a collection of expert evaluations of possible future trajectories may provide important clues, both for scientific enquiry, and for practitioners' strategies and policies.

In a *fourth* and final step, these descriptive, explanatory, and prospective findings will serve as a basis for developing concrete strategic and policy recommendations aimed at improving the preconditions for the further development of a European sphere of political mobilisation and communication as a basis for a deepening of the integration process and for developing an active European form of citizenship. The addressees of these recommendations will include not only (European and national) policy-makers, but also media representatives dealing with European news, as well as interest groups, NGO's and social movements dealing with European policies and institutions.

## 1.2 Expected Benefits: Scientific Advances, European Added Value and Policy Relevance

The considered impact of the study is underwritten by its explicit European focus. It should be made clear from the start that there are few funding opportunities of the scale and width necessary to conduct the wide-reaching European study that we propose. We have selected the proposed research design to benefit from the singular opportunity for cross-national and EU research presented by framework 5, and the resulting study will be a unique in its kind. The study will provide not only a valuable and original research resource – a strictly cross-national comparative data-set with an EU-level dimension – for the international academic community, but it will also provide a substantive basis for understanding the increasingly significant topic of the degree and extent of the political integration of Europe, and the resultant changes which are taking place in national and European politics. The high standing of the international research team in their respective countries and internationally, guarantees that the findings of the research will reach a broad academic audience.

The proposed project will advance theory and extend knowledge in the field of European politics and communications. This will be achieved by developing a more integrated conceptual approach that systematically relates two dimensions that have previously remained distinct and isolated fields of research: media institutions and the production of political communication with reference to Europe on one side, and the supply side of political contentions, public campaigns and mobilisation over European issues, on the other. An important objective here is to provide an original analysis and data set that will become a resource for researchers in the future who address questions relating to the pattern and consequences of European integration on national politics.

The fact that European Integration is a question at the forefront of the current political agenda makes this study not only timely but of pressing importance. This gives the study a high potential for entering policy deliberation and public debates. For example, the proposed idea of tracking specific substantive policy domains – e.g. EMU – during the lifetime of the study, will give an empirical basis for addressing topical questions such as what are the major cross-national differences in the degrees and ways in which Europe is framed, debated and contested in the public sphere, and the cleavages on which such conflicting viewpoints hinge (e.g. North/South; centre/periphery). Clearly such findings are of wide general public significance, and attempts will be made through our own website, contacts will professionals in the field, as well as where possible using journalistic contacts to enter the public domain to ensure dissemination.

There is as yet no substantive empirically based research that addresses our topic of processes of Europeanisation in the field of political mobilisation and communication. In addition, there has been relatively little research on the nature of organisational networks and information flows which link the EU policy domains to the public domain at the transnational, national, and regional levels, and the extent to which EU policy decisions are open to influence 'from below' by public campaigns and social movements. By centrally addressing these questions with an integrated conceptual approach and through original data, the impact that the research will make is potentially very great indeed and is likely to have an important influence on the scientific agenda for how the public dimensions of Europeanisation and European integration are seen. By addressing a topic of current political relevance across Europe on which empirically grounded knowledge is largely lacking, there is a high potential for timely interventions within both academic, policy and wider public debates.

Given that the findings of the research have such potential for exerting influence on the policy debate at the European and national levels, and the perspectives of the principal actors in the field – governments/administration, media, political parties, civil society organisations, and social movements – we shall aim to establish channels of contact and dissemination at an early stage of the project, so that our findings may feed into the understandings of the relevant actors, and improve communication between the public and expert domains. Special efforts will be made to build on these contacts within the course of the study, especially through regular interchanges with our Board of Advisors consisting of prominent professionals from national and European parliaments, prominent media outlets, and other collective actors, and two conferences which will also involve practitioners (see workpackages 7, 9, 10, and 13, as well as the section on our exploitation and dissemination strategy in Part C). In addition, the special focus given to leading media professionals and communications experts at the interview stage, and the use of the 'Delphi' technique, which is explicitly designed for interaction with knowledgable experts, will allow us to improve our own understanding but also to feed recommendations back into the professional world which produces news and information about Europe (see workpackage 6).

A key benefit of the proposed research design, that also provides European added value and policy relevance will be the establishment of a series of transnational networks and exchanges both with the participating institutions from the seven countries, and among our Board of Advisors consisting of policy-makers and political mobilisation and communication professionals at both the national and EU levels. These interdisciplinary and cross-national exchanges could only be provided within the type of research opportunity possible under framework 5. The aim is to establish a set of networks that will last beyond the lifetime of the project and allow for continuing exchanges of expertise and learning within the emergent field of European political mobilisation and communication.

The policy relevance of the expected results follows directly from the crucial role of the public sphere as an intermediator between policies and institutions, on the one hand, and the citizenry, on the other. Without being accompanied by a substantial degree of Europeanisation of public spheres, the integration process from above is likely to come to a standstill, or worse, to provoke anti-European tendencies and a retrenchement into national particularism or even to further feed xenophobic tendencies. Our proposed research plan will provide concrete empirical information on the extent to which the different national political public domains are resistant to Europeanisation, to what extent Europeanisation is occurring within nations or regions, and to what extent it is a genuinely transnational process. Through our contacts with the professionals – both those making political demands and those mediating and packaging political information – who actively shape the image of Europe and its relation to national concerns and identities in the public sphere we shall be in a position to make prognostic predictions and show possibilities for policy intervention. With the proposed extension of the EU to further countries, with new languages and cultural cleavages, it is important to be informed about the current state of affairs on the levels, degrees and forms of Europeanisation of the public domain, to be able to make sustainable polices within this field.

Our proposed workpackage on new media as a potential for new forms of linkage and communication between political authorities and citizens (workpackage 4) is again of potential wide-reaching importance to national and EU policies on supplying and facilitating access to the internet in an era of digitalisation. If we are able to show that this new media provide some efficacy as a form of dissemination of political information, or as an emergent forum for public debate and exchange (at times interactively with political institutions), then such findings will support the claims of those politicians advocating policies for increasing

the level of access of the population to new media. Indeed we have one of the advisors to the government in one of the most enthusiastic pro-new media countries (UK), on our Board of Advisors.

## 1.3 Scientific Description of the Project

### 1.3.1 General Background

Processes of globalisation and 'de-nationalisation' have undermined the nation-state as the predominant boundary marker of public space, which defined external territorial limits to communication and exchange, provided an internal focus for collective identities and solidarity, and thereby constituted national societies (Deutsch 1972). This applies particularly to Europe, where the process of European integration has initiated a profound **restructuring of public space**, both within the member state polities, on the European level itself, and in a complex interplay between European, national, regional and local levels. The larger epochal question that confronts us is to what extent such de-nationalisation processes merely lead to fragmentation and a loss of control over our collective destinies, or whether we are witnessing a reconstitution of collective identities, solidarities and capacities to act on other territorial and social levels than the nation-state, e.g., global, European, local, or some combination of these (e.g., Held et al. 1999).

The European Union probably is the most important and advanced attempt to politically come to terms with globalisation and denationalisation, by providing a transnational institutional setting around which a **reconstitution of collective identities, solidarities and capacities to act** may occur. However, so far such a reconstitution does not seem to have come about, or at least, in the eyes of most observers, not to a sufficient extent (e.g., Scharpf 1999, Weßels 2000). While policy decisions in Europe are increasingly taken in the supranational and inter-governmental arenas, the nation-state has remained the primary focus for collective identities, and public debates and citizens' participation in the policy process are still mainly situated on the nation-state level and directed at national authorities. This discrepancy between Europe's institutional development, its increasing competences and influence on Europeans' conditions of life, on the one hand, and the continuing predominance of the national political space as the arena for public debates and the source for collective identification and notions of citizenship, on the other, is at the core of Europe's **'democratic deficit'**. Since the beginning of the 1990s, the former 'permissive consensus' on EU integration has eroded, increasingly so after the Treaty on European Union of 1992, which was ratified only with great difficulty in those countries where it was subject to popular referenda. Trust in European institutions and support for the integration process have steadily declined, and so has in many countries voter participation in European elections (Schmitt and Thomassen 1999). In addition, tendencies of a 'renationalisation' of politics are observable in many member states, e.g., in the form of increasing support for xenophobic parties, which usually also have a strong anti-European profile.

### 1.3.2 Multiple Forms of Europeanisation of Public Spheres

Although the emerging scientific discussion on the Europeanisation of public spheres (e.g., Gerhards 1992; Erbring 1995; Kopper 1997; Schlesinger 1995) provides many important insights and has been a valuable source of inspiration for us, we think it suffers from insufficient empirical grounding, and therefore has a tendency to remain highly speculative. Moreover, there is a tendency to view the notion of a European public sphere in a narrow way, implicitly or explicitly derived from an ideal-typical conception of the national public sphere. Thus, several authors have focussed on the question of the probability of the development of transnational mass media or transnational collective action and organisation on the European level. This way of approaching the problem usually results in a negative answer and particularly emphasizes linguistic boundaries to communicative spaces as a

crucial and perhaps insurmountable barrier to a Europeanisation of public debates, collective identities, and collective action. Although some authors reckon with the emergence of English as a true lingua franca in Europe that would allow such direct transnational communication on a mass level (De Swaan 1993), for the moment this prospect seems to be very distant, not least because of strong resistance against such cultural homogeneisation in many non-English speaking member states. In our view, this perspective on the Europeanisation of the public sphere is deficient because it basically envisages Europeanisation as a replication, on a higher level of spatial aggregation, of processes which have earlier brought forth the nation-state. Moreover, it is based on a vision of the nation-state that presupposes a degree of linguistic and cultural homogeneity that cannot be found in many well-functioning democratic states. Thus, the Dutch consociational democracy has proved to be a successful way to politically integrate a population characterised by deep socio-cultural cleavages (Lijphart 1968). Similarly, Switzerland is one of the most stable and successful Western democracies, despite important cultural differences, not least of which the existence of four different language regions (Ernst 1998).

The now predominant view in the literature on European integration is to see the European Union as a new and complex form of multi-level polity, next to, but not in a strict hierarchical sense superimposed on the existing European system of nation-states (e.g., Jachtenfuchs and Kohler-Koch 1996). In line with this view, we think it is necessary to conceive of ways in which a Europeanisation of public spheres may occur, which are different from the ideal-typical nation-state model. We distinguish **five different forms a Europeanisation of public spheres may take**:

*Supranationalisation*. The development of a genuine supranational European public sphere, structurally similar to existing national public spheres, with European-level mass media and public debates, and European political parties, interest groups, social movements and other collective actors. As we have indicated, such a full-fledged European public sphere seems unlikely for the moment, but this does not exclude the possibility of its partial emergence, e.g. in specific policy domains. For instance, transnational, European-wide media catering to financial and economic elites are gaining weight recently, and in some domains (e.g., environmental politics) transnational interest groups and movement organisations seem to be quite strong. Specific attention should also be paid here to the new media, particularly the internet. As a transnational medium par excellence, which functions largely independent of territorial boundaries and distances, the internet may well be able to serve as a medium for transnational political communication to an extent that traditional mass media because of their dependence on territorially bounded readerships and advertisers cannot.

*Increased national focussing on Europe*. Given Europe's cultural and linguistic heterogeneity we may expect that much of political communication and collective action will remain confined to nationally delimited public spheres. However, such national public spheres may themselves 'Europeanize'. The most straightforward way in which this may happen is when national public debates and collective action increasingly refer to European institutions and policies. This may happen in several ways. First, European institutions and their representatives may intervene themselves as actors in national public spheres, e.g. by criticising national policies or propagating European integration. Second, European institutions may be directly addressed by national collective actors, e.g. to intervene against an unwanted national policy. Third, European institutions and policies may be addressed indirectly, e.g. when a group demands from the national government to intervene on the European level to further its interests. Finally, European institutions and policies, or the European integration process generally, may be referred to in order to back demands and

policy viewpoints, e.g. when national governments argue that a specific national policy is necessary because of the need for 'harmonisation', or impossible because it cannot be implemented nationally without common European action or the implementation of similar policies in other member states.

*Vertical convergence from above*. Even if we do not find any explicit reference to Europe in public debates and collective action, the process of European integration may lead to a convergence of debates and mobilisation in national public spheres in the sense that increasingly similar issues and similar policy options are discussed in the different member states. A first variant by which such a convergence may occur proceeds in a top-down fashion and derives from common European policies and guidelines developed at the intergovernmental level and carried into national public spheres by member state governments. Often, the European origin of the resulting policy proposals remains obscured in subsequent national debates and mobilisation. E.g., during the 1990s many member states discussed or introduced changes in asylum policies limiting the rights of asylum seekers from 'safe countries of origin' or who had arrived by way of a 'safe third country'. The fact that these policy ideas originated in intergovernmental discussions and guidelines in the context of the Schengen and Dublin Agreements was often hardly mentioned in national public debates. Nevertheless, the result was an implicit convergence of national public debates on the asylum issue.

*Horizontal convergence through cross-national diffusion*. A second source of possible convergence is the increasing interdependence of European nation-states, particularly in the economic sphere as a result of the common market and the common currency. This implies that political developments, debates and conflicts in other member states become increasingly important for national policy-making. This may lead to increasing attention for public debates and collective action in other member states, or even the direct intervention of actors in the national public spheres of other member states than their own. As a result, public debates and collective acton campaigns can diffuse from one national public sphere to another. One example of such diffusion is the increasing exchange of opinion articles among newspapers from different European countries (e.g., the exchange of opinion articles among *El Pais, the Guardian* and *de Volkskrant* or the inclusion of translated versions of *Le Monde Diplomatique* as a monthly supplement to newspapers in Germany, Austria, the United Kingdom and other countries.

*Europe as a new conflict dimension in public spheres*. Europeanisation of public spheres, in whichever (combination) of the forms discussed above should not be misunderstood to necessarily imply a growing consensus among and within member states on the desirability and forms of further European integration. On the contrary, several authors (Bartolini 1997, 1999, see also Hix 1999, Zürn 1998) have argued that the opening up of national boundaries may create a new political cleavage between (real or perceived) 'winners' and 'losers' of Europeanisation. On the one hand, denationalisation creates new opportunities for social groups that control resources (e.g., higher education, investment capital) that can easily be transferred and converted across national boundaries. On the other hand, social groups that were formerly protected from competition and social decline by national trade barriers, immigration controls and welfare state arrangements (e.g., unskilled workers, small businesses, workers and employers in formerly protected industries) may stand to lose from the process of Europeanisation, or at least perceive a relative decrease in status relative to the 'winners'. With the increasing pace of European integration, such interest conflicts are likely to become more manifest and may develop into a new pro- vs. anti-integration cleavage in national public spheres, which partly cross-cuts and partly coincides with existing cleavages

such as those between left and right, centre and periphery, or materialist and postmaterialist. The rise of xenophobic and anti-European parties in many countries may be seen as a first indication of such a new cleavage (Kitschelt 1995). In addition to such new cleavages within national public spheres, European integration may also become more conflictual *between* member states who hold different views on the appropriate trajectories of integration. Thus, Europeanisation of public spheres may to an important extent occur by way of an increasing level of conflict over European integration. This does not have to be necessarily harmful for the development of a European collective identity, however. National identities have often been forged in such conflicts over different models of nation-building, as has for instance been argued for the Swiss case (Ernst 1998).

### 1.3.3 Other Forms of a De-Nationalisation of Public Spheres

Before we formulate our concrete research questions regarding the Europeanisation of public spheres, it is still important to note that Europeanisation is only one among several possible consequences of the denationalisation of politics. In many policy fields, European integration not only 'competes' with existing political arrangements on the nation-state level, but also with international organisations and policy arenas beyond Europe. E.g., in the field of humanitarian and military interventions, attempts to define common European policies have not been very successful yet, and international organisations such as NATO or the United Nations have played a more important role. Although Europe is clearly stronger in the field of economic policies, here too, it not only has to carve out its competences vis-à-vis the member states, but also with regard to institutions with a more global reach such as GATT, OECD, IMF or G-7. In addition, it is often argued that at least in some policy domains, denationalisation may also move in the opposite direction toward a greater role for regional and local policy arenas. To some extent such developments are stimulated by the EU itself, e.g. through its regional policies, the Council of the Regions, or the European Charter for Minority Languages.

These observations are important in the present context, for they imply that on the level of public debates and collective action in public spheres, as well, Europeanisation is not the only possible response to the denationalisation of politics. Europeanisation may be accompanied by, and interact with a simultaneous shift to regionalised or localised public spheres, as can be observed to some extent in regions with strong cultural or linguistic traditions and some degree of political autonomy, such as Catalonia or Scotland. Similarly, we may observe tendencies towards a globalisation of public debates and collective action that bypass both national and European levels, and directly address global actors such as the UN or multinational corporations. A recent example of this was the unexpected mobilisation against the Seattle meeting of the World Trade Organisation and similar subsequent 'anti-globalisation' protests in Davos and Washington. Therefore, our research design must take into account not just the national-European nexus, but also be sensitive to interactions with regionalisation and globalisation tendencies of public spheres. We do so by including in our research design (see below) policy areas in which regionalisation (e.g. the fields of culture promotion and agriculture) or globalisation (e.g., military and humanitarian interventions, asylum and refugee politics) tendencies may be expected to play a particularly important role. Moreover, our analysis will systematically include regional and transnational media and collective actors next to national ones.

**1.3.4 Descriptive Questions and Objectives**

On the descriptive level, we must note that the current debate on Europeanisation of public spheres is characterised by much theoretical speculation on the basis of poor and fragmented emprirical evidence. We know preciously little about to what extent and in which forms public spheres and patterns of political commuication and mobilisation are being transformed by the process of European integration. Our aim is to make an important contribution to filling this gap in our knowledge by systematically mapping degrees, forms and trends of Europeanisation of public spheres in different countries and in different policy domains. Referring to the five basic modes of Europeanisation introduced above, we want to provide quantitative and qualitative measures across countries, across policy domains and across time of:
- the degree and forms of supranationalisation of public spheres, collective action and public debates;
- the degree and forms of debates and mobilisation in national public spheres which focus on the European Union, its institutions and its policies;
- the degree and forms of (vertical) convergence or divergence between national debates and mobilisation as a result of common European guidelines and policies;
- the degree and forms of (horizontal) convergence or divergence between national debates and mobilisation as a result of cross-national diffusion;
- the degree and forms of new cleavages related to the process of European integration, both within, and between national public spheres.

To arrive at such measures, we will gather different types of content-analytic and interview data, which are intimately connected by way of a common research design. We will provide more detailed information on the research design below when we describe the individual workpackages, but want to briefly introduce the main features of the primary data we propose to gather here. First, we will conduct a detailed content analysis of news media coverage in each of the seven countries included in this study, as well as on the European level, referring to six substantive policy areas, as well as to the issue of European integration itself. This content analysis includes first a coding of **political 'claims' in the public sphere** (i.e., demands, proposals, criticisms, decisions etc.) made by collective actors in the form of statements or collective mobilisation (**workpackage 2**). All collective actors making claims on one of the selected policy fields will be included, ranging from government officials, party representatives, the judiciary, interest groups and NGO's to social movements. We will complement this 'political claims analysis' by a coding of **newspaper editorials** on the same issues in order to capture the own voice of the media in public debates (**workpackage 3**). Thirdly, our design includes a study of **the internet as a potentially new arena for transnational political communication**. We will trace and code websites, discussion groups and fora, as well as network links among them, which are devoted to political communication relating to European policies and institutions within our six substantive policy fields and/or relating to the European integration process itself (**workpackage 4**).

In addition, we will conduct a series of **expert interviews**. These interviews will complement the other workpackages by providing additional information on collective actors' political communication and mobilisation strategies, and will give us important feedback from practitioners on how to interpret our findings. In addition, we want to explicitly ask these experts about their expectations regarding future developments in European political communication and mobilisation. A first set of interviews – complementing workpackages 2 and 4 – will include representatives of the most important **collective actors involved in public debates and mobilisation** in the different policy fields (**workpackage 5**). A second set of interviews – complementing workpackage 3 – will be held with **actors involved in the**

**news production process**, i.e., press officers, journalists, and editors (**workpackage 6**). In combination, these data will allow us to draw a detailed map of the new, European political space, which should provide answers to a large number of empirical questions regarding trends and differences in the impact of European integration on different countries, policy domains, and collective actors.

### 1.3.5 Explanatory Framework and Hypotheses

Turning  to the explanatory level, we will analyze these findings using a theoretical framework combining insights from research on political mobilisation and social movements, on the one hand, and media and political communications research, on the other. Recent work on collective political action has emphasised that levels and forms of mobilisation by social movements, interest groups and citizens' initiatives are strongly influenced by so-called *political opportunity structures*, the set of opportunities and constraints offered by the institutional structure and political culture of the political systems in which these groups operate (e.g., Kitschelt 1986; Tarrow 1994). From this perspective, we can derive a series of guiding *hypotheses* regarding differences among countries and policy areas, as well as temporal trends.

We hypothesise that *cross-national differences* in political institutions (e.g., degree of centralisation, nature of the electoral system), as well as differences in elite approaches to European integration (e.g., from widespread euroskepticism in the UK to a relatively strong pro-European elite consensus in Germany) are important determinants of cross-national differences in degrees and forms of a Europeanisation of political mobilisation and communication. Similarly, we expect systematic differences in patterns of Europeanisation *across policy domains*, since each is characterised by a particular multi-level opportunity structure defining among other things the distribution of decision-making and implementation competences and capacities across the European, national and subnational levels.

On the *temporal dimension*, the political opportunity perspective leads us to generally expect increased levels of Europeanisation of political communication and mobilisation as a result of advancing European integration. However, unlike in the functionalist perspective, this connection between European integration and patterns of mobilisation and communication is not seen as a more or less automatic process of adaptation, but as depending crucially on the mediating role of political institutions and power configurations. With the Maastricht and Amsterdam treaties, and especially with the introduction of the common currency Euro in most member states on January 1, 1999, the European integration process has taken a qualitative leap forward. This entails important changes in the political opportunity structures facing different collective actors. First, the increased competences of European institutions and reach of European policies may imply new opportunities for collective actors to influence the policy process on issues relevant to their consituencies. E.g., on several occassions, actors have successfully appealed to the European Court of Justice to overturn national policies and regulations. Second, however, the increasing importance of the EU may also impose new constraints that make it more difficult for collective actors to exert influence on the policy process. Unitary regulations on the European level often strongly limit the latitude of national policies and may thereby constrain the mobilisation opportunities of groups which were traditionally well-connected to national policy-arenas (e.g., labour unions). In addition, due to the consensus model of decision-making in the Commission and Council of Ministers and the lack of transparency of the debates which lead up to many European-level decisions, it is often difficult for groups to keep track of the European policy-process and to make out which

channels of access to use and which institutions or policy-makers to address and to hold accountable.

The exact mix of opportunities and constraints that European integration implies for political mobilisation and communication will in our view be highly variable depending on the policy-area in question. In addition, there will be important *differences among collective actors* within policy areas. While for some contenders 'Europe' may on balance imply a more positive balance of opportunities, other actors in the same policy field may stand to loose influence (e.g., as a result of the predominance of 'negative integration' through deregulation, employers associations seem to have been better placed to exploit new opportunities produced by European integration than labour unions). Further, the balance of opportunities and constraints may look different for the same collective actors and the same policy areas in different countries. For collective actors from countries with strongly centralised political systems which provide relatively few institutional channels of citizens' access to the policy process (e.g., France), European integration may on balance imply an improvement in the balance of opportunities and constraints. However, for collective actors from countries whose political systems offer multiple points of access to the citizenry (e.g., Germany) the reverse may well be true, because the loss of national influence opportunities may not be outweighed by the new European channels of access.

Because in modern democracies media coverage is crucial for gaining political resonance and influence, we additionally draw on **theories of media agenda setting and news value** as developed in political communication and media research (Rogers and Dearing 1986; Iyengar 1993). In this approach, whether and how news events are covered by the media is explained by event characteristics such as their intensity, proximity, the status of the actor, or the possibilities for dramatisation and polarisation, as well as their fit with substantive media agendas and frames. Here we expect important differences in the degree to, and forms in which mobilisation and communication attempts related to the European Union enter the public sphere, depending on the public relations strategies used by collective actors and the selection criteria used by media professionals. In addition, we expect such differences to be related to differences in political opportunity structures across countries and policy domains. E.g., similar instances of political communication directed at the European Union will be treated differently depending on the degree of Europe's actual influence in the respective policy domain, or on the extent to which European integration is a controversial issue in the country in question.
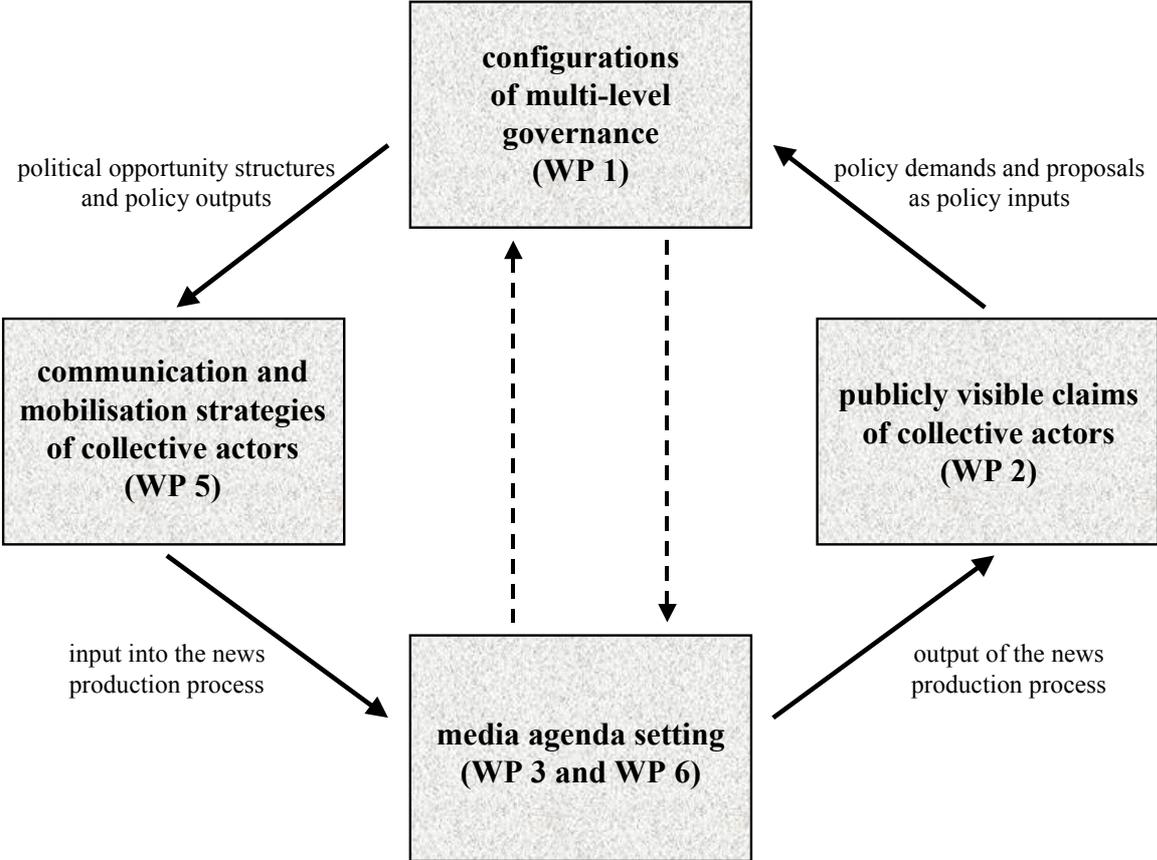
More generally, analyses of the reasons behind the *weak media presence of the EU's institutions and policies* often point to characteristics of the EU decision-making process that do not match the news value criteria journalists use in selecting news (Meyer 1999). The negotiations and consensus-building processes leading up to many important decisions in the EU, for instance in the Council of Ministers, are often kept outside the media spotlight in order not to endanger compromise solutions. However, this often entails that EU policies do not receive much media attention at all. Newsworthiness is promoted by such factors as the possibility of clear attributions of responsibility for policy problems and solutions, the presence of pronounced conflict lines, or opportunities for personalisation and dramatisation. In the case of many EU decisions, however, it is unclear who is responsible, conflicts remain invisible, and the emphasis in the EU's public relations on consensus and collegiality offers few possibilities for personalisation and dramatisation. More generally, the binary logic of opposition versus government, which is crucial to assuring media attentiveness in national democracies, is weakly developed in the EU.

The degree to which EU policies and institutions conform to media news selection criteria is however not uniform. Again, we may assume that important differences occur here across our three comparative dimensions: time, countries, and policy domains. Regarding **developments over time**, there is a growing commitment among European policy-makers to improve the Union's public presence and transparency. Moreover, there seems to be a related tendency to be more open about conflicts of interest among EU institutions and among member states. Further, recent institutional reforms have relativised the consensus principle and opened up the way to majoritarian forms of decision-making that are better geared to capturing media attention. **Among countries**, differences in the newsworthiness of EU policies and institutions may be expected to occur as a function of the degree to which EU integration is a controversial issue in national politics. Where this is the case, EU events will tend to draw more media attention, although that attention is likely to be focused on the implications of the event for national politics, rather than on the European dimension itself. Finally, we may expect differences in the degree and forms of media selection **across policy fields**. For instance, in such areas where the European Parliament has gained significant co-decision powers vis-à-vis the Commission, something resembling a government-opposition binarity may develop and enhance media attention. One example – albeit a not very positive one for the EU's public image – of this has been the stepping down of the previous Commission under pressure from the Parliament.

Figure B.1 (next page) presents a simplified graphical overview of our theoretical framework and the relations of the theoretical variables to our data workpackages. On top of the figure, we find configurations of multi-level governance, which present different types of policy outputs and political opportunity structures to collective actors who seek to interven with their demands and  proposals in the policy process. As indicated, such outputs and opportunity structures will vary from country to country, among policy domains, as well as over time. For the policy areas included in our research design (see below), workpackage 1 will provide an analysis of the relevant institutional configurations and policy settings that influence collective actors' communication and mobilisation strategies. Workpackage 5, consisting of interviews with collective actors in selected policy fields, aims at finding out how collective actors perceive and strategically react to the emergent structures of European multi-level governance in different policy fields. In addition, this workpackage asks how collective actors design their strategies to obtain favourable coverage in the media. In modern democracies, much of political mobilisation and communication that seeks to affect policies has to pass through the filter of the mass media to reach policy makers as well as the wider public.[2] Our workpackages 3 and 6, which respectively consist of an analysis of newspaper editorials, and interviews with media professionals, are designed to inquire into this filter function of the media, and will provide us with information on the criteria media employ for selecting and presenting particular types of political communication and mobilisation, and not others. The outputs of this process of news production in the form of publicly visible forms of claims-making is our main dependent variable, since it is here that political communication and mobilisation attempts become part of the public sphere in the proper sense, and thereby have the potential to influence policy deliberation as well as public opinion. Workpackage 2, which consists of an analysis of political claims by collective actors as they appear in the media, therefore plays a crucial role in our research design.

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[2] Of course, there are more direct ways for collective actors to intervene in the policy process, particularly lobbying and institutionalised consultation procedures. Such strategies are, however, not our main focus in this study because they cannot substitute for the public deliberation, participation, and transparancy effects from which political communcation and mobilisation in the public sphere derive their special role in democratic polities.

**Figure B.1:  Simplified Version of the Theoretical Model**

configurations
of multi-level
governance
(WP 1)

political opportunity structures
and policy outputs

policy demands and proposals
as policy inputs

communication and
mobilisation strategies
of collective actors
(WP 5)

publicly visible claims
of collective actors
(WP 2)

input into the news
production process

output of the news
production process

media agenda setting
(WP 3 and WP 6)

Our final data workpackage 4, which analyses the internet as a potential new arena for political communication and mobilisation is not represented in the figure.[3] This workpackage is precisely designed to find out whether the internet has the potential to provide collective actors with new channels to insert their claims effectively in the public sphere, without having to first pass through the mass media filter. This is arguably a highly important question that may have far-reaching effects on the structure of politics in the near future. For the EU this seems to be of even greater potential relevance given the weakness of traditional mass media on the European level, on the one hand, and the inherently transnational mode of communication that the internet seems to enable, on the other.

## 1.3.6 Prospective and Prescriptive Questions and Objectives

In an area undergoing rapid change such as the one we are studying, it is not only important to describe and explain the present state of affairs, but also to develop informed scenarios for future options and developments. This **prospective aim** of our research requires mobilising the practical, 'hands on' knowledge of expert practitioners, who are actively involved in shaping future developments. In the interviews of workpackages 5 and 6 we will therefore integrate a set of prospective questions where interview partners are asked to provide us with their informed estimates about the future development of European political mobilisation and communication along a number of dimensions. In addition to these estimates of probable future scenarios, we will ask respondents to indicate to what extent and in which sense these expectations differ from the scenario they find most desirable, and how they think their organisation will adapt and respond to these trends. The results of this prospective analysis will allow us to derive estimates about possible future scenarios and public conflicts surrounding European institutions and policies that will point the way for further research. Moreover, they will provide key information from the actor perspective for policy makers attempting to improve the preconditions for a development of political mobilisation and communication in Europe that can constructively involve the citizenry, the media and collective actors in the European policy process.

This brings us finally to our *prescriptive aims*. The fact that – contrary to the more settled patterns of national politics – European integration is an ongoing and open-ended process, implies for policy-makers a high degree of uncertainty regarding outcomes, on the one hand, but important opportunities for shaping the future, on the other. However, to optimally seize such opportunities, policy-makers need to have at their disposal sufficient information about the present state of affairs of the object of their policy interventions (our descriptive component), about causal interpendencies among relevant variables (our explanatory component), as well as about the expected and desired scenarios prevalent among actors within policy fields (our prospective component). We will bring together our policy-relevant findings in an Executive Summary Report (workpackage 12) that will be presented at a Final Conference in Brussels or Strasbourg involving policy makers, media professionals and representatives of collective actors. This report will include a set of general recommendations regarding ways to enhance and deepen the European dimension of political mobilissation and communication, aimed at these different practitioner categories.

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[3] One might visualise the main question of this workpackage as an horizontal arrow (with a question mark) going through the middle of the figure from left to right, i.e. investigating whether the internet enables collective actors to make their claims publicly visible under circumvention of the traditional mass media.

**1.3.7 Research Design**

Our *research design* includes *three comparative dimensions*. *Cross-nationally*, the design includes seven national case studies of *Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands and Switzerland*. Apart from considerations having to do with the qualifications of the investigators and with building on existing cross-national research co-operation, this set of countries was chosen so as to include the most important EU member states, and to provide for sufficient variation along potentially relevant dimensions such as the size of the country and the date of entry into the EU. Moreover, from the theoretical perspective of political opportunity structures it is important that this choice provides for a large variety of political systems (e.g. federal versus centralised, majoritarian versus proportional electoral systems, important differences in the composition of party systems). Switzerland has been included as a non-member state because the structure of its highly fragmented, multi-lingual public sphere may provide interesting clues as to the possible future development of European public spheres. In addition to these national cases, the design includes a separate case study of transnational political mobilisation and communication on the *EU level* that will – as far as possible – be structured parallel to the national cases. Along the *time dimension*, our main focus will be on the *period from 1999* (de facto introduction of the common currency as a qualitative leap in the integration process) *to 2002*. In order to be able to place the findings for this period in a long-term perspective, we will, where possible, gather data for selected earlier years, namely 1995, 1990, 1985 and 1980. The interview workpackages will in addition have a prospective component and inquire into collective actors' and media professionals' expert estimates regarding **future trends** in European political communication and mobilisation.

Because we expect degrees and forms of Europeanisation of public spheres to vary with different institutional settings, we have chosen *six different policy domains* on which our study will focus. The choice of these domains was structured by the EU's pillar structure as defined in the Maastricht and Amsterdam treaties, which defines different distributions of competencies for decision-making, policy development and implementation between the European and national levels. Thus, each pillar defines a specific multi-level political opportunity structure (which is further complicated by nationally specific distributions of power in policy domains among national, regional and local levels of governance). Because of the fact that it has hitherto been the dominant driving force behind integration, we will choose two issue areas from the first, common market pillar. Moreover, the domain of agricultural politics takes up such an important place in the EU's competencies and budget, that it merits to be considered separately from other common market issues. From those policy areas outside the pillar structure two will be chosen as well, because important differences may be expected between such policy areas for which harmonisation of national policies has been explicitly formulated as an aim, and such policy areas where this is not the case. Within each of the analytic categories of issues thus circumsribed, we have chosen specific issues for study that are of particular salience in present mobilisation and debates related to European integration and may be expected to remain so in the near future. Thus, we arrive at the following selection of policy domains:

- Common market policies, agriculture: *subsidies, livestock and dairy quotas, animal disease control* (e.g., BSE and other disease control, regulation of hormone usage, EU quota regulations);
- Common market policies, other: *monetary (currency) politics* (e.g., introduction of the Euro, interest rate adjustments);

- Foreign and defence policies: ***military troops deployment abroad*** (regardless of the purpose (military intervention, humanitarian aid, peace keeping, etc.; e.g., Kosovo, Afghanistan, Macedonia);
- Justice and internal policies: ***immigration: regulation of entry and exits*** (e.g., Schengen co-operation, Bosnian refugees);
- Co-operation outside the pillar structure aiming at harmonisation: ***retirement and pension schemes*** (e.g., retirement age, pension funds);
- Co-operation outside the pillar structure not aiming at harmonisation: ***primary and secondary education*** (e.g., curriculum issues, resource allocation, private versus public schools).

To avoid misunderstandings, we want to emphasise that we are not primarily interested in these substantive topics for their own sake, but in the role which European institutions and policies play in public debates and political mobilisation in these issue areas, and in cross-national differences and temporal developments in this respect.

Figure B.2 (next page) presents a graphic overview of the three comparative dimensions of our research design.

**Figure B.2:   The Three Comparative Dimensions of the Research Design**

**Temporal:**  1980, 1985, 1990, 1995, 1999-2002, future trends

**Policy domains:**

• Regulation of
  livestock farming
• Monetary (currency)
  politics
• Humantarian aid and
  military interventions
• Asylum and refugee
  politics
• Retirement and
  pension schemes
• Culture promotion

**Cross- and transnational:**

• France
• Germany
• Italy
• Netherlands
• Spain
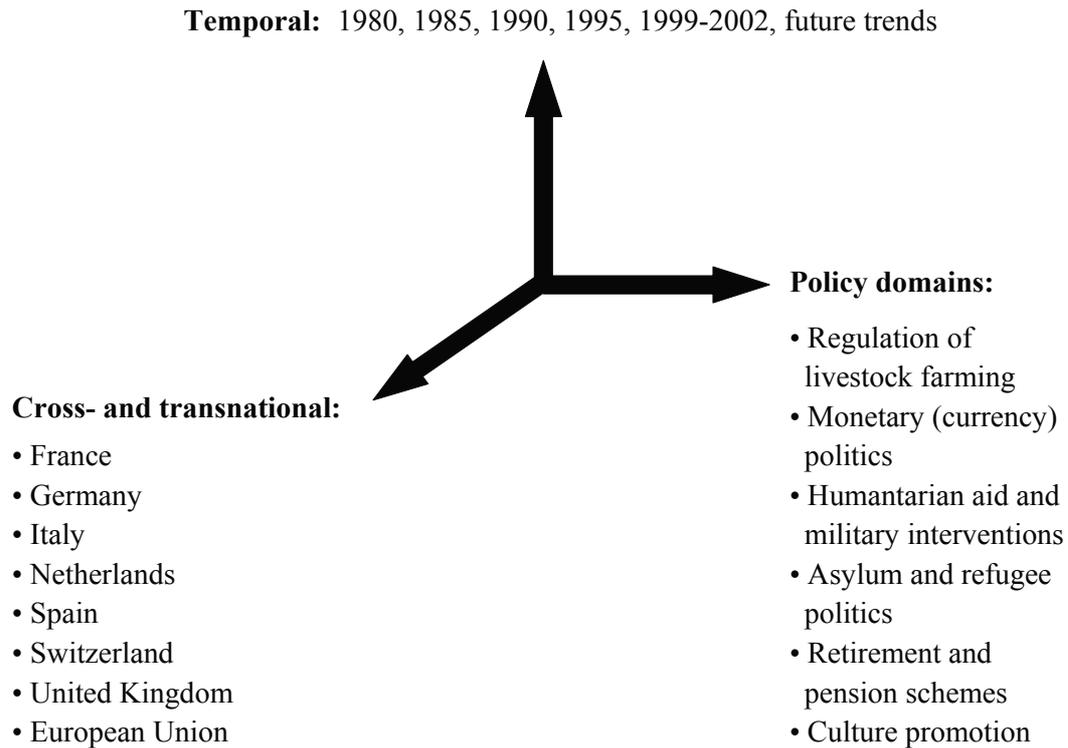• Switzerland
• United Kingdom
• European Union

Table B.1 shows how the time dimension of our design relates to the different workpackages. Whereas the cross-national and policy field dimensions will be applied consistently throughout the data workpackages this is not the case for the time dimension. The historical dimension (data for the years 1995, 1990, 1985 and 1980) will only be gathered for workpackages 1 (opportunity structures) and workpackages 2 and 3 (analysis of public claims by collective actors and of newspaper editorials). For the two interview workpackages 5 and 6 it would in principle have been possible to include a retrospective component, but we judged this to be both too time-consuming and too problematic in terms of reliability of responses to warrant the extra resource investment. The internet (workpackage 4) is obviously too young a phenomenon to be analysed historically. The future trends, prospective compoment, by contrast, is not realisable for workpackages 1-4 (we obviously cannot analyse future media or internet content or future, as yet unknown, opportunity structures), but will be integrated in the interview workpackages to develop scenarios on the basis of expert opinions that will, however, address issues relevant to workpackages 1-4.

**Table B.1: Temporal Frames of the Data Workpackages**

|  |  | Historical trends (1995, 1990, 1985, 1980) | Core period 1999-2002 | Prospective future developments |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| WP 1 | Political opportunity structures | + | + | − |
| WP 2 | Political claims analysis | + | + | − |
| WP 3 | Analysis of editorials | + | + | − |
| WP 4 | Analysis of internet sites | − | + | − |
| WP 5 | Interviews with collective actors | − | + | + |
| WP 6 | Interviews with media professionals | − | + | + |

### 1.3.8 Data and Methods

The data we will gather along the three comparative dimensions are organised into **six data workpackages**. They will be described in greater detail in PART B.2, but need to be briefly introduced here (see also to Figure B.1 above). **Workpackage 1** consists of an analysis of **multi-level opportunity structures** in the six policy domains in each of the countries and on the European level. This workpackage will be based on a review of the relevant literature and secondary data. Since detailed knowledge about such opportunity structures is crucial for interpreting the rest of our data, this workpackage is situated at the beginning of the project (see below under workplan and timetable). The results will be reported in case reports for each of the seven countries and for the EU level and then brought together in a cross-national report.

**Workpackage 2** occupies, as indicated, a central place in our design and is the most time and resource intensive of our workpackages. It consists of a coding of **political claims made by collective actors** as reported in print media and measures the publicly visible side of their political mobilisation and communication. The method used has been inspired by protest event studies of social movements (e.g., Tarrow 1989), but extends this methodology to include not only demonstrations and other unconventional protest forms, but also discursive forms of claims-making in the forms of public statements, reports, interviews, press conferences, litigation and so forth. Moreover, we will not limit our coding to typical protest actors, but include interest groups such as labour unions or farmers' organisations, civil society groups such as the churches and welfare organisations, as well as representatives of political parties, and of legislative, adminsitrative and judicial institutions. Needless to say, the spectrum of actors included will also span the spectrum of relevant arenas of multi-level governance: local and regional, national, European, and other transnational.

While workpackage 2 focuses on political claims by collective actors as reported by the media, the complementary **workpackage 3** focuses on the media's explicit own voice in public debates in the form of **newpaper editorials**. These will be coded in similar ways as the political claims by non-media actors of workpackage 2. Because of their particular rather detailed argumentive structure, however, the analysis of editorials will allow us to go deeper into the interpretive frames that are behind policy evaluations, proposals and demands than will generally be the case for the claims in workpackage 2.

As already indicated above, **workpackage 4** will focus on the **internet** as a potentially new arena for political communication. We will do so first by an exploratory analysis of internet sites relating to European policies and institutions in our selected policy fields, or which deal with the European integration process in a general sense. We will pay special attention to links among internet sites, in order to be able to map communicative network structures in this emergent field of European political communication. In a second phase, we will focus on selected internet sites and code the political claims with regard to Europe in similar ways as the claims of workpackages 2 and 3. Her too, we will additionally pay attention to the network structure of internet communication by asking site managers to provide us for a specified period with information on the numbers of hits they receive, and with referral reports showing from where people arrive at their site and where they go after having visited the site. Needless to say, we will be particularly interested in the extent to which such communicative network transcend national boundaries and thereby constitute a transnational space for political communication.

**Workpackage 5** consists of involved **semi-structured interviews with collective actors in political mobilisation and communication** in our selected policy fields. The workpackage complements workpackage 2, and the results of this workpackage will serve as an important input

for the interviews. The other way around, the interviews will be of great assistence to interpreting the findings of workpackage 2. Interview partners will be selected from five categories of collective actors (government/administration, political parties, socio-economic interest groups, NGO's, and social movement groups; the same categorisation will also guide the selection of internet sites in the second phase of workpackage 4) in each of the policy fields. We will ask interview partners about their action repertoires for intervening in the policy process and inserting their claims in the mass media, and in particular how their strategies are affected and transformed by the process of European integration and emergent structures of multi-level governance. Furthermore, we will ask the interview partners if, and how they use the internet as a new forum for political communication. We will also ask them to reflect on what they think are likely scenarios for the future development of political communication and mobilisation in the European Union, thus adding a prospective component to the interviews. Interview partners will systematically be included in our dissemination strategy by keeping them updated over the course of the project about results such as working papers and final reports, as well as about public events in the context of the project such as the Final Presentation (workpackage 13).

**Workpackage 6** stands in a similar relation to workpackage 5, as workpackage 3 to workpackage 2. This workpackage consists of **interviews with media professionals** from national and European media, both print and broadcast, as well as **media relations experts from European institutions** (e.g., press officers of the European Commission or the European Central Bank). Here we are again interested in the factors behind media agenda setting and news selection about European issues. Interview partners will be selected in such a way that they encompass the different 'selection gates' in the production of European news: spokespersons of EU institutions, transnational media, EU correspondents of national media, and editors and journalists on the national level. Again, we will introduce a prospective component into the design by asking respondents about their future expectations and desires regarding different dimensions of Europeanisation of political communication and mobilisation (here in the form of a so-called 'Delphi' questionnaire, see the detailed desciption in PART B.2).

The **methods** used for analysing the data form the different workpackages will be both qualitative and quantitative. A qualitative frame analyisis of the interview, mass media, and web site content data will be undertaken to reveal differences among countries, collective actors, and policy domains regarding the way in which Europe, its institutions and policies are perceived, evaluated and interpretatively packaged. Apart from qualitative in-depth questions, the interviews will include a set of standardised questions regarding collective actors' mobilisation and communication strategies, their contacts with European institutions and other collective actors, as well as information on their organisation's structure and resources. These data can be comparatively analyzed using simple descriptive statistical techniques. In addition to qualative elements, the content-analytic data will where possible and appropriate be numerically coded so as to allow the employment of more sophisticated statistical techniques. Across countries and policy domains these include analysis of variance, across time also event history and time series analyses. The data on linkages among websites derived from workpackage 4, finally, will also allow the employment of techniques of network analysis.

### 1.3.9 Integrative Workpackages

The six data workpackages will be integrated by way of a number of integrative workpackages, consisting of general project meetings (in addition to meetings dedicated to specific workpackages), conferences and workshops, and a final scientific report and Executive Summary.

Over the course of the project, **three general project meetings** will be held, which will all be dedicated to integrating the different elements of the research design into a coherent framework. The first of these meetings (workpackage 7) will be primarily dedicated to the finalisation of the research design and workplan, the second (workpackage 8) to the interpretation of first results, and the third (workpackage 10) to preparing the final project reports and the finalisation of the exploitation and dissemination plan.

To enhance dissemination and mobilise structural feedback from practitioners in the field, we have established a **Board of Advisors**, which presently has 14 members from different countries as well from the EU level, and includes representatives of the different expert categories relevant to our research design and questions (policy-makers, collectiev actors in political mobilisation and communication, media journalists and editors). Over the course of the project, **three workshops** with this Board will be held. The first of these is integrated in the first general project meeting (workpackage 7), the second in the mid-term Expert Conference (workpackage 9, see below), the third in the third general project meeting (workpackage 10). From these workshops with expert practitioners we hope to receive valuable suggestions for the carrying out our research plans, the interpretation of our results, and ways in which to optimise dissemination of the findings.

First findings will in addition be reported at an **Expert Conference** that will be organised near the middle of the funding period (workpackage 9). To this conference, we will invited external speaker, both from academic specialists, and experts drawn from the practical field. To enhance dissemination, the conference will be concluded with a press conference. A selection of revised papers will be published in an edited conference volume.

The final results of the project will be reported in a **final scientific report** (workpackage 11), which builds on a series of reports for the different workpackages and will emphasise linkages between the different workpackages and cross-national and European dimensions of the findings. This report will in turn be the basis for an **Executive Summary Report** (workpackage 12) that will contain a summary of findings from the viewpoint of practitioners in the field and will include a set of strategic and policy recommendations to be drawn from the data. This report will be published both in English and in French.

The Executive Summary Report will form the basis for a **Final Presentation** of the project's findings in Brussels or Strasbourg. This will be a praxis-oriented rather than an academic conference and will be an improtant vehicle for the dissemination of our results among potential user groups such as European and national policy-makers, news media, and other collective actors involved in political communication and mobilisation.

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