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Report

Political communication on the Internet
Part 1: Representative sample of websites

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Introduction

Within the framework of the Europub.com project[1], work package four is conceptualised to explore the potential impact of the Internet as a communication technology that facilitates new emergent forms of public sphere, and which provides new opportunities for political interaction by organisations and citizens in the public domain. To examine the Internet as such a potentially new arena for political communication we separated the analysis in two parts. In the first part, which we present in this report, we concentrate on public visibility of actors on the Internet, by analysing results given by search engines in return to issue specific search strings. In the second part we will analyse the link structures between collective actors that operate in seven different issue fields.

So far much of the theoretical discussion on the potential for new forms of political communication through the new media technologies has been polarised among arguments, which on one side visualise the emergence of a 'civic commons' as a positive development for democracy. For example, Kellner (1998), who states that the Internet has produced new public spheres and spaces for information, debate, and participation that contain the potential to invigorate democracy and to increase the dissemination of critical and progressive ideas. Negroponte (1995) even sees the potential of the digital technology to be a natural force drawing people into greater world harmony. Others take a more critical view, seeing access to the Internet simply as another medium that will replicate and perhaps exacerbate the existing divisions between the 'haves' and 'have-nots' among collective actors in terms of their access to politics and capacities to mobilise public attention. Kubicek (1997) states that the Internet has very different functions and consequences under different environmental conditions, so that it can be fitted into almost all existing socio-cultural settings and is more likely to consolidate and strengthen them than to act as a causal agent of change. Sunstein (2001) argues that the Internet may create a high degree of social fragmentation (balkanization), of group polarization and of local cascades which will produce severe risks for democracy. As yet such debates have been couched largely in normative terms, which is perhaps not surprising considering the large amount of speculation involved. Our aim is to remain future-oriented but to make predictions that start out from empirically grounded findings.

This integrated report of the Internet analysis within work package four is aimed to give an overview of the results of the first part of the exploration of political communication on the Internet. Here, the starting point of analysis is the Internet itself. For structuring the Internet as our object of analysis we simulated search processes by the "common" Internet user for information about the seven policy fields. In this way we narrowed down our research field to the question how people mainly use the Internet when they are looking for information. This corresponds to our approach in the newspaper analysis (work package two) where we are not looking directly at "reality" but at the representation of reality by media, which are filtering and selecting the complexity of available information. For the newspaper analysis we decided to use widely read newspapers for examining the media public sphere. In a similar way, the aim of this first part of Internet analysis is less to see how citizens actually use the Internet for political

[1] This project is sponsored by the European Commission in the context of its 5th Framework programme (project number HPSE-CT2000-00046). For an outline, see Koopmans and Statham (2002), available on the project website at http://europub.wz-berlin.de.

communication, but to look which actors are "visible" on the Internet in regard to specific policy fields. To specify visibility, we took into account that most of the Internet users use search engines to get information on the Internet. Because of this, we decided to analyse the space of political communication that is opened up by search engines in response to issue specific search strings.

The main emphasis of this report is put on a comparative view across our seven countries of analysis, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. For presenting the findings we will structure this report mainly along two crucial questions:

1. **How hierarchical is political communication on the Internet?**
2. **How Europeanised is political communication on the Internet?**

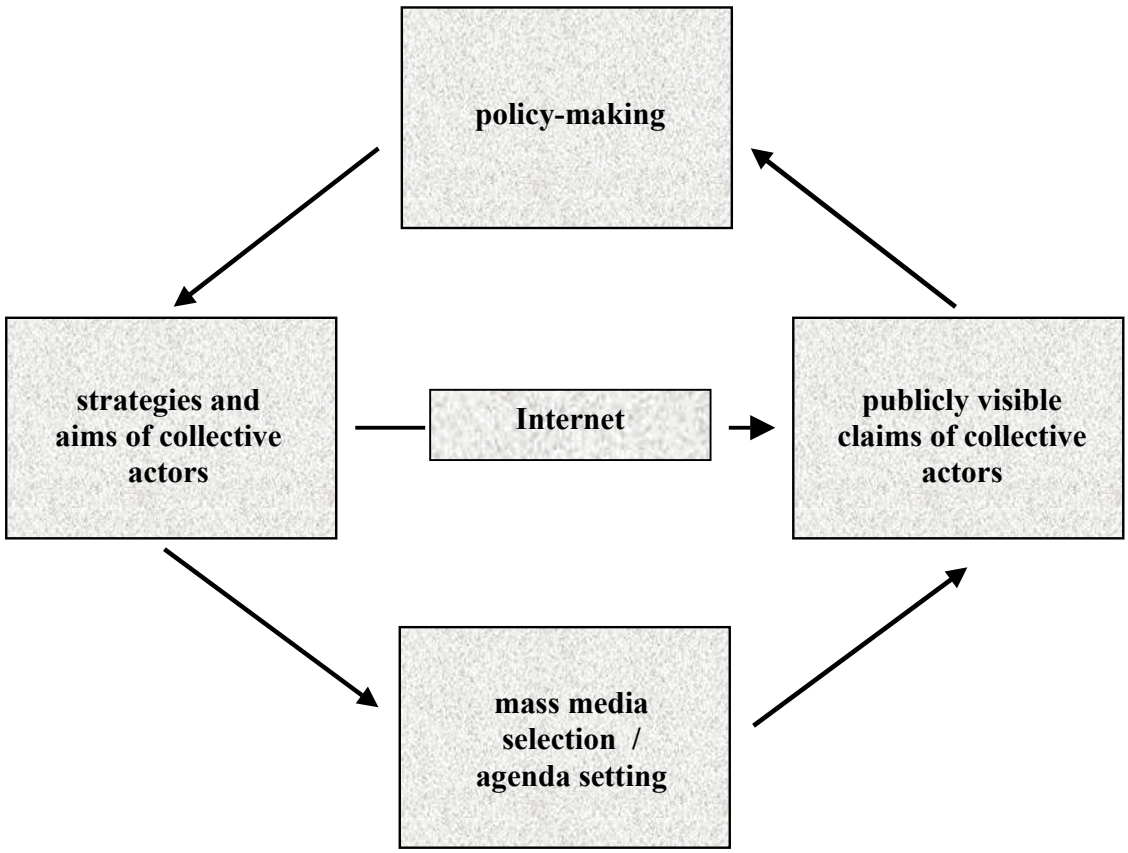
First, we ask if indeed as is often argued, the Internet provides better opportunities for less-institutionalised actors from within civil society to participate in public debates and deliberation than is possible through the traditional mass media. The latter are characterized by a strong selection bias – driven by journalists' commitment to so-called "news values" – in favour of state representatives and institutional interests. Much of the literature on the Internet argues that this new communication technology allows less resourceful actors to circumvent these selection barriers and directly communicate with other collective actors, policymakers, and with the wider public. Against this, one may argue that the Internet, too, is hierarchically structured, because the large majority of people do not access the Internet randomly, but use portals, catalogues, and – above all – search engines to find information. Rössler (1999: 119) describes search engines as an automated variant of a gatekeeper, whose catalogue of criteria is defined by the users themselves. Thus, these Internet gatekeepers may or may not be equally selective as the journalists and editors who are the gatekeepers of the traditional media public sphere, or they may be selective in different ways. Presently, we know virtually nothing about this, and our analysis aims to begin filling this gap.

Our second central question refers to the potential contribution of the Internet to a Europeanisation of public communication and mobilisation. Given the inherently transnational character of Internet technology, and the possibilities for multi-lingual communication supply, the Internet might be considered a medium that may help overcome some of the infrastructural and linguistic (national) boundaries that have often stood in the way of a Europeanisation of traditional media public spheres. Theoretically, the Internet is a public space without borders in which it is as easy and as cheap to communicate with one's neighbour as with someone on the other side of the globe. Moreover, the organisations (portals, search engines, providers, etc.) that structure access to the Internet are generally much more transnational than the still mainly national scope of print and audiovisual media. All this would suggest that the Internet provides much better opportunities for transnational actors, and European ones in particular, to achieve public visibility and resonance. Even if the actors themselves remain nationally based, we might expect them to find better opportunities to frame their demands in ways that go beyond national borders. Against this one may hold a more sceptical view, which emphasizes the subordinate role that political communication plays on the Internet, as well as the continuing relevance of national languages as the preferred medium of access. Again, we do not know which of these views is true because of a virtual absence of empirical data.

Theoretical Model

In order to understand how the Internet may affect patterns of political communication and mobilisation, it is useful to first look at the role of the traditional mass media in the policy process.

Figure1: Simplified version of theoretical model



The theoretical model displayed in Figure 1 starts with collective actors who want to influence the policy process. While some resourceful actors may be able to exert such influence without mobilising visibility and support in the public sphere (e.g., by way of lobbying, financial support for political candidates, etc.), most societal interests are not in a position to affect the policy process in such a direct way. They must become publicly visible and mobilise the support of other societal actors. It is through mobilising such public support that they may then exert pressure on policy-makers. This makes collective actors crucially dependent on the mass media, because in modern democratic societies it is only through them that public visibility and support can be gained. Passing the selection barriers of the mass media is far from self-evident. On a

typical day in a medium-sized democratic society, thousands of press statements are issued by a wide variety of parties, interest groups, and voluntary associations, hundreds of demonstrations, pickets, and other protests are staged, and dozens of press conferences vie for the attention of the public. Many of these attempts to enter the public sphere do not receive any media attention at all, some may receive limited and localised coverage, and only very few of them succeed in achieving a high level of public visibility. From communications and media research we know quite a lot about the so-called 'news values' that structure the decisions of journalists and editors to assign newsworthiness to 'stories' or not (e.g., Galtung and Ruge 1965; Schulz 1976).

The Internet, now, offers the potential to collective actors to circumvent the traditional mass media and to directly mobilise public visibility through their online presence. This is illustrated by the causal path from left to right through the middle of the figure. At first sight, the Internet seems to be a non-hierarchical communicative space, which allows everybody to present and retrieve information and opinions without being dependent on the selection and description biases of the traditional mass media. With a very limited investment of resources, everybody can set up a homepage and thereby make his or her opinions accessible to a worldwide public.

It would be naïve, however, to think that within the Internet selection processes do not play a role. It is easy to see that there must be a heavy selection pressure in the Internet, too. Precisely because it is so easy to set up a web page, there is a huge oversupply of web offerings that vie for the attention of the online public. The amount of available websites is so large that even for a relatively delimited topic it would be impossible for a user to look at all the websites that offer information or opinions on the issue. Apart from the impossibility to look at everything that might be relevant, the enormous number of websites also creates the problem of how to find relevant websites. Without the assistance of some kind of map to guide one through the sheer endless web space, the Internet would be a labyrinth in which nobody would be able to find what he or she is looking for. Therefore the question should be how Internet users actually get to the information they look for on the Internet?

Selection processes and visibility on the Internet

Obviously, it is no problem if the user exactly knows which website of which actor s/he wants to visit. In this case s/he simply needs to find out the web-address. To facilitate this, resourceful actors with a web presence are willing to pay substantial sums for a web address that is easy to identify and to memorise. If this would be the only way to retrieve information online, the Internet would be not more than a new access to information about actors the user knows and is interested in anyway. There is hardly a qualitative difference in this sense between getting information from or about a certain political actor via the Internet, or by telephone, by mail, or through personal contact. In a quantitative regard, there are of course advantages to using the Internet to contact a political actor or to get information about his political position: more information can be retrieved more up-to-date and without much effort in time or money. But still this contact depends on a pre-existing knowledge and interest of the public in a particular actor and his positions. Taking into account that in modern societies the public attention given to certain collective actors is strongly influenced by their prominence in the traditional mass media, the Internet would probably only strengthen the existing patterns of access to the public sphere

for different actors. Furthermore the inherent non-hierarchical character of the Internet would not have any practical implications since actors would only be able to become visible if they would be known independently from their online presence, namely from their presence within the public sphere of the traditional mass media.

For assessing the Internet's new potential, it is therefore more interesting to look at how information retrieval is structured for users who do not have a pre-existing interest in one particular site of one particular actor, but who want to get information and opinions about a certain topic from a variety of actors and perspectives. In such cases, several studies show that the most often used means of access to web information are search engines and links or recommendations from other websites. Among several studies that analyse how Internet users search for information on the Internet or find out about websites they did not know before the number of people that use search engines varies between 70% and 90%. Following the links or recommendations on other websites accounts for 60% to 90% of all means of finding information online.[2]

Search engines

Search engines and portals select a sample from the numerous websites offered on the Internet in regard to a certain search issue defined by the Internet user. In this way, search engines act as gatekeepers to the web space and disclose a certain part of "online-reality" according to particular criteria. The criteria used tend to differ from one search engine to another. Some offer the possibility to simply buy a high visibility on their search result lists, so that, e.g., when you type in "public sphere" our project website would always come up first. Like the commercial trade in easy web addresses, this selection mechanism simply tends to reproduce offline differences of power on the Net: the offline rich can buy themselves a prominent web presence. However, most of the commonly used search engines use more 'democratic' criteria.

Generally, search engines do not search the World Wide Web directly, but the contents of their databases.[3] There are two different kinds of database building and indexing along which search engines can be distinguished, whether the database is built automatically, manually or in a mixed way. Directories depend on human for building their databases. Short descriptions of the websites are submitted to the search engine's directory by the website's owner or editors write descriptions for the sites they review. A search looks for matches only in the descriptions submitted. Search engines that create their database automatically are so called "true search engines". They crawl the web by using software called "spider", "robots" or "crawlers". After spiders find pages, they pass them on to another computer program for "indexing". This program identifies the text, links, and other content in the page and stores it in the search engine database's files so that the database

[2] Forrester Research Inc. (2000); Fittkau & Maaß (2000); Graphic, Visualisation & Usability Center (1998); Alexander, J./Powell, J./Tate, M. A. (2001)

[3] The following mainly refers to Sullivan, D. (2002);
"Search Engines" online available: http://webreference.com/content/search/how.html AND
"How search engines work, search engine features" online available: http://www.whitelines.nl/html/search-engines.html

can be searched by keyword and whatever more advanced approaches are offered. Search engines that maintain their databases in both ways, automatically and manually, are called Hybrid search engines. There are also search engines that search several other search engines to compile on these basis their result list, these are called Meta Search Engines (e.g. Metager).

It is obvious that the different types of database building and indexing lead to different results. Among others, some search engines index more web pages than others. Some search engines also index web pages more often than others. The result is that no search engine has the exact same collection of web pages to search through. That naturally produces differences, when comparing their results. However, the results of different search engines differ not only because of different databases and indexing but also because of different forms of result ranking. The general aim of search engines is to return the most relevant pages at the top of their lists. To determine this relevancy, crawler-based search engines follow a set of rules (algorithm). Exactly how a particular search engine's algorithm works is a closely-kept trade secret. However, all major search engines follow, to different extents, some general rules. One primary criteria is the location and frequency of the key word on a web page. Pages with the search terms appearing in the HTML title tag are often assumed to be more relevant than others to the topic. Search engines also check if the search keywords appear near the top of a web page, such as in the headline or in the first few paragraphs of text. The assumption is that any page relevant to the topic will mention those words right from the beginning. This location/frequency method is very susceptible to attempts of website owners to influence their position within the result list. By repeating a word hundreds of times on a page (spamming) they try to increase the frequency and thus to get their page higher in the listing. Search engines watch for common spamming methods in a variety of ways and have also developed so called “off page” ranking criteria that cannot be easily influenced by webmasters. The most popular one is link analysis. By analyzing how pages link to each other, a search engine can both determine what a page is about and whether that page is deemed to be “important” and thus deserves a high ranking within the result list. In addition, sophisticated techniques are used to screen out attempts by webmasters to build “artificial” links designed to boost their rankings. Another “off page” factor is clickthrough measurement. In short, this means that a search engine may watch what results someone selects for a particular search, then eventually drop high-ranking pages that are not attracting clicks, while promoting lower-ranking pages that do pull in visitors. The criteria of links and clickthrough measurement are emergent phenomena that are neither imposed from above, nor obviously dependent on the amount of resources controlled by an actor. However, since past popularity of a website is in this routine the determinant of the prominence in the search listing, the theoretical effect of such search criteria seems to be a path-dependent process that reinforces the visibility of websites that are already popular and prominent. This will inevitably introduce inequalities in the Internet space, by making some websites more visible and more easily accessible, and others less so.

In one important sense the role of Internet gatekeepers is certainly much more restricted than that of the traditional mass media. While the mass media not only ‘control’ who is presented in the public sphere (selection bias) but also how the activities of these actors are presented (description bias), search engines and portals only provide the access to specific actors. On the websites the actors themselves decide which information they want to provide and which not. Furthermore collective actors may themselves act as gatekeepers to other information and opinions on the Internet, by way of providing links to other websites. Next to the gatekeeping functions of search engines, this is a second important way in which access to information on the Internet is structured. While search engines and portals guide the user through the Internet space by

presenting a hierarchical sample of relevant websites, one may alternatively surf through the web space by jumping via links from one web page to another. We can denote these two types as[4]:

- ***vertical, hierarchical selection*** by search engines
- ***horizontal, network selection*** by way of the link structures between different actors

In the first part of our Internet analysis - for which this integrated report will summarise the main findings – we especially focus on the first type of selection, via search engines. In the second part of our Internet research, we will investigate horizontal network linkages between websites more in detail.

Research design

To analyse the spheres of political communication that are selected by search engines we used the two most often used search engines in each of our countries to search the Internet for information about the seven policy fields of our project. The search engines used in each country are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: **Search engines used in each country**

Germany	Google.de, Fireball.de
Spain	Google.es, Altavista.es
France	Google.fr, Voila.fr
Italy	Arianna, Virgilio
Netherlands	Google.nl, Vindex.nl
United Kingdom	Google.uk, MSN.uk
Switzerland	Search.ch

Switzerland is a special case, because the most often used search engine in the German speaking part of Switzerland is the same as in Germany (Google.de) and the same applies for the French speaking part where Google.fr is the most often used search engines. Because of this, we decided to use the next often used search engines in both parts of Switzerland. In this way, the findings for German and France also apply for Switzerland when the search engines are Google.de or Google.fr and when the search strings are the same. Thus, even though we will analyse the situation in Switzerland in the following on the basis of the data from the searches with "Search.ch" it has to be kept in mind, that the findings for Germany and France apply in some extent also to Switzerland.

Since the searches of a search engine can vary from day to day, it was exactly scheduled on which day the teams should search with which search string. There were two periods of coding which took place in July and November 2002. The only exception is Switzerland where, because

[4] Of course, to the extent that search engines use link frequencies as a search criteria, the two selection mechanisms are related.

of technical problems, only the second round of coding was conducted. Because of this, the Swiss data will be weighted by the factor two in the analysis, unless we look at distributions by countries.

As search strings we used one general and one specific term for each policy field and translated them in the language of each of our countries. Given our question about the Internet as a transnational space, it was of course a consideration for us whether we should search in the national language of each of our countries, or, alternatively, should use English everywhere. We decided against the latter option because outside a rather small business and scientific elite, most people search the Internet in their own language. The potential of the Internet as a transnational medium does not lie in English becoming the dominant web language, but in the possibility of offering the same information parallel in different languages (as on the EU website). Such multilingual websites are also picked up by our searches in national languages. The following tables show the search strings used in each country. All search strings also included "2002" to get some kind of actuality if possible.

MONETARY POLITICS		
DE	Geldpolitik	Leitzins Entscheidung
ES	Política monetaria	Tasas de Interés decisión
FR	politique monétaire	taux d'intérêt décision
IT	politica monetaria	tasso d'interesse decisione
NL	monetair beleid	rentebesluit
UK	monetary politics	interest rate decision
CH/(DE)	Geldpolitik	Leitzins Entscheidung
CH/(FR)	politique monétaire	taux d'intérêt décision

AGRICULTURE		
DE	Landwirtschaft Subventionen	BSE Rinder
ES	Agricultura Ayudas	EEB vacas
FR	agriculture aides	ESB vaches
IT	agricoltura sussidi	BSE mucche
NL	landbouw subsidies	BSE koeien
UK	agriculture subsidies	BSE cows
CH/(DE)	Landwirtschaft Subventionen	BSE Rinder
CH/(FR)	agriculture subventions	ESB vaches

IMMIGRATION		
DE	Zuwanderungspolitik	Abschiebung
ES	Política de inmigración	Deportación
FR	politique d'immigration	reconduite à la frontière
IT	politica dell'immigrazione	accompagnamento alla frontiera
NL	immigratiebeleid	uitzetting
UK	immigration politics	deportation
CH/(DE)	Immigrationspolitik	Ausschaffung
CH/(FR)	politique d'immigration	exécution du renvoi

TROOPS DEPLOYMENT		
DE	Truppen Stationierung	Truppen Friedenssicherung
ES	Despliegue tropas	Tropas mantenimiento de la paz
FR	déploiement de troupes	troupes maintien de la paix
IT	spiegamento di truppe	truppe mantenimento pace
NL	troepen stationering	troepen vredesmissie
UK	troops deployment	troops Peacekeeping
CH/(DE)	Truppen Stationierung	Truppen Friedenssicherung
CH/(FR)	déploiement de troupes	troupes maintien de la paix

RETIREMENT AND PENSION SCHEMES		
DE	Rentenpolitik	Renten demographisch
ES	Política de pensiones	Pensiones demográfico
FR	politique des retraites	retraites démographique
IT	politica pensionistica	pensioni demografico
NL	pensioenbeleid	pensioenen demografisch
UK	pension politics	pensions demographic
CH/(DE)	Rentenpolitik	Renten demographisch
CH/(FR)	politique des retraites	retraites démographique

EDUCATION		
DE	Bildungspolitik	Bildung Chancengleichheit Politik
ES	Política de educación	Educación igualdad de oportunidades politica
FR	politique d'éducation	éducation égalité des chances politique
IT	politica dell'istruzione	istruzione pari opportunità politica
NL	onderwijsbeleid	onderwijs achterstand beleid
UK	education politics	education equal opportunities politics
CH/(DE)	Bildungspolitik	Bildung Chancengleichheit Politik
CH/(FR)	politique d'éducation	éducation égalité des chances politique

EUROPEAN INTEGRATION		
DE	EU Reformen	EU Erweiterung
ES	UE reformas	UE ampliación
FR	UE réformes	UE élargissement
IT	UE riforme	UE allargamento
NL	EU hervormingen	EU uitbreiding
UK	EU reforms	EU enlargement
CH/(DE)	EU Reformen	EU Erweiterung
CH/(FR)	UE réformes	UE élargissement

The results given by the search engines in return to the search queries were coded on different levels. On the result level we first select the websites according to aspects of relevance. The websites must be relevant in terms of:

- ***content*:** the provided information must be relevant and related to the search issue
- ***language*:** must be the same as the search language
- ***location*:** websites must be located in Europe except for the websites of transnational organisations, which are coded regardless of their geographical locations[5]

In the first round of coding, each website listed in the search results was included and coded until ten relevant websites per list were found. If ten or more results in a row were encountered that were irrelevant for substantive reasons, the coding of that search was broken off, even if the ten relevant results had not yet been reached. 'For substantive reasons' means that the site was rejected because it was not about our issues of research. I.e., this did not include sites that were irrelevant because they are located outside Europe, because they were in a different language, or because the site was not reachable, required a password, etc. Websites that were irrelevant in terms of content were disregarded, while for websites that were irrelevant because they were non-European or non-transnational, we only coded the country variable.

In the second round of coding, the number of relevant results that must be included in the coding per results list was reduced from ten to five websites. We did this after we had checked the findings from the first round of codings and found that there were very little differences between the first five and the last five results. More significant differences could be observed between the two search engines and the general and specific search strings.

The coding took place on four different levels: search, result, text, and claims. On the first level the general search information was coded, e.g. date, search string, number of returned results. On the relevant websites we looked for information about the search issue in textual form, which was coded on the text level. On the claim level we concentrated on actors that become publicly visible

[5] This rule was necessary because otherwise we would have ended up coding many non-European websites, particularly for the searches in English, which obviously turned out many websites based in the USA (to a lesser extent, similar problems occurred for the searches in French (e.g., Quebec sites) and Spanish (Latin American sites)). Normally, a user who would want to exclude US sites would probably add “UK” or “Britain” to her search string. However, since we are interested in Europeanisation and transnationalisation this was not an option for us, because our findings would then have been strongly biased towards those with a national scope.

as claimants on the websites in regard to the search issue. A claimant is defined as an actor who performs strategic action in the public sphere (claim-making). This action consists of the expression of a political opinion by some form of physical or verbal action, regardless of the form this expression takes (statement, violence, repression, decision, demonstration, court ruling, etc. etc.) and regardless of the nature of the actor (governments, social movements, NGO's, individuals, anonymous actors, etc. etc.). Decisions and policy implementation are defined as special forms of claim-making, namely ones that have direct effects on the objects of the claim.

Claimants can present themselves online on their own homepage or they can be presented on the homepage of other actors. We define these two different forms in which political claims can become visible on the Internet as:

- ***autonomous online presence of claimants***: the claimant is the same as the actor who runs the website (medium) and as the actor who wrote the text containing the claim (author)
- ***dependent online presence of claimants***: the claimant depends on other actors to make his claim publicly visible. In this case medium and/or author are different actors than the claimant and/or an external gate in addition to the search engine exists.

In all, we differentiated between five different roles that actors can perform within the scope of a website:

- ***Gate***: the actor who runs the website that provides the access to the relevant website (text) via an external link.
- ***Medium***: the actor who runs the website that actually contains the relevant information
- ***Source***: the actor who originally published the text that contains the relevant information
- ***Author***: the actor who wrote the text
- ***Claimant***: the actor whose political opinion is cited in the text

For all those actors we coded the actor category, name, scope, country and party affiliation. The claims themselves were coded in regard to the issue they were related to, the scope of the issue, as well as the country or countries it referred to. If relevant, we also coded the claimant's position towards European Integration.

Analysis

1.1 General explorations

Before analysing the data along the two main questions regarding hierarchy and transnationality, the following will give some information on our sample and present some findings in regard to more general questions about transparency and up-to-dateness of the information offered on the Internet within the platform of political communication selected by search engines. We will also take a look at the kind of texts found on these websites and the action forms of claim-making.

1.1.1 Sample

Overall we have a sample of 3,547 coded results. Within these results, 2,640 relevant websites that contained any textual information on the search issue were found. 2,170 of these texts contained claims related to the policy field the search string belongs to.

Table 2: **Number of coded results, texts and claims per country (N)**

	DE	ES	FR	IT	NL	UK	CH	ALL
Results	420	729	530	415	404	837	212	3547
Texts	420	397	389	412	399	411	212	2640
Claims	393	288	281	412	352	271	173	2170
% of all texts that contain claims	94%	73%	72%	100%	88%	66%	82%	82%

According to Table 2, this implies that 82% of all texts contained claims in regard to the search issues. Texts without claims do not have any expression of a political opinion, for example tables without any additional statement or purely factual information. Even though in all countries the majority of the texts contained claims the number differs from 100% in Italy to 66% in the United Kingdom.

Table 3 shows how many results had to be checked until the required number of relevant results was found. For the first round the requirement was ten relevant websites and for the second round five ones.

Table 3: **Number of results that had to be checked until enough relevant result were found** (First round / Second round)

	DE		ES		FR		IT		NL		UK		CH		ALL	
	1st	2nd	1st	2nd	1st	2nd	1st	2nd	1st	2nd	1st	2nd	1st	2nd	1st	2nd
Monetary politics 2002	19	13	26	163	37	15	18	19	13	26	163	37	15	18	33	42
Interest rate decision 2002	11	7	249	211	52	9	19	11	7	249	211	52	9	19	67	37
Agriculture subsidies 2002	16	6	15	23	19	7	14	16	6	15	23	19	7	14	26	15
BSE cows 2002	13	8	12	7	13	5	16	13	8	12	7	13	5	16	17	8
Immigration politics 2002	16	6	27	53	25	14	20	16	6	27	53	25	14	20	29	22
Deportation 2002	14	7	40	22	15	6	12	14	7	40	22	15	6	12	23	12
Troops deployment 2002	12	6	46	21	32	20	15	12	6	46	21	32	20	15	30	15
Troops peacekeeping 2002	17	9	26	28	31	14	17	17	9	26	28	31	14	17	29	18
Pension politics 2002	12	6	21	11	17	7	15	12	6	21	11	17	7	15	18	16
Pensions demographic 2002	12	5	20	8	18	8	20	12	5	20	8	18	8	20	17	12
Education politics 2002	15	5	41	12	46	16	20	15	5	41	12	46	16	20	36	18
Education equal opportunities politics 2002	17	14	31	107	34	9	20	17	14	31	107	34	9	20	29	31
Europe reforms 2002	22	8	63	19	35	18	21	22	8	63	19	35	18	21	32	18
EU enlargement 2002	17	5	16	10	25	8	12	17	5	16	10	25	8	12	19	11
MEAN	15	8	45	50	29	11	17	15	8	45	50	29	11	17	29	20

Table 3 shows that the number of results that had to be inspected varies strongly between the countries of our project. While in Germany, France, Italy and Switzerland the highest number of results that needed to be checked was only about twenty during both rounds of coding, this number reaches maxima of 211 in the United Kingdom, and 249 in Spain and the Netherlands.

In Table 4 on the previous page, conspicuous cross-national differences among the numbers of coded results were shown. To clarify this picture, Table 4 shows how many of the websites offered as results by the search engines were located outside Europe.[6]

Table 4: **Number of non-EU / non-transnational websites**

	DE	ES	FR	IT	NL	UK	CH
European or transnational	100%	55%	73%	99%	99%	49%	100%
Non-European / non-transnational	0%	46%	27%	1%	1%	51%	0%
Total (%)	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Total (N)	420	729	530	415	404	837	212

[6] Here, Europe includes the EU Member states and candidate countries, other western European countries, the Balkans, and the successor countries of the Soviet Union except the central Asian republics.

The partially big differences in the number of coded result among the countries is due to the fact that English, Spanish and French – unlike Italian, Dutch and German – are spoken in many countries outside Europe. Thus, while in Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Switzerland all or nearly all of the websites are located in Europe, about half of the websites in the United Kingdom and Spain are located outside Europe. In Table 5, the countries where these websites are actually located are shown for Spain, France, and the United Kingdom.

Table 5: **Location of non-European or non-transnational websites**

	ES	FR	UK
USA	10%	2%	76%
Canada	1%	88%	5%
Chile	16%	0%	0%
Mexico	14%	0%	0%
Argentina	13%	0%	0%
Columbia	9%	0%	0%
Venezuela	6%	0%	0%
Peru	5%	0%	0%
Uruguay	3%	0%	0%
Guatemala	3%	0%	0%
Cuba	2%	0%	0%
Other South and Central America	15%	0%	1%
India	0%	0%	2%
China	2%	2%	1%
Other Asia	0%	0%	6%
Australia / New Zealand	0%	0%	5%
Africa	1%	7%	2%
Other[7]	0%	1%	2%
Total (%)	100%	100%	100%
Total (N)	332	140	416

In the French searches, Canada, is with nearly 90%, the country where most of the non-European websites are located. In the United Kingdom three quarter of all non-European websites are located in the United States, while in Spain no country is dominant in a similar way. Varying between 16% and 9%, Chile, Mexico, Argentina, the United States and Columbia are the countries where most of the Non-European websites are located.

These non-European websites were not included in the further coding which was concentrated on websites located in Europe or websites of transnational or supranational organisations.[8] Nevertheless, we can assume that the degree of international communication is considerably higher in the United Kingdom, Spain and France than it is in the remaining countries. However,

[7] this category includes coding errors

[8] The only exceptions were websites that were located outside of Europe for strategic reasons, e.g., radical websites of actors that are forbidden by law in their home countries and are therefore hosted outside of Europe.

this does not necessarily also hold for the degree of Europeanised communication, as we will see in chapter 2.2.

1.1.2 Transparency

Since theoretically everyone is able to release his own website or any kind of information on the Internet, it is all the more important to know who is the source of the information, who is responsible for the selection or whose opinion is expressed. However, this is not always easy to detect and sometimes even impossible. To explore transparency or non-transparency on the Internet we distinguished within our analysis between three possibilities: (1) the information on the medium who offers/runs the website is provided on the website containing the text directly or via an internal link (e.g. by clicking on the logo, "home", "about us", "who we are", etc.); (2) information on the medium can only be found by own research on the homepage, e.g., by "cutting" the address; and (3) no information on the medium is available at all. Table 6 shows the findings in our seven countries with regard to this categories.

Table 6: **Source of information on medium**

	DE	ES	FR	IT	NL	UK	CH	ALL weighted
provided on website	71 %	57 %	77 %	99 %	77 %	92 %	86 %	81%
own research	19 %	40 %	21 %	0 %	23 %	7 %	13 %	17%
no information available	10 %	2 %	2 %	1 %	0 %	0 %	1 %	3%
Total (%)	100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %	100%
Total (N)	390	288	279	412	353	272	173	2340

On average, the large majority of the mediums (81%) directly provide information or direct links to information on who they are on the websites where the relevant information is offered. However, there are significant differences between our seven countries. While in Italy nearly all mediums do so, only 57% of the mediums found in Spain provide such information on the website that contains the relevant information. Nevertheless, on most of the remaining websites information on the medium could be found via own research on the websites in Spain. The percentage of websites for which no information on the medium was available ranged from 0% in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom to 10% in Germany.

1.1.3 Up-to-dateness

As a rough indicator of up-to-dateness of the information provided on the websites, Table 7 presents the year in which the relevant texts were released on the website - as far as this information was available.

Table 7: **Year in which texts were released**

	DE	ES	FR	IT	NL	UK	CH	ALL weighted
before 2000	7%	8%	9%	4%	7%	6%	12%	8%
2000	6%	5%	10%	3%	6%	5%	9%	6%
2001	14%	18%	20%	60%	15%	15%	11%	22%
2002	73%	69%	61%	33%	72%	75%	68%	64%
Total (%)	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Total (N)	361	384	310	383	346	378	212	2586

In all countries – except Italy – most of the texts were released in 2002, the year in which the data collection took place. In Italy, 60% of the texts were released in 2001 and only 33% in 2002. If we look at the temporal context that is referred to within the texts – shown in Table 8 – it is mostly a current context the texts refer to. That does not mean that no other general or historical context is addressed, but it means that in texts that are categorised as general or historical no references to recent events, situations etc. were made at all. An example of a text with a historical context could be a description of monetary politics in the middle of the 20th century. A text dealing with a general context could for example describe instruments of monetary politics. If the text would refer to recent decisions of the European Central Bank to use certain instruments of monetary politics it would have a current context.

Table 8: **Temporal contexts in which texts are written**

	DE	ES	FR	IT	NL	UK	CH	ALL weighted
current context	97%	92%	78%	95%	92%	95%	97%	93%
general context	2%	5%	21%	2%	5%	4%	1%	5%
historical context	0%	3%	1%	3%	4%	2%	2%	2%
Total (%)	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Total (N)	419	397	365	412	399	411	212	2827

The data in Table 8 show that texts without a current context of reference are rather marginal in all countries. Only in France, texts with a general character with no reference to the recent situation seem with 21% to play a significantly more important role than they do in the other countries.

1.1.4 Action forms of claims

Table 9 shows in what kind of forms the claims that become visible on the websites were made.

Table 9: **Action Form of claimants**

	DE	ES	FR	IT	NL	UK	CH	ALL weighted
political decisions	10%	3%	22%	29%	21%	12%	20%	17%
executive actions	6%	2%	6%	5%	3%	0%	3%	4%
judicial actions	1%	0%	4%	1%	0%	1%	1%	1%
verbal statements	72%	87%	56%	56%	67%	72%	59%	66%
meetings	6%	7%	10%	8%	8%	13%	9%	8%
direct-democratic actions	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	7%	1%
petitioning	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
demonstrative protests	3%	1%	0%	2%	0%	1%	1%	1%
confrontational protests	1%	0%	1%	0%	0%	2%	0%	0%
violent protests	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%
Total (%)	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Total (N)	393	284	281	412	351	272	173	2339

In all countries – albeit to different extents – most of the claims were verbal statements, followed by meetings and political decisions. Protests play a marginal role within the claims-making on the websites, with a maximum of 3% of all claims in Germany. Direct-democratic actions such as referenda and people's initiatives only play a significant role in Switzerland (7%).

Another interesting question is how many of the claims were made directly on the websites and how many of the claims were originally made offline and are only reported online. In other words, is the Internet as a platform of political communication selected by search engines a place where claims are actually made or is it rather a place for making claims public visible that have already been made offline?

Table 10: **Online/Offline Form of Action**

	DE	ES	FR	IT	NL	UK	CH	ALL (weighted)
offline	64%	55%	72%	85%	66%	94%	59%	71%
online	21%	19%	15%	12%	8%	6%	15%	14%
mixed	15%	26%	13%	3%	26%	1%	26%	16%
Total (%)	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Total (N)	387	288	279	412	353	271	172	2334

The data in Table 10 suggest that most of the claims where made offline. However, while in the United Kingdom nearly all of the claims are made offline, the number declines to 55 % in Spain. The number of claims made purely online, varies from 21% in Germany to 6% in the United Kingdom. Overall, it seems as if the explored sphere of political communication is less a place of actual claims-making, than a place for presenting and commenting claims that were made offline. This is perhaps not very different from the traditional media but it is surprising when seen in the light of the widespread view of the Internet as a new arena for political mobilisation.

2.2 How hierarchical is political communication on the Internet?

As mentioned above, the first crucial question we want to explore on the basis of our data is how open the Internet is to less institutionalised actors. Or in other words: how hierarchical is political communication on the Internet? In accordance with the different types of actors that we coded we will address this question on several levels. First, we take a look at the gates.

2.2.1 Gates

Gates are defined as actors who run websites selected as results by the search engines that do not contain relevant information in regard to the search issue itself, but offer external links to other websites that actually contain such information. Table 12 shows that these actors play only a secondary role within the results of the search engines. Only 127 out of 2,852 relevant results were gates (4%). To analyse the different collective actors that can perform as gates we distinguish between: ***state actors*** (e.g. government, legislative, judicial, political parties, military, central banks), ***news media*** (e.g. newspaper, magazines, television and radio stations, press agency, portals, ISPs), ***socio-economic interest groups*** (unions, employers organisations, firms, consumer organisations, etc.), ***social and educational organisations*** (e.g. universities, schools, research institutions, churches, welfare organisations, students, pupils), ***NGOs and social movement organisations*** (migrant organisations, human rights organisations, peace movement, environmental organisations, women's organisations, racist and extreme right organisations, pro- and anti-European campaign groups, etc.) and ***private individuals***.

Table 11: **Actor type of gates**

	DE	ES	FR	IT	NL	UK	CH	ALL weighted
state actors	11%	4%	50%	17%	13%	25%	0%	15%
news media	32%	4%	14%	67%	77%	42%	43%	41%
socio econ. interest groups	11%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	14%	3%
social and educat. orgs	16%	40%	21%	0%	10%	25%	29%	21%
NGOs	21%	12%	7%	0%	0%	8%	14%	9%
private individual	5%	0%	0%	8%	0%	0%	0%	2%
unknown/unspecified	5%	40%	7%	8%	0%	0%	0%	10%
Total (%)	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Total (N)	19	25	14	12	31	12	7	127

Table 11 shows that on average 41% of the gate websites were run by news media actors. State actors (15%) are less prominent than socio-economic interest groups and social and educational groups taken together (25%). NGO's – as the group of actors with the lowest degree of institutionalisation – are about half as often selected by search engines as gates than state actors are. However, this picture strongly varies if we look at the single countries. In France, for example, 50% of the gates are state actors, while in Switzerland there is no gate website run by a state actor at all. 77% of all gates found in the Dutch search are run by news media actors, while this is the case for only 4% in Spain. In Germany, 21% of the gates are run by NGOs, while in

Italy an the Netherlands, NGOs do not show up as gates at all. Since gates play numerically such a secondary role, our basis of judgement is too narrow to enable the drawing of any reliable conclusions from this rather erratic pattern. Thus, this should be taken as a very vague impression.

2.2.2 Mediums

A much more precise analysis is possible in regard to the mediums, which are the actors who run the websites that actually contain relevant information in regard to the search issue. The data in Table 12 show that on average, nearly half of the mediums are news media. State actors run one quarter of all websites that provide relevant information. The less institutionalised socio-economic interest groups and social and educational organisations account together for 16% of all mediums, while the weakly institutionalised NGOs do so only about half as often (9%). France is the only country where state actors are by far the most dominant providers of relevant information on our search strings with 41%. Even though in all other countries most of the mediums are news media actors, the number strongly varies between the single countries, ranging from 34% in Switzerland to 73% in Italy. Differences occur also in regard to the prominence of NGOs and social movement organisation. In the Netherlands, they account for only 5% of all mediums, while in France, 15% of all mediums are NGOs or social movement organisations.

Table 12: **Actor type of mediums by countries**

	DE	ES	FR	IT	NL	UK	CH	ALL weighted
state actors	21%	16%	41%	20%	38%	10%	30%	25%
news media	47%	50%	26%	61%	37%	74%	32%	47%
socio econ. interest groups	13%	8%	5%	10%	8%	5%	15%	9%
social and educat. orgs	9%	12%	8%	2%	9%	3%	9%	7%
NGOs	7%	9%	15%	6%	5%	9%	13%	9%
private individual	2%	0%	3%	1%	1%	0%	1%	1%
unknown/unspecified	0%	6%	2%	0%	1%	0%	0%	1%
Total (%)	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Total (N)	393	288	281	412	353	272	173	2345

Table 13 shows that the distribution of actors depends strongly on the policy field that is addressed. If we take as a rough standard state actors as highly institutionalised actors, socio-economic interest groups and social/educational groups as actors with a medium level of institutionalisation and NGOs as weakly institutionalised actors, the prominence of actors corresponds to their degree of institutionalisation only within the fields of education politics and EU Integration. In the field of troops deployment and immigration politics NGOs are more important than socio-economic and social/educational organisations. In the fields of pensions, monetary and agricultural politics, socio-economic interest groups and social/educational organisations are about equally important as the state actors.

Table 13: **Actors type of mediums by issues** (weighted)								
	Monetary	**Agri-culture**	**Immi-gration**	**Troops**	**Pensions**	**Edu-cation**	**EU**	**ALL**
state actors	21%	21%	21%	21%	23%	41%	28%	25%
news media	54%	52%	45%	57%	44%	30%	49%	47%
socio econ. interest groups	18%	12%	3%	2%	19%	6%	8%	9%
social and educat. Orgs	4%	5%	5%	5%	8%	19%	6%	7%
NGOs	2%	8%	24%	12%	2%	4%	9%	9%
private individual	0%	1%	1%	2%	2%	0%	1%	1%
Unspecified	2%	1%	2%	2%	2%	0%	0%	1%
Total (%)	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Total (N)	283	349	352	336	336	326	363	2345

The actors' online prominence is not only determined by the frequency of appearance. The degree of prominence may also depend on the position on which the website of an actor shows up on the search engines' result lists, as shown in Table 14.

Table 14**: Position of Mediums within result list by countries** (Means)								
	DE	**ES**	**FR**	**IT**	**NL**	**UK**	**CH**	**Total** weighted
state actors	7	15	10	7	7	11	10	9
news media	6	16	9	7	8	14	14	10
socio-econ. groups	6	23	11	6	7	10	11	10
social/ educat. orgs.	7	11	7	11	8	24	10	10
NGOs	6	21	9	8	6	17	9	11

The data suggest that across all countries no significant differences in the positioning of the mediums are observable. Thus, we may assume that in contrast to the frequency by which the different actor types occur as mediums, the positions of the actors within the search engines' result lists do not seem to be correlated with their degree of institutionalisation. That means, that state actors for example are not much more likely to show up at higher positions on the result list than NGOs are.

2.2.3 Types of text found on the websites

Table 15 allows a closer look at which kinds of texts containing relevant information on the search issue were presented by which kinds of mediums. Articles drawn from news media (newspapers, television stations, radio stations and press agencies) account for nearly half of all texts presented on the websites. On the one hand that is due to the general dominance of news media among the mediums. On the other hand, news media articles account still for one quarter of all texts presented by socio-economic interest groups, social and educational organisations and NGOs. Only on the websites of state actors, own news-style articles, publications of political decisions and statements on own positions and responsibilities are significantly more important than news media articles.

Table 15: **Type of texts offered by mediums** (weighted)

	state actors	news media	socio-econ. interest	social / edu. orgs	NGOs	private individual	un-specified	Total
News media articles	11%	76%	25%	25%	24%	31%	21%	45%
News-style articles / press releases by political actor	23%	4%	27%	14%	27%	15%	14%	14%
Publications of political decision	24%	6%	3%	9%	5%	0%	0%	10%
Statements on position / responsibilities descript.	22%	2%	13%	16%	18%	19%	14%	11%
Conference information (program, papers, etc.)	1%	0%	3%	5%	1%	0%	3%	1%
Research reports, survey results	3%	0%	3%	5%	3%	0%	3%	2%
University information (seminar, paper)	0%	0%	1%	3%	1%	0%	3%	0%
Online publications of book/paper or advertisement	3%	1%	5%	12%	2%	0%	10%	3%
Online versions of verbal statements	8%	5%	3%	4%	4%	0%	7%	5%
Announcements of / calls for protest event	0%	1%	1%	1%	3%	4%	3%	1%
Petitioning / signature collections	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%
Information sources / data banks	2%	1%	5%	3%	3%	12%	7%	2%
Tables, charts without text	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Unspecified texts, articles	4%	5%	11%	4%	7%	19%	14%	5%
Total (%)	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Total (N)	583	1096	219	170	210	26	29	2333

2.2.4 Sources

Sources are defined as the actors who originally published the texts presented on the mediums' websites. About one quarter of the texts refer to an external source (615 out of 2,640) as shown in Table 16, whereas the number varies among the countries between 7% in the United Kingdom and 43% in Italy.

Table 16: **Actor type of sources by countries**

	DE	ES	FR	IT	NL	UK	CH	ALL weighted
state actors	11%	14%	50%	9%	17%	10%	13%	17%
news media	86%	65%	39%	85%	72%	86%	81%	75%
socio- econ. Groups	0%	7%	1%	2%	2%	3%	0%	2%
social / educat. Orgs	2%	5%	5%	0%	4%	0%	2%	2%
NGOs	0%	9%	4%	3%	5%	0%	4%	4%
private individual	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Unspecified	1%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Total (column %)	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Total (N)	84	43	82	176	105	29	48	615
Total (% of all texts)	20%	11%	21%	43%	26%	7%	23%	22%

In all countries the news media are the most prominent source the texts refer to, with an average of 75% across all countries. The only exception is France, where state actors again are more important than media actors.

The data shown in Table 17 indicate that there is no strong correlation between the different issue fields and the distribution of external sources the texts refer to.

Table 17: **Actor type of Sources by issue fields** (weighted)

	Monetary	Agri-culture	Immi-gration	Troops	Pensions	Education	EU	ALL
state actors	21%	17%	18%	9%	5%	39%	16%	17%
news media	75%	73%	73%	78%	90%	53%	78%	75%
socio econ. interest groups	3%	3%	1%	1%	1%	2%	0%	2%
social and educat. orgs	1%	1%	1%	6%	3%	5%	1%	2%
NGOs	0%	5%	7%	5%	1%	2%	4%	4%
private individual	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Unspecified	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	1%	0%
Total (column%)	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Total (N)	81	124	88	86	79	61	96	615
Total (row%)	13%	20%	14%	14%	13%	10%	16%	100%

2.2.5 Claimants

In the following we will look at the actors who actually make publicly visible claims on the websites selected by the search engines. Recall that these are not necessarily the same as the actors who run the selected websites, because websites may offer a platform for claims by other actors. Generally, claimants were defined as actors that perform strategic actions in the public sphere (claim-making), which consist of expressions of political opinion by some form of physical or verbal action.

Table 18: **Actor type of Claimants by countries**

	DE	ES	FR	IT	NL	UK	CH	ALL weighted
state actors	59%	50%	67%	76%	70%	66%	58%	64%
news media	7%	4%	6%	6%	9%	6%	9%	7%
socio econ. interest groups	13%	18%	6%	10%	7%	11%	12%	11%
social and educat. orgs	11%	14%	7%	4%	10%	9%	8%	9%
NGOs	8%	9%	9%	3%	2%	8%	12%	7%
private individual	1%	1%	4%	1%	1%	0%	0%	1%
general public	1%	1%	0%	0%	1%	0%	1%	0%
unspecified	2%	3%	1%	0%	2%	0%	1%	1%
Total (%)	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Total (N)	393	288	281	412	353	272	173	2345

At first sight, the data in Table 18 indicate that the sphere of political communication selected by search engines shows clear hierarchical patterns regarding the visibility of different kind of actors. State actors account for 64% of all claimants and only 7% of the claims found on the websites were made by NGOs and social movement actors. Institutionalised interest groups and social and educational groups together make up 20% of claimants. In regard to the single countries the degree of hierarchy varies in line with the dominance of state actors, which varies between 50% in Spain and 75% in Italy. Compared to the gates, mediums and sources, an important difference is the much lower percentage of news media actors. This is due to the fact that the texts on the websites of online media in the majority of the cases did not contain the media's own opinion, but presented the opinion or actions of other collective actors.

The following Table 19 shows the distribution of claimants across the seven issue fields. In accordance with the previous findings, state actors are the most visible claimants in all issue fields, varying between 77% in the field of troops deployment and 48% within education politics.

Table 19: **Actor type of Claimants by issue fields** (weighted)								
	Monetary	**Agri-culture**	**Immi-gration**	**Troops**	**Pensions**	**Education**	**EU**	**ALL**
state actors	64%	62%	58%	77%	48%	64%	76%	64%
news media	8%	5%	7%	6%	12%	3%	6%	7%
socio econ. interest groups	20%	16%	3%	1%	26%	7%	5%	11%
social and educat. orgs	5%	10%	5%	5%	9%	23%	4%	9%
NGOs	1%	6%	21%	10%	2%	2%	7%	7%
private individual	1%	1%	1%	0%	3%	1%	1%	1%
general public	0%	0%	1%	1%	0%	1%	1%	0%
unspecified	1%	1%	3%	1%	1%	0%	1%	1%
Total (%)	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Total (N)	284	353	352	336	335	326	359	2345

NGOs are rather irrelevant in the fields of monetary, education and pensions politics. Here, institutionalised interest groups are much more prominent: socio-economic interest groups in regard to monetary and pension politics, and social and educational groups in regard to education politics. NGOs attain similar levels of visibility only within the field of troops deployment and immigration politics. When we compare these findings to the distribution of mediums by issue fields (Table 13), it becomes clear that the more less-institutionalised actors operate as mediums in an issue field the more likely are less-institutionalised claimants to gain visibility online.

Table 20 shows the means of claimants' positions within the search engines' result lists by country. Again – similar to the mediums' positioning – no significant differences that would indicate a hierarchical structure in regard to the claimants' positions within the results lists show up.

Table 20: **Position of Claimants within result list by countries** (Means)								
	DE	**ES**	**FR**	**IT**	**NL**	**UK**	**CH**	**Total** weighted
state actors	6	16	10	7	8	14	11	9
news media	6	18	10	6	7	17	18	11
socio-econ. groups	6	19	11	7	7	12	11	11
social/ educat. orgs.	7	10	9	9	7	12	12	9
NGOs	6	13	9	6	8	20	11	11

As already mentioned above, regarding the type of online presence of claimants we can distinguish between ***autonomous online presence of claimants*** (the claimant is the same as the actor who runs the website (medium) and as the actor who wrote the text containing the claim (author)) and ***dependent online presence of claimants*** (the claimant depends on other actors to make his claim publicly visible, i.e. medium and/or author are different actors than the claimant and/or an external gate in addition to the search engine exists). The following Table 21 shows the actor distribution according to this differentiation.

First and foremost, the data in Table 21 show that across all countries only 38% of the claimants reach the audience directly, while the remaining 62% depend on other actors for gaining public visibility on the Internet (total row %). This is an important finding given the fact that the hopes for the Internet as a more egalitarian form of communicative space are based on the potential for unfiltered access to the public sphere for collective actors and especially for less-institutionalised actors. In the United Kingdom, the percentage of claimants who are independently publicly visible online is the lowest with 20%. In Switzerland, the relationship seems to be balanced with 49% of all claimants independently visible, and 51% who depend on other actors to gain online visibility. France is the only country where more claimants are able to reach the audience directly on their own home homepage (58%) instead of in a dependent way (42%). In general, these findings reflect the importance of news media as mediums in the single countries (Table 12). The more news media dominate the provision of information the less claimants are able to reach their online audience directly.

Table 21: **Kind of online presence by countries**

	DE		ES		FR		IT		NL		UK		CH		ALL weighted	
	aut	**dep**	**aut**	**dep**	**aut**	**dep**	**aut**	**dep**	**aut**	**dep**	**aut**	**dep**	**aut**	**dep**	**aut**	**dep**
state actors	42%	68%	42%	54%	65%	71%	57%	85%	67%	72%	39%	73%	50%	66%	54%	71%
media	13%	4%	7%	2%	7%	4%	17%	1%	15%	5%	28%	1%	12%	6%	13%	3%
socio econ. interest groups	20%	9%	20%	18%	7%	5%	18%	7%	9%	5%	11%	12%	18%	6%	14%	9%
social and educat. orgs	14%	9%	14%	13%	6%	9%	5%	3%	8%	11%	4%	10%	6%	9%	8%	9%
NGOs	10%	7%	13%	7%	12%	5%	4%	3%	1%	3%	19%	6%	14%	10%	10%	6%
private individual	2%	0%	0%	2%	3%	4%	0%	1%	0%	1%	0%	1%	0%	0%	1%	1%
general public	0%	1%	0%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	1%
unspecified	0%	2%	3%	3%	1%	2%	0%	0%	0%	3%	0%	0%	0%	2%	0%	2%
Total (Column %)	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Total (N)	137	256	99	189	162	117	124	286	151	201	54	218	84	88	895	1443
Total (Row %)	35%	65%	34%	66%	58%	42%	30%	70%	43%	57%	20%	80%	49%	51%	38%	62%

Even if most of the claimants depend on other actors to gain online visibility, it might nevertheless be the case that the distribution of actors is less hierarchical among independent online presence than it is among dependent online presence. On the basis of Table 21 it becomes clear that there are actually differences in the degree of bias in favour of less-institutional actors between the two forms of Internet presence of claimants. Although state actors are the most prominent claimants among both forms of online presence, they are generally less dominant when the claimants have an autonomous online presence. Especially socio-economic interest groups and NGOs gain more visibility when the audience is reached directly, whereas social and educational organisations hardly benefit from the autonomous online presence.

In Table 22, we take a look at how the more hierarchical distribution of dependent actors is constituted. The table shows which actors (mediums) offer a platform for which types of claimants.

Table 22: **Mediums that present dependent claimants** (weighted)

Dependent claimant	Medium							
	state actors	**news media**	**socio econ. interest**	**social and educat. orgs**	**NGOs**	**private individual**	**un-specified**	**Total**
state actors	84%	73%	67%	59%	57%	53%	55%	71%
news media	3%	2%	9%	6%	3%	12%	5%	3%
socio econ. Interest	4%	10%	17%	7%	2%	6%	15%	9%
social and educat. orgs	2%	9%	5%	23%	6%	12%	0%	9%
NGOs	3%	4%	2%	4%	23%	6%	15%	6%
private individual	0%	1%	0%	1%	2%	0%	5%	1%
general public	2%	0%	0%	0%	2%	0%	0%	1%
unspecified	3%	1%	0%	1%	4%	12%	5%	2%
Total (column%)	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Total (N)	160	927	93	102	124	17	20	1443
Total (row%)	11%	64%	6%	7%	9%	1%	1%	100%

The data suggest that in about two-third of the cases, online news media are the platform for the claims of other collective actors. These news media strongly privilege state actors (73%), and give little attention to civil society organisations, and among those particularly to NGOs and social movements. If we look at the remaining one third of the cases where non-media actors offer a platform to the claims of other actors, we see that the pattern is not much different. State actors profit most from attention given to them by other actors. Even the websites of NGOs and social movements that give a space to the opinion of other actors do so most frequently to state actors. Thus, the centrality of state actors in the political process also seems to give them a central role in political communication on the Internet. Apart from privileging state actors, the mediums

– with the exception of news media – present considerably more often claimants that belong to the same category of actors than claimants from other categories of actors. This corresponds to the previously observed correlation between the prominence of one actor category among the mediums and its prominence among the claimants.

Table 23 shows what this distribution looks like in the seven countries. Although the totals of the countries reflect the general tendencies of the table above, some differences in regard to single actor categories in some countries show up. E.g., in the United Kingdom and in Switzerland, NGOs are significantly more often presented on the websites of other actors than they are in the remaining countries.

Table 23: **Mediums that present dependent claimants by countries**

Dependent claimant		Medium					
		state actors	**news media**	**socio-econ. interest**	**social / edu. orgs**	**NGOs**	**Total**
DE	**state actors**	74%	70%	67%	68%	56%	68%
	news media	4%	1%	10%	5%	6%	4%
	socio econ. interest	13%	8%	14%	0%	6%	9%
	social / edu. orgs	0%	10%	10%	26%	0%	9%
	NGOs	9%	7%	0%	0%	22%	7%
	Total (N)	23	168	21	19	18	256
	Total (row%)	9%	66%	8%	7%	7%	100%
ES	**state actors**	69%	62%	43%	42%	14%	54%
	news media	0%	3%	0%	0%	0%	2%
	socio econ. interest	0%	16%	43%	25%	7%	18%
	social / edu. orgs	0%	13%	14%	25%	14%	13%
	NGOs	0%	3%	0%	4%	57%	7%
	Total (N)	13	122	7	24	14	189
	Total (row%)	7%	65%	4%	13%	7%	100%
FR	**state actors**	87%	60%	50%	85%	65%	71%
	news media	7%	4%	0%	8%	0%	4%
	socio econ. interest	0%	11%	50%	0%	0%	5%
	social / edu. orgs	7%	13%	0%	8%	0%	9%
	NGOs	0%	2%	0%	0%	24%	5%
	Total (N)	31	47	2	13	17	117
	Total (row%)	27%	40%	2%	11%	15%	100%
IT	**state actors**	89%	85%	93%	78%	76%	85%
	news media	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	1%
	socio econ. interest	12%	7%	0%	11%	5%	7%
	social / edu. orgs	0%	3%	0%	11%	5%	3%
	NGOs	0%	2%	7%	0%	14%	3%
	Total (N)	26	212	15	9	21	286
	Total (row%)	9%	74%	5%	3%	7%	100%
NL	**state actors**	85%	79%	67%	36%	31%	72%
	news media	5%	2%	0%	14%	19%	5%
	socio econ. interest	0%	6%	20%	0%	0%	5%
	social / edu. orgs	2%	9%	13%	43%	25%	11%
	NGOs	0%	2%	0%	0%	19%	3%
	Total (N)	41	106	15	14	16	201
	Total (row%)	20%	53%	8%	7%	8%	100%

		Medium					
		state actors	news media	socio-econ. interest	social / edu. orgs	NGOs	Total
UK	**state actors**	83%	72%	57%	80%	79%	73%
	news media	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	1%
	socio econ. interest	0%	12%	29%	0%	0%	12%
	social / edu. orgs	0%	11%	0%	0%	0%	10%
	NGOs	17%	3%	14%	20%	21%	6%
	Total (N)	6	186	7	5	14	218
	Total (row%)	3%	85%	3%	2%	6%	100%
CH	**state actors**	90%	63%	62%	56%	67%	66%
	news media	0%	2%	23%	11%	0%	6%
	socio econ. interest	0%	7%	15%	0%	0%	6%
	social / edu. orgs	0%	14%	0%	22%	0%	9%
	NGOs	10%	12%	0%	11%	17%	10%
	Total (N)	10	43	13	9	12	88
	Total (row%)	11%	49%	15%	10%	14%	100%

All in all, the impression is that space for political communication opened up by search engines shows clear patterns of hierarchy. State actors are the most prominent claimants, whereas NGOs and social movement organisations are the ones that are the least visible. Thus, in the sphere of political communication selected by search engines, the least prominent actors are the same ones that are weakly present in the offline policy process. This is not that surprising when we take into account that the news media are the most important provider of websites that contain relevant information on the search issues and thus seem to transfer the structures of the offline public sphere to the online one. Nevertheless, even if most of the mediums are news media actors (with a share of about 50%, as shown in Table 12), the remaining half of the actors that run the selected websites are other societal actors, who are able to present information independently from the selection criteria of the news media. What surprises is that these collective actors themselves refer in a significant way to the traditional media and thereby additionally replicate the pattern of the traditional mass media public sphere. Thus, it seems at this point of analysis that although collective actors have much more the opportunity to reach the public directly – in comparison to the traditional mass media public sphere where they are hardly able to do so – they mainly become visible when they are referred to by the news media. However, even when they act themselves as gatekeepers for other actors they seem to replicate the selection criteria of the mass media.

After we have provided an impression of the hierarchical structure of political online communication in terms of access for less institutionalised actors we will now turn to our second central question, namely: how transnational and especially Europeanised is political communication within the public sphere that is made accessible by search engines?

2.3 How Europeanised is political communication on the Internet?

To explore if the inherently transnational character of the Internet infrastructure is reflected in the spheres of political communication that are opened up by search engines, our data allow us to look at various dimensions of transnationalism on the actor level corresponding to the different actor types we introduced in the previous expositions. It should not be forgotten that even though the Internet is structurally transnational, it is still a medium that is in regard of communicative use mainly based on language. This has to be taken into account, if one wants to explore more than communication patterns of a small elite who speaks English. Our aim here is to analyse that sphere of political communication that is not only accessible for everybody, but also understandable for most citizens in terms of language. Thus, the kind of transnationality we will analyse in the following is embedded in a public sphere limited by language. However, the Internet facilitates much easier ways to offer websites or at least parts of a website in more than one language than are available to the traditional media. Therefore, the first question will be how many of the websites selected by search engines use the possibility to make their content comprehensible for more people than only the ones who speak the same language. We will first look at the websites the search engines directly offer as results and secondly if the specific relevant texts found on this result websites are also offered in additional languages to the search language.[9]

2.3.1 Languages

The data in Table 24 indicate that the websites selected offered only in a minority of the cases also information in at least one additional language to the search language (359 out of 2,640).

Table 24: **Languages other than the search language in which the results websites were offered**

	DE	ES	FR	IT	NL	UK	CH	All weighted
Dutch	12%	15%	14%	53%	0%	14%	0%	12%
English	81%	89%	73%	81%	73%	0%	41%	65%
French	65%	50%	0%	72%	27%	57%	35%	33%
German	0%	30%	61%	75%	24%	21%	53%	35%
Italian	35%	20%	33%	0%	15%	11%	50%	21%
Spanish	19%	0%	30%	53%	16%	39%	3%	19%
other regional	0%	17%	0%	6%	0%	0%	0%	3%
other EU	12%	24%	18%	50%	32%	21%	3%	22%
other	4%	13%	6%	6%	5%	36%	3%	8%
N (websites)	26	54	66	36	81	28	34	359
Note: columns > 100%, because more than one additional language per text possible								

[9] However, it has to be considered that other languages were only coded if they were offered directly on the result website or the website where the text was offered. Thus, if a homepage offers no additional languages on the website selected by our searches, this does not imply that there may not be additional languages offered on other websites within the same homepage. But, since our starting point of analysis is the picture the common Internet user gets, we concentrate on the features directly available.

Table 24 shows the distribution of additional languages for those 14% of the cases where an additional language was offered. The most frequently offered language other than the search language is English (65%). French (33%) and German (35%) are more often offered than Italian (21%) and Spanish (19%). Dutch is offered even less frequently (12%). All other EU languages taken together are offered on 30% of the websites with additional languages, and only 3% of all offered languages are regional EU languages. Non-EU languages are also only rarely offered with 8%. However, in regard to the single countries this distribution varies considerably. Thus, for example in Switzerland none of the result websites is additionally offered in Dutch, whereas in Italy this is the case for 53% of the websites that offer foreign languages.

In the next Table 25, we look at how many of the texts are also offered in other languages than the search language and which languages these are.

Table 25: **Languages other than the search language in which the relevant texts were offered**

	DE	ES	FR	IT	NL	UK	CH	All weighted
Dutch	23%	23%	8%	57%	0%	26%	0%	16%
English	85%	77%	59%	67%	61%	0%	43%	58%
French	46%	54%	0%	87%	33%	60%	38%	45%
German	0%	39%	53%	87%	29%	37%	46%	52%
Italian	39%	23%	26%	0%	20%	26%	41%	31%
Spanish	23%	0%	15%	60%	24%	49%	8%	28%
other regional	0%	8%	0%	0%	0%	3%	0%	1%
other EU	23%	31%	11%	57%	49%	34%	3%	30%
other	0%	8%	8%	3%	4%	26%	3%	8%
N	13	13	53	30	51	35	37	269

Note: columns > 100%, because more than one additional language per text possible

Only 10% of all texts are offered in at least one additional language to the search language (269 out of 2,640). The distribution of the different languages is fairly similar to the distribution of additional offered languages on the result website level. Again, English is the language in which texts are additionally offered the most, although it is a little less dominant than it is on the level of the result websites. French and German text editions are considerably more often provided than editions in Italian, in Spanish, and especially in Dutch.

In sum, it is remarkable that only relatively few result websites and few of the relevant texts were directly offered in an additionally language other than the search language. If other languages are offered, English is the most dominant followed by the German, French, Italian and Spanish, while other EU languages are rather marginal. Non-EU languages play a much less important role than EU languages.

2.3.2 Gates

We will now turn to the level and forms of Europeanisation on the actor level. Most of the result websites that lead via an external link to websites that actually contain relevant information on the search issues are national with 75% as shown in Table 26. Only 5% of all gates are European and gates from other European countries are as marginal as gates from non-EU countries. If we look at the total that does not include the data on the search string EU Integration, the picture is quite similar. There is only a slight decrease in European gates, which mainly leads to a slight increase of other supra- and international ones.

Table 26: **External gates** (Totals weighted)

	DE	ES	FR	IT	NL	UK	CH	Total	Total without EU
Other supra- and internat.	5%	12%	14%	0%	0%	17%	14%	8%	11%
European	0%	0%	21%	0%	3%	17%	0%	5%	4%
National: own country	79%	68%	64%	83%	90%	50%	71%	75%	75%
National: other EU	5%	0%	0%	0%	7%	17%	0%	4%	2%
National: non-EU	0%	0%	0%	8%	0%	0%	0%	1%	1%
Unclassifiable	11%	20%	0%	8%	0%	0%	14%	8%	7%
Total (%)	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Total (N)	19	25	14	12	30	12	7	126	83

2.3.3 Mediums

Table 27 shows that similar to the distribution of gates, most of the mediums – the actors who actually offer the relevant information on their websites – are national actors (76%). European actors offer only 6% of all relevant texts and this number again slightly decreases when the data on the base of search strings related to EU Integration are excluded.

Table 27: **Scopes of medium by countries** (Totals weighted)

	DE	ES	FR	IT	NL	UK	CH	ALL	ALL without EU
Other supra- and internat.	4%	11%	14%	4%	2%	11%	9%	7%	8%
European	3%	7%	7%	9%	10%	8%	1%	6%	4%
National: own country	75%	74%	61%	82%	83%	66%	84%	76%	78%
National: other EU	8%	4%	7%	0%	5%	14%	5%	6%	5%
National: non-EU	8%	0%	8%	5%	0%	1%	2%	4%	4%
Unclassifiable	2%	4%	4%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	2%
Total (%)	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Total (N)	393	288	281	412	353	272	173	2345	1986

A more differentiated picture emerges if we look at the distribution of the mediums' scope by issue fields as presented in Table 28. Here, we see that most of the European mediums provide

information in regard to European Integration, accounting for 18% of all mediums within this field. In the other issue fields, European actors play a rather marginal role as the provider of relevant information on the search issue, and the same is true for all other actors other than these from the own country. The only exception is the field of troops deployment where 18% of the mediums are organised on a supra- or other international level beyond the EU. It is interesting that especially in the field of agriculture politics, which is highly regulated on the European level, other supra- and international mediums play a more important role than European ones do. However, both are in comparison to national actors hardly significant.

Table 28: **Scopes of Mediums by issue fields** (weighted)

	Monetary	Agri-culture	Immi-gration	Troops	Pensions	Education	EU	Total	Total without EU
other supra- and internat.	4%	6%	9%	18%	3%	5%	5%	7%	8%
European	8%	1%	3%	2%	5%	5%	18%	6%	4%
national: own country	75%	83%	81%	66%	84%	80%	64%	76%	78%
national: other EU	6%	5%	5%	5%	5%	7%	9%	6%	5%
national: non-EU	7%	4%	0%	6%	2%	3%	4%	4%	4%
Unknown	1%	1%	2%	3%	2%	0%	1%	1%	1%
Total (%)	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Total (N)	283	349	352	336	336	326	363	2345	1982

2.3.4 Sources

Most of the texts refer to national sources if any external sources are mentioned, as is shown in Table 29. European sources and other supra- and international sources account both for about 10% of all sources, while sources from other national EU countries are as marginal as sources from non-European countries.

Table 29: **Scopes of sources by countries** (Totals weighted)

	DE	ES	FR	IT	NL	UK	CH	Total	Total without EU
Other supra- and internat.	2%	12%	24%	7%	5%	17%	13%	10%	10%
European	2%	7%	15%	23%	7%	3%	2%	11%	10%
National: own country	58%	72%	49%	64%	86%	55%	67%	65%	67%
National: other EU	11%	5%	2%	3%	3%	10%	19%	7%	6%
National: non-EU	13%	0%	9%	3%	0%	14%	0%	5%	5%
Unclassifiable	13%	5%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%	2%
Total (%)	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Total (N)	83	43	82	176	105	29	48	614	518

However, in regard to the single countries again considerable differences catch the eye. While in Germany transnational sources are rather unimportant, they play a much more important role in the other countries. Especially in France, Italy, the United Kingdom, and Spain, European and

other supra- and international sources account for about 20% to 40% of all sources taken together. Still, in most of the countries other supra- and international sources are more important than the European ones, except Italy where nearly one quarter of all sources are European.

In the next Table 30, the distribution of the sources' geographical scopes by issue fields is shown.

Table 30: **Scopes of sources by issue fields** (weighted)

	Monetary	Agri-culture	Immi-gration	Troops	Pensions	Education	EU	Total	Total without EU
other supra- and internat.	7%	10%	11%	21%	4%	8%	7%	10%	10%
European	26%	3%	8%	0%	8%	20%	19%	11%	10%
national: own country	52%	68%	77%	57%	80%	66%	57%	65%	67%
national: other EU	1%	10%	2%	11%	5%	3%	13%	7%	6%
national: non-EU	6%	7%	1%	9%	3%	3%	2%	5%	5%
Unknown	7%	2%	0%	2%	1%	0%	2%	2%	2%
Total (%)	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Total (N)	81	123	88	86	79	61	96	614	518

European sources are cited the most within the issue field of monetary politics, with one quarter of all sources, which is even more than in the field of European Integration. Generally, there seems to be no correlation between the degree of regulation of a policy field on the European level and the kind of sources that are cited. This is extremely obvious in the field of agriculture politics, which is highly regulated on the European level and where only 3% of all sources are European. Education politics is still predominantly a responsibility of the nation-state, but still 20% of all cited sources within this field are European, and another 8% are other supranational or international. This may be due to debate about the international comparative PISA study, which may have increased the attention for the educational situation in other countries.

2.3.5 Claimants

In the following, the analysis will be focused on the actors that become visible on websites selected by the search engines as claimants. The question is which geographical scope do actors have that appear as speaker within the sphere of political online communication?

Table 31 shows that national actors also dominate as claimants with 57%, followed by European actors with 16%. Among the different EU countries the share of European actors varies from nearly 30% in Italy to 10% in the United Kingdom. In Switzerland the percentage of European claimants is the lowest with 5%. However, Switzerland is the only country where claimants from European countries are more important than claimants from non-European countries. In all other countries the proportion is the other way around. That does not suggest a very high level of horizontal Europeanisation – which would imply in this context that actors from other European countries would be especially important as claimants.

Table 31: **Scopes of claimants by countries *including* European Integration**								
	DE	**ES**	**FR**	**IT**	**NL**	**UK**	**CH**	**Total** weighted
Other supra- and internat.	5%	9%	11%	7%	3%	10%	6%	7%
European	15%	19%	15%	28%	16%	10%	5%	16%
National: own country	55%	49%	48%	51%	65%	55%	72%	57%
National: other EU	10%	7%	7%	4%	7%	10%	11%	8%
National: non-EU	14%	12%	14%	11%	9%	15%	6%	11%
Unclassifiable	2%	5%	4%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%
Total (%)	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Total (N)	393	288	281	412	352	272	173	2344

Table 32 shows how the distribution of the claimants' geographical scopes changes if the field of European Integration is not included in the analysis.

Table 32: **Scopes of claimants by countries *excluding* European Integration**								
	DE	**ES**	**FR**	**IT**	**NL**	**UK**	**CH**	**Total** weighted
Other supra- and internat.	6%	10%	12%	8%	3%	10%	6%	7%
European	11%	12%	10%	21%	9%	4%	2%	10%
National: own country	58%	54%	54%	55%	70%	62%	75%	61%
National: other EU	8%	6%	8%	4%	7%	7%	11%	7%
National: non-EU	15%	14%	12%	13%	11%	18%	6%	12%
unclassifiable	2%	5%	5%	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%
Total (%)	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Total (N)	336	238	241	352	300	226	146	1985

Overall, the percentage of European claimants declines by 6%. The relationship between claimants from other European and non-European countries is now also slightly more in favour of non-European actors than it was in Table 31. All this indicates that most of the European actors, as well as actors from other European countries are visible as claimants within the field of European Integration.

To check this assumption, Table 33 presents the distribution of claimants' geographical scopes across the issue fields over all countries. The data actually show that the field of European Integration is the only field where European actors account for nearly half of all claimants and are thereby more important than national claimants. Here, claimants from other EU countries are also twice as often visible than claimants from non-European countries.

Table 33: **Scopes of Claimants by issue fields** (weighted)									
	Monetary	**Agri-culture**	**Immi-gration**	**Troops**	**Pensions**	**Education**	**EU**	**Total**	**Total** without EU
other supra- and internat.	3%	7%	4%	22%	3%	5%	4%	7%	7%
European	28%	12%	7%	1%	10%	8%	47%	16%	10%
national: own country	44%	58%	75%	33%	79%	76%	31%	57%	61%
national: other EU	6%	11%	5%	8%	5%	8%	13%	8%	7%
national: non-EU	16%	13%	7%	35%	1%	3%	6%	11%	12%
Unknown	3%	0%	2%	1%	3%	0%	1%	1%	2%
Total (%)	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Total (N)	283	348	352	336	336	326	363	2344	1985

The data suggest that in regard to the fields of European Integration and monetary politics, the degree of Europeanisation of the communicative sphere selected by search engines matches the regulative importance of the European Union within these policy fields. However, this is mainly due to a hierarchical form of Europeanisation, since especially European actors gain visibility as claimants within the national online public sphere. In regard to horizontal forms of Europeanisation the findings are less encouraging – actors from other European countries are not especially important as claimants. Beyond these two issue fields, the European level plays a rather marginal role. But this does not necessarily mean that we find no indications of transnational communication, as the field of troops deployment shows, where other supra- and international claimants, as well as claimants from other countries than the own, play a crucial role.

It is an important question how the actors with different scopes gain online visibility. Especially in regard to actors that are not from the own country, it is interesting to see if they are able to do so in an autonomous way, or if they mainly dependent on other actors to become visible. In this regard Table 34 shows the distribution of claimants' scope by the different forms of online presence and by countries. At first sight, the total across all countries shows that although national actors are the most dominant ones within both forms of online presence, they are so in a lesser extent when the claimants depend on other actors for becoming visible online. Within the dependent form of online presence, all actors other than national ones from the own country become more important.

Table 34: **Scopes of claimants by countries and different forms of online presence** (including European Integration)

	DE		ES		FR		IT		NL		UK		CH		Total weighted	
	aut	**dep**	**aut**	**dep**	**aut**	**dep**	**Aut**	**dep**	**aut**	**dep**	**aut**	**dep**	**aut**	**Dep**	**aut**	**dep**
Other supra- and internat.	1%	7%	14%	6%	13 %	9%	2%	9%	0%	5%	15%	8%	5%	7%	6%	7%
European	6%	19%	12%	23%	18%	12%	17%	33%	19%	14%	6%	11%	0%	10%	11%	19%
National: own country	75%	44%	64%	41%	50%	45%	74%	40%	72%	60%	65%	52%	92%	53%	71%	47%
National: other EU	11%	10%	3%	9%	6%	9%	0%	6%	9%	6%	4%	12%	2%	19%	5%	10%
National: non-EU	6%	18%	2%	17%	9%	20%	7%	13%	1%	16%	11%	16%	1%	10%	5%	15%
unclassifiable	1%	2%	5%	4%	4%	5%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	1%
Total (column%)	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Total (N)	137	256	99	189	162	117	124	286	151	200	54	218	84	88	895	1442
Total (row%)	35%	65%	34%	66%	58%	42%	30%	70%	43%	57%	20%	80%	49%	51%	38%	62%

However, Table 34 also shows that there are significant variations among the countries in this regard. Only claimants from non-European countries are in all countries more often visible within the dependent type of online presence than they are within the autonomous one. Other supra- and international actors are only present in a stronger way within the dependent kind of online presence in Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Switzerland, whereas in Spain, France, and the United Kingdom they seem to be able to reach the audience in a more direct way. Presumably this is again due to the more worldwide spoken languages of these countries. European claimants and national actors from other EU countries account in most of the countries for a smaller share of all claimants within the autonomous online presence than in the dependent one, which suggests that these actors strongly depend on other actors to gain public visibility on the Internet and are hardly able to reach the online sphere of political communication directly.

We will now take a closer look at the structure of the Europeanised forms of political online communication on the claimants level. Table 35 shows the distribution of European actors by the different actor types. That data clearly indicate that – as often stated – political communication on the European level is mostly elite communication. In all countries - except Switzerland, where the total number of European claimants is anyway too little to be interpretable – state actors account for more than 90% of all claimants. European NGOs and social movement actors appear – in very small numbers – only in Spain and France. More institutionalised actors like socio-economic interest groups and social and educational actors are visible to a similarly small degree across all countries.

Table 35: **Actor type of claimants who have an EU scope by countries**								
	DE	**ES**	**FR**	**IT**	**NL**	**UK**	**CH**	**ALL** weighted
state actors	98%	91%	93%	95%	98%	100%	89%	95%
Media	0%	0%	2%	1%	0%	0%	0%	1%
socio econ. interest groups	0%	2%	0%	4%	0%	0%	0%	1%
social and educat. orgs.	2%	4%	0%	1%	2%	0%	0%	1%
NGOs	0%	2%	5%	0%	0%	0%	11%	1%
Unspecified	0%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Total (%)	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Total (N)	57	56	43	115	56	28	9	373

In general, tendencies towards a transnationalisation or Europeanisation of political online communication must not necessarily only be reflected in the organisational scope of the actors who appear on a website, but may alternatively show up in the substantive content of the claims made on these websites. To investigate this, we will now look more closely at these expressions of political opinion and aims.

2.3.6 Issue Scopes

To this end, we look at the scopes of the issues as seen by the actors who make the claims, i.e. the geographical and/or political frame of reference that the claimants indicate as relevant for the issues. Table 36 shows the distribution of issue scopes by countries.

Table 36: **Scope of Issue by countries including EU Integration** (total weighted)									
	DE	**ES**	**FR**	**IT**	**NL**	**UK**	**CH**	**ALL**	**ALL** without EU
other supra- and internat.	19%	17%	23%	19%	25%	25%	17%	21%	24%
European	34%	40%	30%	39%	35%	31%	25%	34%	22%
national: own country	35%	29%	38%	37%	32%	37%	50%	37%	44%
national: other EU	4%	1%	2%	2%	4%	4%	7%	3%	4%
national: non-EU	8%	9%	6%	4%	4%	4%	1%	5%	6%
Unknown	1%	2%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	1%
Total (%)	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Total (N)	393	288	281	412	353	272	173	2345	1986

The data show that on this level the transnational dimension is more important than the national one. More than 50% of all claims refer to a European or other supra- and international level, while the European perspective alone accounts for 34% of all claims. This tendency is more or less stable across the seven countries. The horizontal European perspective is rather marginal, since in all of the countries – except Switzerland – the claims are more likely to refer to other non-European countries than to other European ones. However, this issue is not ultimately

decidable on the basis of these data, because we always coded the highest scope if a claim referred to more than one political or territorial unit. This implies that other supra- and international references overrule European ones, and these in turn overrule national ones. Thus, it could be that references to other European countries were often connected with references to the European level and were in this way mostly ascribed to the European level. To clarify this, further analysis of the data will be necessary.

What we are able to analyse at this point in time is what the distribution of these geographical references looks like in regard to the single issue fields, as shown in Table 37.

Table 37: **Scope of Issue by issue fields** (weighted)

	Monetary	Agri-culture	Immi-gration	Troops	Pensions	Education	EU	Total	Total without EU
other supra- and internat.	8%	13%	11%	90%	7%	14%	1%	21%	24%
European	54%	32%	21%	3%	14%	11%	99%	34%	22%
national: own country	18%	43%	56%	2%	73%	66%	0%	37%	44%
national: other EU	4%	5%	5%	0%	5%	5%	0%	3%	4%
national: non-EU	16%	6%	7%	5%	1%	3%	0%	5%	6%
Unknown	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%	1%	0%	1%	1%
Total (%)	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Total (N)	284	353	352	336	335	326	359	2345	1986

Although the references to other supra- and international and European levels decrease when the issue field of European Integration is excluded from the analysis, these references are taken together still as important as purely national ones are. In the field of European Integration, the scope is by definition at least European, but could also include other supra- and international dimensions. However, actually the field of European Integration is in 99% of all cases discussed on the European level (possibly in combination with reference to the national level) and hardly any reference is made to other supra- and international dimensions. In regard to the other issue fields the assumption that the more a policy field is regulated on the European level, the more Europeanised it is in the public sphere seems to apply here much more than it did in regard to the actor scopes of the claimants. However, the field of troops deployment is an exception. Here, the most dominant references are by far other supra- and international ones with 90%.[10] The comparatively high level of other supra- and international references within the field of education politics is once again probably due to the debate about the PISA study.

Our data allow us not only to see with reference to which political or territorial scopes the claims were framed, but also which position the claimant took towards EU integration for those claims which had a European frame of reference. However, this should not be misunderstood as another indicator of Europeanisation or a lack of Europeanisation, in the sense that the more positive the positions are with regard to the EU, the more Europeanised the public sphere would be.

[10] Here again the other scopes could be hidden behind the highest scope of other supra- and international references. However, the coding experience suggests that this is mainly in favour for the national scopes and hardly to the detriment of the European dimension. But here again, further analysis will have to be done. In regard to the other issue fields the national perspective is the more dominant, the more the policy field is politically regulate on the national level.

Europeanisation of public spheres should not be mistaken for a growing consensus among and within the member states on the desirability and forms of further European integration. Several authors (Bartolino 1997 and 1999, Hix 1999, Zürn 1998) have argued that Europe may emerge as a new conflict dimension in public spheres. In this view, Europeanisation of public spheres may to an important extent occur by way of an increasing level of conflict over European integration. However, this does not have to be necessarily harmful for the development of a European collective identity. 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).

Table 38: **Position towards EU Integration by countries**

	DE	ES	FR	IT	NL	UK	CH	All weighted
Negative	0%	8%	15%	4%	6%	2%	33%	10%
neutral / ambivalent	42%	22%	20%	63%	25%	63%	4%	35%
Positive	58%	70%	65%	33%	69%	35%	63%	56%
Total (%)	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Total (N)	57	50	40	57	52	46	27	356

Even so, the data shown in Table 38 indicate that the debate about European Integration in our seven countries seems to more often refer positively or neutrally than negatively to the EU. The only country where the European Union is relatively often seen in a negative light is the only country that is not a member of the EU, namely Switzerland. In Germany, Spain, France, and the Netherlands the position towards European Integration expressed by the claimants is mostly positive, while in Italy and the United Kingdom the ambivalent or neutral perspective on European Integration dominates. Among the EU member countries, critical voices where found most frequently in France, but even there they only account for 15% of all claims, compared to 65% of claims that take a positive position towards European Integration.

2.3.7 Overall tendencies of Europeanisation

The previous explorations revealed no clear tendencies in regard to the differences in the degree of Europeanisation of claims among the countries. However, perhaps a clearer picture emerges if we combine the information on the different types of actors, as well as on the framing of the issue. To this end, Table 39 shows the percentage of claims which had any kind of European dimension, either because one of the actor types involved (i.e., gate, medium, source, or claimant) was organised on the European level, or the issue was seen in an European frame of reference. We call this form of Europeanisation that directly involves the European level "vertical" Europeanisation.

Table 39: **Vertical Tendencies of Europeanisation** (without EU Integration)*								
	DE	**ES**	**FR**	**IT**	**NL**	**UK**	**CH**	**All** weighted
EU references	23%	31%	18%	32%	24%	20%	12%	23%
no EU references	77%	69%	82%	69%	76%	80%	88%	77%
Total (%)	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Total (N)	336	238	239	352	299	224	146	1980

* Percentages of cases where an European actor or reference is visible on at least one of the following levels: gate, medium, source, claimant or issue

According to table 39, the results found within the Italian and Spanish searches show the highest degree of vertical Europeanisation in terms of the prominence of European actors and European perspectives over all levels of analysis. European references are found the least in Switzerland, while in the remaining countries this percentage fluctuates around the mean.

The other form of Europeanisation that we distinguish consists of actors from, or references to, other EU member states. This we call "horizontal" Europeanisation, because it establishes horizontal communicative linkages between member states. Table 40 shows the distribution of references to other European countries over all levels of analysis as an indicator for the degree of horizontal forms of Europeanisation.

Table 40: **Horizontal Tendencies of Europeanisation** (without EU Integration)*								
	DE	**ES**	**FR**	**IT**	**NL**	**UK**	**CH**	**All** weighted
references to other EU countries	12%	8%	11%	5%	9%	16%	12%	10%
no references to other EU countries	88%	92%	90%	96%	91%	84%	88%	90%
Total (%)	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Total (N)	336	238	239	352	299	224	146	1980

* Percentages of cases where a national actor from another EU country or a reference to another EU country is visible on at least one of the following levels: gate, medium, source, claimant or issue

At first sight, the data show that the degree of horizontal Europeanisation is considerably lower than the degree of vertical Europeanisation, i.e. European actors are more prominent than actors from other European countries. The differences among the countries shown in Table 40 are less extensive than the differences in regard to vertical tendencies of Europeanisation. However, it is remarkable that especially in Italy and Spain – where European references are considerably more important than in the other countries – references to other EU countries are less important than in the remaining countries.

Conclusions

On the general level, we found that most of the websites that offer relevant information on the search issues contain claims. However, it became clear that the number of results that needed to be checked to reach the required number of relevant websites strongly varies among the different countries. In regard to the question how transparent information providing on the Internet is - in terms of the possibility to identify which actor offers the information - our findings suggest a high degree of transparency. There are hardly any websites that do not make clear by whom they are ran. Most of the texts refer to current events or situations at the time of their publishing, which is mostly 2002, the year in which our data collection took place. In regard to the way in which the presented claims were made, two points are interesting: direct-democratic actions and protests are hardly found among the claim-making and most of the claims were originally made offline and only reported online. Thus, the online public sphere explored on this level of analysis seems to be more a place of information and communication than of direct mobilising and protest.

The analysis of the structure of political online communication in terms of the involved collective actors has shown that there are clear hierarchical patterns, especially on the important levels of information selection and online visibility of claims. On the medium level – the providers of information on their websites – the conventional news media like newspaper, magazines, television and radio clearly dominate. This implies, that although the Internet theoretically allows collective actors to reach their audience directly, most of the information visible online is still selected and filtered by the traditional news media. Even when other collective actors act as providers of information, news media articles play a significant role among the texts they offer. Additionally, media are by far the most often cited sources. It is also interesting that collective actors that act as gatekeepers for other actors on their websites tend – similar to the news media – to present more frequently state actors than other collective actors as the most important claimants. In line with this, most of the claims visible online are made by state actors, while NGOs and social movements' organisations play a rather marginal role. Due to the high salience of news media as providers of political communication, the percentage of collective actors that depend on other actors to gain visibility online is considerably higher than the percentage of actors who reach their online audience in an autonomous way. Even though, the autonomous online presence – on which many of the hopes for the Internet as a more egalitarian form of communicative space are based – is less important than the dependent one, our findings indicate that the online public sphere in which collective actors are able to reach their audience directly is indeed less hierarchical than the dependent form of online presence. However, prominence on the Internet via search engines depends not only on the frequency of appearance but also on the position of appearance. The websites of actors that are listed in a high position are more likely to be visited than websites that appear on lower positions of the result lists. The analysis of the positioning of the actors' websites showed that there are no significant differences between the actor types in this regard.

In regard to our second main question – how transnational and especially Europeanised political online communication is – our analysis was focused on the geographical scope of the actors that appear on the selected websites. However, our data in addition allow us to draw some general conclusions in regard to the limitations of the online public sphere in regard to language and

geographical location. Unsurprisingly the spread of the websites' geographical locations widens the more, the more widespread a search language is across the world. More surprising is that only a few of the websites use the possibility to reach more people than the ones that speak the same language by providing additional languages – which the Internet theoretically would make much easier than in the case of the traditional mass media. In regard to the geographical scope of the actors that play a role within the websites, actors from the own country clearly dominate on all levels, albeit to a different extent. National actors are especially often the providers of political information on their website as mediums. On this level European actors are as marginal as transnational actors. Actors that are not from the own country seem to be more important on the claimant level. In regard to a vertical Europeanisation of public sphere the findings suggest that European claimants are slightly more prominent than other supra- and international ones. Nevertheless, since actors from non-European countries are more important as claimants than actors from other European countries, there are hardly any indications of horizontal Europeanisation. However, the data showed that considerable differences exit between the different issue fields. The claimants are to some extent more likely to be European, the more a policy field is regulated on the European level. The distinction between the two different forms of online presence showed that actors that are not from the own country, are more likely to be visible online within the dependent form of online presence than they are when the claimants reach their audience in an autonomous way. Thus, European actors depend strongly on other actors to gain online visibility. This is an interesting point, because on the one hand we saw that the communicative sphere is less hierarchical when the claimants reach their audience directly but on the other hand this direct access seems to make it less likely for European actors or actors from other European countries to gain online visibility.

At this point in our analysis, we are still on a rather descriptive level of exploration. To be able to deepen our understanding of these hierarchical and Europeanised structures of political communication on the Internet, we need a comparative point of view. It may, for instance, well be the case that although political communication on the Internet shows clear hierarchical patterns, it is still *less* hierarchical than the traditional mass media public sphere. The same applies for the degree of Europeanisation. Political online communication might still be *more* Europeanised than political communication in the conventional mass media public sphere. To investigate this in further analyses, we can use the data from the newspaper analysis conducted in work package two of the Europub.com project. In this way, we will be able to compare the structure of claimants and claims in the offline public sphere of newspapers with the structure of claimants and claims within the sphere of political online communication.

To conclude, it must be emphasised that the analysis of the results of search engines is only the first part of our exploration of the Internet as a new sphere of political communication. Until now, we have investigated one of the two most often used means of finding information and websites on the Internet. To get a more complete picture, our next step will be to analyse the structure and the degree of Europeanisation of the sphere of political communication opened up by the collective actors themselves, by way of the link structures that connect them to other actors. Since these links are used by many Internet users to get further information on an issue, the structure of the online public sphere is strongly influenced by actors' decisions to which actors links are offered and to which not. It will be especially interesting to see how different the structures of this online sphere are in comparison to the sphere of political communication opened up on the basis of the selection criteria of search engines.

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