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Bringing the Mass Media in

The Contribution of the Mass Media for Understanding Citizens' Attitudes towards the European Union

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Abstract

Economic considerations, identity related considerations and cueing theory are used for explaining citizens' attitudes towards the European Union. Yet, all of this research has failed to show how elite cues on interests and identities actually reach the citizens. As a consequence, the author argues that domestic mass media as the most widely used source for citizens' information about the European Union has the potential to fill this missing link. Mass media actively construct reality by promoting ideas (agenda-setting and framing) and thereby shaping processes of socialization and persuasion. In this article the author discusses theoretical concepts of how mass media might affect citizens' attitudes, summarizes what we know about the role of domestic mass media in the course of EU integration, derives research desiderates and finally shows why knowledge on the link between mass media and citizens is paramount to understand the future of EU integration.

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1.   Understanding Citizens' Attitudes towards the European Union – a Challenge

For a long time studies of EU integration have concentrated on the elites who took decisions regarding the integration of the Union "sometimes over the opposition and usually over the indifference of the general membership" (Haas 1958: 17). Yet, since the ratification of the Maastricht treaty in 1992, this time of citizens' "permissive consensus" (Lindberg/Scheingold 1970) regarding EU integration seems over: "The permissive consensus that shielded the machinery's operators from accountability is not just under strain; it is broken" (Hooghe 2007: 5). It has been replaced by a "reluctant acceptance" (Mittag/Wessels 2003: 47) or even a "constraining dissensus" (Hooghe/Marks 2005: 426). There is a gap between elites' and citizens' attitudes towards the EU in all member states (see e.g. Hix 2005; Mittag/Wessels 2003). This gap has vividly turned relevant in recent rejections of EU treaties in Ireland, France and the Netherlands. These referenda are very likely not a unique interlude as public opinions on European integration today are well structured, are strongly polarized among citizens (Eijk/Franklin 2004) and under specific conditions even able to affect national voting (see e.g. de Vries 2007).

What drives citizens to support or oppose the European Union? How can we understand citizens' attitudes towards the European Union? These questions have been in the focus of some hundred articles. Yet, there is no scholarly consensus to the answer (Hooghe/Marks 2005). There are three main competing schools for explanation (for an overview see Hooghe/Marks 2005)[1]: economic considerations, identity related considerations and political cueing. On the economic side it is argued that EU integration creates new forms of competition that lead to societal winners and losers (Kriesi et al. 2006). Those who profit from EU integration, the better educated and the richer, tend to support it whereas the losers prefer demarcation (see e.g. Gabel 1998). Identity related research argues that European integration undermines national self-determination resulting in a cultural divide between defenders of the nation and defenders of supranationalism / multiculturalism. The relation between national identity and EU identity is double-edged: national identity and European identity may reinforce each other creating multiple identities (see e.g. Cidrin/Sides 2004). Yet, national identity – mainly if it is exclusive – may well lead to opposition of EU integration (Hooghe/Marks 2005: 433). These first two schools that seek to explain citizens' EU attitudes towards the European Union focus on citizens themselves and their internal system of attitudes. Tested against each other, both schools yield explanatory power whereas identity turns out to be more important than economy (Hooghe/Marks 2005: 438). The third school finally opens for external factors impacting these opinions: "Given that the European Union is rarely foremost in citizens' minds, we need to understand how interest and identity come to bear on European integration" (Hooghe/Marks 2005: 420). Cueing theory argues that political ideology, political parties and political elites in domestic areas influence public opinion (see e.g. Steenbergen et al. 2007). Cueing is especially influential when domestic elites are divided (Hooghe/Marks 2005: 436f).

Yet, hardly any research has asked the question of how party or elite cues on EU integration actually reach the citizens (for a critique see Carey/Burton 2004; Maier/Rittberger 2008). Gabel and Scheve (2007) for example directly connect party dissent on EU integration as studied in expert surveys with public opinion. No reference is made in this study of how citizens are assumed to gain knowledge on these competitive

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1   Other authors distinguish more explanatory variables. Loveless and Rohrschneider (2008) for example distingu-
     ish four approaches: instrumental self-interest, social location, identities and institutional performance.

cues of the elite. This missing link of cueing theory becomes also visible when looking for an answer within this theory why the attitudes of the elites (cue-givers) and the public (cue-receivers) differ so drastically regarding EU integration.

Domestic mass media have the potential to fill this missing link of cueing theory as they are the most widely used source for citizens' information about the European Union (EU-Commission 2003). Only few citizens read party programs, attend campaign meetings or have direct contact to politicians. Consequently, information on political actors, positions and issues need to be diffused by the mass media to become visible and relevant for the average citizen. If one regards mass media as neutral transmitters that mirror political reality (see e.g. EU-Commission 2006), one could argue that studying elite cues and citizens' opinions is sufficient to understand processes of opinion formation. Yet, given the limited space for information transmission, mass media's core task is to decide what is relevant and what can be left out. Mass media need to select out of the abundance of information available. This selection process (see e.g. Hagen 1993; Kepplinger 1989) – whether guided by professional selection routines like news values (Galtung/Ruge 1965) or by journalists' or editors' positions or by something else (for an overview see Shoemaker/Reese 1996) – concerns not only the topics that are discussed, but as well the actors that are given a voice and the frames that indicate what the problem is actually about. By selecting and emphasizing issues, actors and frames, mass media actively construct reality[2]. This active construction process is acknowledged by Trenz (2008: 303) when he claims that mass media are more than a "passive and submissive transmitter of meaning that is fabricated and pre-established by European political actors and institutions." Following this core finding of communication research, one must regard studies that connect elite cues to citizens' opinions as incomplete if not misleading. Such studies disregard the active role of mass media in the transmission process. Their content decides which cues about interest and identity reach the citizens: "A key to understanding why ideas about and trajectories of the future development of the EU differ between the elites and the public is the role of the media […] Press, radio, television and the Internet serve as a link between 'cue-givers' at the macro level and 'cue-recipients' at the micro-level" (Maier/Rittberger 2008: 262; see also Steenbergen et al. 2007: 31).

Putting the focus on this 'link' between EU politics and the citizens is the goal of this paper: How can mass media affect citizens' attitudes towards the European Union? To answer this question, I will first of all discuss theoretical concepts that might capture how mass media promote ideas on Europe and therefore affect citizens. In a second step the state of research regarding the role of the mass media in the European Union is summarized and research desiderates identified. Finally, I will show why an understanding of this link between EU politics and the citizens is relevant for the future of EU integration and how it helps to proceed in media effects research.

2. Mass Media as a Promoter of Ideas about Europe – Theoretical Considerations

Mass media have been identified as important in linking EU politics to its citizens. Thereby we implicitly assume a process of diffusion in which mass media as communication channels select which actors

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2   This does not mean that politicians do not influence the media agenda. Yet, I want to stress that media agendas and the political process are never a one-to-one reflection.

with specific ideas (sources and messages) become visible to a broader audience, the recipients. These recipients finally are assumed to be affected if their awareness increases and their attitudes change (see for this source-message-channel-receiver-effects model in diffusion research Rogers/Shoemaker 1971). The relation between mass media and citizens is special in terms of the diffusion mechanisms at work. Mass media as communication channels rely on very specific mechanisms for diffusion (for an overview of these mechanisms Börzel/Risse 2009). They do not have coercive power at their disposal to force their audience to follow. In addition, they cannot rely on incentives making their audience follow out of strategic reasons. So which mechanism might be at work, when mass media are involved into processes of diffusion?

Mass media might be a promoter of ideas by shaping processes of socialization and of persuasion. They impact socialization processes by promoting ideas through providing an authoritative model. An authoritative model within the mass media could be a master frame – that is a long-lasting, hardly disputed public definition of society – that stabilizes for example today's political or economic regime and the identity construction of a community. The authoritative model respectively the master frame is internalized to gain social acceptance. If mass media therefore contribute to such internalization processes, they affect processes of socialization. One can assume that such effects must be studied in a long time perspective. Finally, mass media might promote ideas through persuasion. They do so, if they present arguments and positions. These might alter the attitudes, perceptions or identities of citizens as they actively engage with new considerations (Checkel 2005: 812). Yet, attitude change in this perspective "must not be understood as an all-or-nothing shift in a 'true attitude', but as an adjustment in the mix of considerations relating to an issue" (Zaller/Feldman 1992: 611). Mass media's impact regarding persuasion therefore has different characteristics: It might only be a short-term effect if new considerations are made accessible turning them top of citizens' heads. Yet, if new considerations do not reach citizens' minds – due to the lack of information available, due to an unchanging information environment which pushes forward a dominant image[3] or due to the lack of citizens' interest – persuasion might have lasting effects. This latter consideration indicates that there is on overlap between processes of persuasion and socialization.[4]

Yet, research on the diffusion of ideas on the societal level (for an overview of how symbolic and technological innovations are diffused in societies see Rogers 1995) has shown that mass media are not the only information channel that influence the recipients. It is a combination of interpersonal communication and mass media that shapes diffusion processes of new ideas. At least for those persons who are involved in discussions with others, mass media seem to 'set the agenda' whereas attitudes are finally shaped within these interpersonal communication processes (for a summary Schenk 2002: 389-393). In return, citizens that are not exposed to media messages at all might be indirectly affected as they discuss in interpersonal settings what the mass media have set on the agenda (for empirical evidence

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3 Noelle-Neumann (1973) has demonstrated that accumulation and consonance in the messages brought forwards in a media system foster media effects. The variables of accumulation and consonance have even marked a fundamental change in media effects research: from mass media that are impotent and weak to those who have power to yield effects.

4 Finally, it is more complicated to judge whether the last mechanism for diffusion, emulation (Börzel/Risse 2009), is relevant regarding the relation between mass media and citizens. Emulation is an indirect mechanism for diffusion and relies on the idea that a sender promotes comparison and competition what makes recipients draw lessons (rationality) or imitate (normative) the peers. So far this mechanism has been applied to actors competing with each other to meet certain performance criteria. Yet, mass media might have a function in this emulation process: by publicizing the performance standards and the successful examples from peers, they put those responsible under pressure to meet the standards as citizens have become aware.

Krause/Gehrau 2007)[5]. Finally, for citizens that are not involved into interpersonal disputes on a specific matter, mass media turn into the sole and most important channel for such diffusion processes.

What does 'set the agenda' mean? How can we describe the role of mass media for shaping citizens' attitudes without ignoring the possible relevance of interpersonal communication? To answer these questions diffusion research needs to borrow from today's concepts of media effects research. These concepts are mainly concerned with understanding the role of the media in persuasion processes, less so regarding socialization (see on this focus Schenk 2002). Yet, this shortened perspective does not mean that one can only study short-term attitudes. Instead "what consistently modifies specific perceptions and appraisals of policies and institutions may, in turn, affect the deeper beliefs and, ultimately, the very identity of an individual" (Bruter 2003: 1151). Today's concepts of media impact research have dismissed the earlier notion of omnipotent mass media as well as the one of impotent mass media, but have developed a more balanced view. Opinion formation can be affected by mass media; yet under specific conditions. Factors that limit or enhance media impact are direct experiences with the object of attitude formation, alternative sources for information (e.g. interpersonal communication), a person's predispositions and recipient's selectivity and involvement when using the media (Schenk 2002: 710f.). This list of factors shows clearly that interpersonal communication, the variable identified by diffusion researchers, is conceptualized as one intervening variable in the process of attitude formation.

Today's most prominent concepts of media impact (see e.g. the special issue 2007 of the Journal of Communication) are agenda-setting and framing. Both concepts rely on the idea that mass media do not tell the people what to think, what to think about (McCombs/Shaw 1972) and thereby indirectly influence processes of persuasion: "The ultimate effect of mass media content lies in the setting of frames of reference and the focusing on specific aspects of reality, topics and attributes" (Schenk 2002: 710, own translation). Therefore the media's distribution of salience to actors, topics and frames is the crucial mechanism for its impact as this sets the agenda for internal attitude formation and for interpersonal discussions.

Agenda-setting refers to the salience of issues: the more the mass media emphasize specific issues, the more relevant are these issues in citizens' perceptions (McCombs/Shaw 1972). Agenda-setting has been studied by looking at the emphasis of mass media and citizens towards one issue over time (salience model) and towards several issues in relation to each other (priority model). That mass media have an impact on what citizens' judge important has been supported in many empirical studies on an aggregate level, less so on an individual level (for overviews see Dearing/Rogers 1996; Schenk 2002: 415-417). Yet, also agenda-setting effects are dependent on context variables, for example direct experiences with the topics, interpersonal communication and the type of mass media or their style of reporting (Schenk 2002: 441-470).

Framing finally goes beyond agenda-setting as it leaves behind a pure issue focus:

> "To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communication text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation." (Entman 1993: 52)

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5   Classical mass media effects research regards the exposure to mass media content as the necessary condition for effects. Yet, a broader understanding would allow to take mass media effects into consideration that are indirectly caused (Maurer 2004).

This macro-level of framing – modes of presentation by journalists or other communicators – is assumed to impact the micro-level of framing, citizens' perceptions (Scheufele/Tewksburgy 2007: 12). Frames thus impact how citizens make sense of politics. They are like recipes, advice from experts on how citizens should cook up their opinions (Kinder/Sanders 1996).

Yet, framing is more a research programme than a unified theory or paradigm (D'Angelo 2002): there is no consensus on the exact definition, nor on the way how one should operationalize a frame (also Weaver 2007). In addition, research so far has often remained on a descriptive level, not systematically linking the macro- and micro-level of framing. Framing effects studies finally have failed to systematically work out under which conditions framing does or does not work (Druckman 2001: 1045). Some initial steps have been taken in this direction (e.g. showing the importance of source credibility: Druckman 2001).

Are agenda-setting and framing effects of the mass media on citizens relevant and conceivable in the context of EU integration? Moravcsik (2002: 615) negates the possibility of such effects regarding EU integration as any effort to expand public engagement in EU governance is doomed to failure because EU policies generally "lack salience in the minds of European voters". The lack of awareness impedes effects. Eijk and Franklin (2004: 39) argue otherwise: Attitudes regarding the European Union are already in citizens' minds. Yet, these attitudes have hardly been mobilized. They claim that "the ingredients for contestation over EU integration are even more powerful than over the more traditional issues that are subsumed under the left/right divide" (Eijk/Franklin 2004: 39). Citizens' attitudes on EU integration therefore constitute something of a "sleeping giant" (Eijk/Franklin 2004: 32), which is likely – if agenda-setting and framing occurs – to be awakened. These empirical results counter-stand the 'no-interest & no-awareness' thesis of Moravscik. It seems not justifiable that if (some) citizens do not actively care about the European Union today, they will not do so tomorrow after having been exposed to mobilization. Consequently, the prerequisite for possible media impact regarding EU integration seems to be met at the side of the recipients. The question thereby remains whether mass media impact is hindered by the communication channels, the mass media themselves? Do they set Europe on the agenda and frame it? Or do they ignore the issue of European integration? It has been shown that domestic mass media, the main source of information for the average EU citizen (EU-Commission 2003), pick up issues of EU integration at least under specific conditions (see state of research section) and consequently also frame Europe. So, there is a mobilization potential at the side of the public and there is mass media content that might be a mechanism for such mobilization. This mechanism is all the more important as the EU is an object far away from the average citizens and thus hardly present in everyday's life. In such situations, where direct experiences and other sources of information are rare, mass media's potential impact is high (Zaller/Feldman 1992; Zucker 1978). This finding is supported by many empirical studies that show that media effects are stronger regarding 'unobtrusive' issues for which first-hand experiences are rare. Consequently, it is international or transnational topics where conditions for mass media impact are high (for an overview see Schenk 2002: 442). Taking up this finding, Hooghe and Marks (2008: 13) conclude for the EU that "public opinion on Europe is particularly susceptible to construction".

Yet, there is not the 'construction' of public opinion in the European Union. Instead, opinions are shaped at the national or even the regional and local level as already pointed out by cueing theory. Why? Because the European Union lacks a singular, pan-European public sphere. Such a pan-European public sphere is hampered by language problems of the recipients (Grimm 1995: 294; Kielmansegg 1994: 27f), by the

lacking necessity for EU politicians to legitimize their ideas in front of EU citizens because of missing democratic structures (Gerhards 2000: 292) and by the absence of a common media infrastructure (Scharpf 1998: 232). We should not speak of a complete absence of such an infrastructure when one thinks of the Financial Times, The Economist, Le Monde Diplomatique, The European Voice or TV programs like ARTE, Euronews, 3SAT etc. – newspapers or programmes that are read and viewed across European borders. Yet, all of these news outlets have something in common: they are media which are directed at an elite audience and which do not reach the average EU citizen. The average EU citizen experiences the integration process via the Europeanization of the respective national public spheres (Gerhards 1993). This claim is strongly supported by the fact that citizens judge their national or regional and local mass media as the most important and preferred source of information about the European Union (EU-Commission 2003). Consequently, it is Europeanized reporting and commentating of domestic mass media that have the potential to influence citizens' attitudes towards the European Union. Reporting and commentating on Europe in these domestic mass media differ across countries and very likely also across regions (Adam 2007a, 2007b; Diez-Medrano 2004; Peter/De Vreese 2004; Peter et al. 2004; Trenz 2000). Not only does the salience of the issue 'EU integration' differ, but also the framing made prominent. To understand therefore the role of the mass media in shaping EU attitudes, we need to relate domestic mass media's adaptation of Europe to domestic citizens' attitudes.

3. Mass Media as a Promoter of Ideas about Europe – What Do We Know and Where Should We Head?

Although domestic mass media are likely to shape citizens' attitudes towards Europe by promoting ideas, their role in the process of EU integration has hardly been studied. Trenz (2008: 291) even calls the mass media "the unknown player in European politics". Most researchers studying the political system of the European Union more or less neglect this issue. Hix (2005: 6) for example explicitly refers to domestic mass media as the central feedback mechanisms between the EU system and its citizens. Yet, the mass media are the only variable in his detailed model of the EU political system that is not further elaborated on.

Finally, those who concentrate on the mass media in Europe, analyse their debates in the search for the existence of and for the factors contributing to the development of (a) European public sphere(s) (see e.g. Adam 2007b; Gerhards 1993b, 2000; Koopmans 2007; Koopmans/Pfetsch 2006; Peter/De Vreese 2004; Risse/Van de Steeg 2007; Sifft et al. 2007; Trenz 2002). In this strand of research mass media are analysed as the most important forum of public spheres as they have the capability to transport information and opinions on a broad range of issues, permanently, to mass publics (Gerhards 1993a: 34). Thereby today, most researchers focus on the Europeanization of national mass media debates instead of searching for a singular, pan-European public sphere (see for the reasons section 2). Although the results on the levels and forms of Europeanization of these national public spheres still differ (for short summaries see Adam 2007b; De Vreese 2007; Risse forthcoming) due to different criteria analysed[6], different operationalizations employed and different foci, we know now that Europeanized reporting and commentating is most likely to

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6   There are at least two central criteria that distinguish the work on Europeanization (Adam 2007b, Meyer 2002, Tobler 2002, van de Steeg 2002): the synchronization and the interconnectedness of debates.

be found in the quality press and least likely in (private) television (see e.g. De Vreese 2007; Schlecht 2002), in times of crisis or high politics instead of routine times (see e.g. Berkel 2006; Peter/De Vreese 2004) and in policy fields that have experienced a substantial shift of competences to the EU level (Koopmans/Erbe 2004). In addition, most researchers – at least those studying newspapers – have identified an increase of Europeanization over time that also follows the increase in competences of the EU (for a summary see Risse forthcoming). These research results indicate that mass media have the potential to affect citizens' attitudes towards Europe as there are no indicators today anymore that they totally neglect the issue. Yet it also shows that the salience of Europe on the mass media's agenda and therefore mass media's impact potential varies across policy phases, media, time and issue fields. Moreover, mass media's impact potential also varies across European countries (Adam 2007a; Diez-Medrano 2004; Peter/De Vreese 2004; Peter et al. 2004; Trenz 2000): some European issues are strongly debated in one country and disregarded in another. In addition, the frames connected to these European issues might differ drastically between countries or regions. To understand this "domestic adaptation with national colors" (Risse et al. 2001: 1) media coverage has been connected to public satisfaction with democracy, elites' opinions towards the EU (Peter/De Vreese 2004; Peter et al. 2004), a country's policy tradition and the conflict constellation towards a specific issue within a country (Adam 2007a).

All the work on the Europeanization of domestic public spheres has so far resulted in a description of mass media as a promoter of ideas about Europe, as a communication channel that makes specific (sometimes European and sometimes national) actors and their positions visible. If this kind of research goes beyond describing levels, forms and developments of Europeanization, it seeks to explain when mass media's reporting and commentating opens up for European issues, actors and frames or when it con- or diverges across countries. Research on (Europeanized) public spheres therefore has treated mass media content as the dependent variable which is explained by media-internal as well as media-external factors. Yet, a closer look at these studies reveals an often only implicit empirical assumption: Mass media yield effects – effects on citizens' attitudes and identities. The justification of most empirical studies on the Europeanization of public spheres relies exactly on this effects' paradigm and therefore treats mass media content as independent variable and citizens' perceptions as the dependent variable. The relation however, between mass media and their audience is empirically not tackled in these studies (see for the same critique Scharkow/Vogelgesang 2007). Consequently, those who study the role of the mass media in the context of EU integration, limit their focus on one aspect of the diffusion process, the relation between source, message and channel (Rogers/Shoemaker 1971) and neglect the recipients and the effects. Also in terms of public sphere research (Neidhardt 1994), a focus on the speakers who try to make their standpoints visible and the mass media as transmitters – more precisely selection devices – omits the third relevant actor of public spheres: the audience. What remains remarkably under-researched is the relation between mass media's content on EU issues and the audience's reception. Börzel and Risse (2009) agree on this point when they stress that we lack knowledge of how Europeanized public spheres affect the construction of European identities among Europeans. Figure 1 shows the one-sided focus of today's research on the mass media in Europe and highlights the relation between the mass media and the citizens as the future research desiderate. To avoid any misunderstandings, figure 1 does not claim that mass media are the only variable affecting citizens' attitudes and identities (see additional arrows in figure 1). Yet, they are one that has so far been neglected when seeking to understand how citizens form opinions about the European Union.

Figure 1: Mass media in Europe – from a dependent to an independent variable
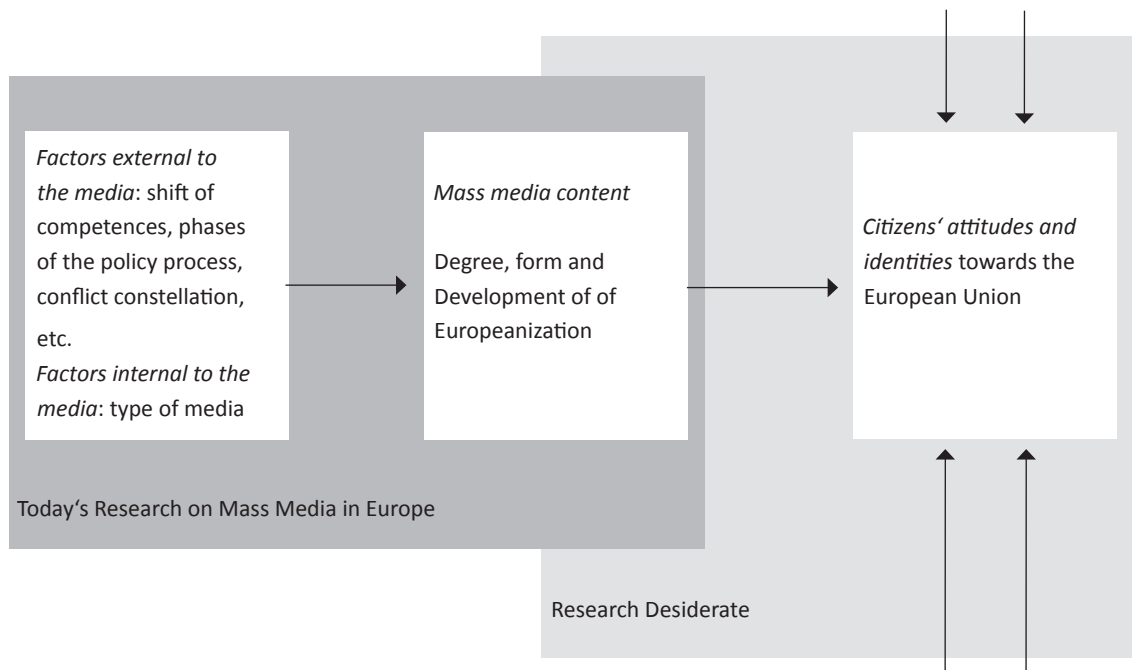
To date there are only few studies that focus on the mass media as independent variable, as a promoter of ideas that might affect citizens' attitudes and identities. One of the first studies that acknowledged the importance of the mass media in shaping attitudes towards the Union relied on media exposure measures without studying the actual content, the cues, of the media (Hewstone 1986) and asked whether citizens differ in their attitudes towards Europe if their media usage varies. Scharkow and Vogelgesang (2007) use a similar approach, when they model the effect of media use on knowledge about and support of the European Union based on Eurobarometer data. Their results can be interpreted as a first indicator of media effects. Yet, such designs that focus on one data source only (here the recipients) have difficulties establishing (more or less) causal relations between the mass media and the citizens.

Consequently other empirical studies combine different data sources. Carey and Burton (2004) for example combine their survey data with an overall evaluation of the general editorial line of the newspapers the respondents are exposed to in their study of attitudes towards the Euro in the UK. They conclude that the British press have an influence on the attitudes of their readers. Dalton and Duval (1986) finally have looked for aggregate level correlations between the tone of the news and public opinion towards EU integration in the UK. In this vein Maier et al. (2003) find a connection between media coverage and attitudes towards the Euro in Germany on an aggregate level. Yet only very small effects can be shown on an individual level. De Vreese and Boomgarden (2006a) are the first who combine a two-wave panel study with content analysis to find out how the tone and amount of news in the mass media surrounding the EU summit in 2002 affect the evaluation of EU enlargement in the Netherlands and Denmark. They show that mass media matter. Yet, the impact is connected to the type of coverage: high intensity and consonance increase the effects (De Vreese/Boomgaarden 2006a). In this study the authors also take into account interpersonal communication about the EU. They show that interpersonal communication, citizens' sophistication and the type of media content are intervening variables regarding media effects (De Vreese/Boomgaarden 2006b, 2006c).

In addition, experimental research on the effects of specific frames of EU integration has been conducted (De Vreese 2004; Maier/Rittberger 2008; Schuck/De Vreese 2006). Schuck and de Vreese (2006) manipulate newspaper articles framing EU enlargement as a risk or as an opportunity. They show that framing had significant effects on readers' support for enlargement. This effect was especially strong in the segment of the less knowledgeable. Additionally, de Vreese (2004), by manipulating a TV news story, can show that framing in terms of economic consequences versus conflict and controversy matters. These two frames directed the audience's thoughts – yet they did not impact the overall level of support for EU integration. Maier and Rittberger (2008) further elaborate on the operationalization of frames and study the effects of economic and identity related frames including the involved tone in the context of enlargement processes. They show that the explanatory power of their model increases when content is studied in a more differentiated way.

This summary of the state of art makes clear why Maier and Rittberger (2008: 248) describe research on media effects on citizens' EU attitudes as an "embryonic field of study" and de Vreese and Boomgarden (2006a: 421) claim that "it is striking that the relationship between the media and public opinion on European integration [...] has remained so underdeveloped in the scientific literature." The studies conducted so far show that mass media have an influence on public perceptions about the European Union. Yet, they cast only a small spotlight on the complex relation between mass media and citizens' attitudes. To identify the path future research needs to take, I will confront research on this relation regarding European integration with the theoretical considerations, empirical results and shortcomings of research on the diffusion of ideas, agenda-setting and framing in other contexts. The main important research desiderates will be summed up in the following four points: a) Methods, b) Independent variable, c) Dependent variable, and d) Intervening variables.

a) Methods: To detect mass media effects is a challenging task as impact studies rely on a causality assumption: mass media content as independent variable affects citizens' attitudes, perceptions or identities, the dependent variable. To detect causality (see for minimum criteria of causality Stegmüller 1983), there must not only be a meaningful theory that binds both variables together, but also an empirically significant relation between the two variables, that is controlled for other relevant, intervening factors. Finally, causality requires that the independent variable precedes the dependent variable in time. As a consequence thereof, mass media effects research cannot rely on static snapshots, but need to be dynamic to take account of the time dimension. As causality is assumed to link two distinct variables, media content and citizens' attitudes, a one-data source design is inappropriate to detect effects. It is for example not sufficient to rely on survey data and thereby take media usage as an alternative indicator for media content. There are two methods that allow bringing together mass media content and citizens' attitudes: experiments and a combination of surveys and content analysis. As experiments allow controlling all variables, they give us the clearest indicator of causality. Yet, experimental research brings along some problems that mainly refer to the external validity of the results. First, one cannot take into account that individuals' awareness differs. Experimental situations make everybody receive the messages. Second, experimental research cannot answer the question how long effects are lasting (Bruter 2003: 1169). Third, experimental research hardly takes into account that frames differ in their salience and compete with other frames for dominance. Fourth, experimental settings do not allow incorporating interpersonal communication processes which have proven to be important intervening variables in the

process of attitude formation.

The challenge of today's media impact research is therefore to study agenda-setting and framing in real-world settings which allow for variation in recipients' awareness, for control of the durability of effects, for competing frames and for the inclusion of intervening variables. So far only agenda-setting studies have been conducted in such real-world settings whereas studies concerned with framing effects primarily rely on experiments. Kinder (2007: 158) criticizes this focus when he claims that "it is nevertheless unnerving […] that we still are waiting for compelling demonstrations of framing effects in natural settings." Impact studies in real-world settings need to combine surveys and content analysis. They can do so on an individual or an aggregate level. A typical study on the aggregate level shows whether a change in the overall public opinion of a country is preceded by a change in media coverage and thereby compares time series on attitudes and media coverage. A research design on the aggregate level implicitly assumes that mass media within a country report and comment similarly and that individuals are affected in a uniform manner (Maurer 2004: 408). Studies on an individual level analyse whether the individual information environment, the usage of specific mass media, changes the attitude of an individual. Such a design is based on the assumption that mass media are not consonant in their reporting and commentating and that effects vary according to the information a recipient was exposed to (Maurer 2004: 408f).

So which design is able to detect mass media effects? If the coverage of all domestic mass media is consonant within a country, aggregate level analyses reveal media effects whereas individual level analyses fail to do so (see for the following reasoning Maurer 2004). The reason lies in the fact that individual level analysis compares different types of users and non-users of mass media coverage and assumes that they are differently affected. If, however, those who use mass media receive similar messages independent of which newspapers or newscast they are exposed to and if non-users are exposed to the dominant message of the mass media indirectly via interpersonal communication, no systematic differences can be observed on an individual level (also McGuire 1989). Yet, on an aggregate level, we find the assumed uniform effect of the mass media. In contrast, if the mass media of a country differ in their reporting and commentating, analyses on an aggregate level will fail to detect effects as citizens are exposed to different stimuli. To capture the impact of different stimuli is the strength of an individual level analysis.

To truly detect mass media effects a combined analysis of individual and aggregate level designs is necessary (see for this claim Jäckel 2001; Maurer 2004; Pan/McLeod 1991; Scheufele 2008). As has been shown, both have advantages. Additionally, without an analysis on the individual level, the mechanisms of media impact remain hidden. Mass media effects result out of a black box. It is difficult to conclude causality from an aggregate-level analysis. However, just focusing on the individual level, probably oversees that individuals are part of groups and networks which might accelerate or hinder processes of societal opinion formation (Scheufele 2008).

In addition, the very complex individual-level analysis of media effects must be improved. So far, individual level analyses are based on a comparison of the impact of different stimuli, i.e. different mass media coverage, on the recipients (Maurer 2004: 418). One compares the influence of specific types of information flows relative to other information flows. This is the most common but also the most problematic way of detecting media effects as if both types of information flow push in the same direction – see congruence problematic described above – no effect can be observed (Chong/Druckman 2007: 105f). Consequently,

I propose to search for effects on an individual level by comparing attitudes before and after exposure (Chong/Druckman 2007; also Scheufele 2000). Such a comparison allows detecting effects on an individual level even if the information flow pushes in the same direction across various media. It calls for a panel analysis. In addition, studies on the individual level so far have neglected interpersonal communication whereas aggregate level analysis have referred to interpersonal communication as one mechanism that explains why a consonant media voice may diffuse even to those who were not exposed to mass media's message (Maurer 2004). I would argue that interpersonal communication should also be part of individual level studies. Ego-centric network analysis might offer a tool to empirically tackle the complete information environment of individuals. I am aware that the proposed method to detect media effects is ambitious but not without flaws which seem to be part of media impact research (Scheufele 2008: 357).

b) Independent variable: Media content is the independent variable of impact studies. So far most studies that seek to understand the role of domestic mass media in the process of attitude formation about Europe reduce mass media content to the salience of EU issues and the tone of coverage (positive versus negative). Research on citizens' attitudes on Europe, however, has clearly shown that economic considerations as well as identity related considerations explain support or opposition towards Europe. It is therefore a research desiderate to study identity and economic frames within mass media. In addition to such substantive frames on EU integration that define the nature of problems and solutions, framing in the European Union also deals with the appropriate level of government (Leitner 1997; Princen 2007: 32). These two sides of framing – framing of substantive issues and of scales – must then be closely linked to citizens' considerations that have been identified as relevant in shaping their opinions on EU integration. This demand for a closer inspection of mass media content is forcefully put forward in framing research on EU politics (see e.g. Schuck/De Vreese 2006: 22). First empirical steps in this direction have been taken by Maier and Rittberger (2008). Yet, this demand is not limited to effects research in the context of EU integration. Instead, framing research in general is too simple when it comes to operationalization of frames (for such a critique see Reese 2007).

c) Dependent variable: Citizens' attitudes, perceptions and identities are the dependent variable in media effects' studies. So far agenda-setting and framing studies in the context of EU integration have been primarily concerned with the salience citizens attribute to an issue or frame and with their evaluation of specific policies. Yet, no effect of the mass media could be shown regarding "deeper" attitudes on EU integration. Such deeper attitudes are often considered key variables as they in turn shape more concrete attitudes towards Europe. Ideational and economic considerations have been identified as such key variables (Hooghe/Marks 2005). How can mass media affect these variables? Which of these variables can more easily be influenced? Do mass media contribute to shaping identities as Bruter (2003: 1170; 2008: 282) claims or the picture of an "imagined community" (Anderson 1991)? Recent experiments seem to indicate that "what consistently modifies specific perceptions and appraisal of policies and institutions may, in turn, affect the deeper beliefs and, ultimately, the very identity of an individual" (Bruter 2003: 1151)[7]. To capture mass media impact on such key variables, it is not only necessary to study mass media messages in a differentiated way, but also to collect data on citizens' attitudes with survey instruments that truly capture these key variables. Bruter (2008) for example shows that survey questions frequently used

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7   Also Hooghe and Marks (2005: 437) acknowledge that identities are constructed in national debates and conflicts.

to measure European identity (see e.g. Moreno question in Eurobarometer surveys) are not adequate. He concludes that European identity is not properly measured with these standard questions (for an alternative instrument Bruter 2003: 1172).

d) Intervening variables: Research has shown that mass media's impact differs according to the type of message, the communicator of the message and the characteristics of the recipients (Maurer 2004: 405) – and one needs to add, the relevance of interpersonal communication. In order to come close to a causality link between media messages and citizens' attitudes, one has to systematically test the intervening variables (see Zaller 1992) – such as recipients' awareness and predispositions, the degree of consensus or dissensus made visible in media messages (also De Vreese/Boomgaarden 2006a; Gabel/Scheve 2007; Sniderman/Theriault 2004), the ideological/partisan affiliation of the communicator and finally added, citizens' involvement in interpersonal communication settings. So far most research on mass media's role in shaping EU attitudes has fallen short on a systematic test of such intervening variables (first steps have been taken by de Vreese/Boomgaarden 2006b). Such intervening variables should influence the research design, the research instruments and the methods for analysis.

4.   Mass Media and Citizens' Attitudes towards Europe – Why Should We Care?

Why focus on domestic mass media and search for their impact on citizens' attitudes, perceptions or identity constructions regarding Europe? First of all, Europe serves as an ideal place to search for media effects and therefore further develop concepts of diffusion, agenda-setting and framing. The European Union in this perspective is regarded a test case. This test case offers specific characteristics: it makes media impact on citizens likely as the EU with its complex and distant policy-making process is hard to directly experience. Such a setting might allow us to further our understanding of how and under which conditions media's agenda setting and framing impacts opinion formation.

Second, how attitudes, perceptions and identities are formed is of special relevance in the context of EU integration. Whether, how and under which conditions domestic mass media impact this process has so far hardly been studied. So far mass media in the context of EU integration have been either ignored or they have been analysed as the most important forum for the Europeanization of public spheres. Hereby we have studied under which conditions mass media open up for European / member state actors, issues and frames and under which conditions they con- or diverge in their coverage about Europe. Most of this work is driven by the implicit assumption that mass media may affect citizens. This assumption is plausible as domestic mass media are the most important information channel for citizens – a cue-transmitter. Yet, our empirical knowledge on the relation between the mass media as those deciding which cues of the elite become visible and the cue-receivers (audience) is limited in the context of the European Union. In light of the fact that the "permissive consensus" (Lindberg/Scheingold 1970) is replaced by a "constraining dissensus" (Hooghe/Marks 2005: 426), research on the mechanism that shape attitudes, perceptions and identities on Europe becomes paramount to understand the future of EU integration (Maier/Rittberger 2008: 244). The mechanism studied so far in research on EU opinions, cue-giving, has failed to show how cues of elites actually reach the citizens. Bringing in domestic mass media as selection device for the elites' cues might help us to understand why the attitudes between elites (cue-givers) and the public (cue-

receivers) differ so drastically in all member countries of the European Union.

First signs of the constraints that public opinion imposes on EU integration have become visible in recent times. The rejections of important EU treaties in France, the Netherlands and Ireland might be a foretaste of the importance of public opinion for EU politics in the future. What is the consequence thereof? If the public cannot be ignored anymore, politics changes – from interest group politics to mass politics (Hooghe/ Marks 2008: 8f). The arena of mass politics changes the content as well as the process of EU decision-making as governments "try to anticipate the effect of their decision on domestic publics" (Hooghe/Marks 2008: 9). Beyers and Kerremans (2004) support this claim when they show that those interest groups that can mobilize public support or that deal with issues on which support may be easily mobilized have better chances to gain access to public officials in the European Union of today.

Follesdal and Hix (2005) place their hopes for the future of European integration on exactly these mechanisms that foster opinion formation – on publicity through mass media. They claim that the EU's democratic deficit can be reduced if contestation for leadership and over arguments takes place. In these contestations, citizens may form opinions on Europe – a prerequisite that EU politics becomes linked to citizens' preferences and interests.[8] Others shed a more critical light on public contestation about Europe. Bartolini (2006) for example claims that such a contestation might undermine the formation of EU parties, lead to frustration of citizens as the EU has limited competences to react to the voiced preferences and interests and that it might put national parties under pressure as EU attitudes are not systematically connected to traditional left-right cleavages. Beyond, Hooghe and Marks (2008: 22) claim that such mass politics in Brussels might undermine traditional ways of compromise finding. As a consequence governments might be tempted to surround public opinion by shifting decision-making to non-majoritarian regulatory agencies and by avoiding controversial referendums.

There is no doubt that a politicization of EU integration is likely to cause change. Beyond, it is unlikely that such politicization of the EU can "be stuffed back in the bag" (Hooghe/Marks 2008: 22). Yet, before we can understand what such public contestation does to the future of EU integration, we need to look at its effects on citizens. If public contestation for example were to foster European identities, it would facilitate the EU political process as citizens would be willing to accept majority decisions or even transfer parts of their own wealth. Yet, if such contestations undermine the development of European identities, it has the potential to hinder steps for further EU integration. It is therefore an empirical question how politicization is changing EU integration. The answer to this empirical question can only be gained if we understand how opinions towards EU integration form and which opinions result – and here it is mass media whose role should be more closely analysed.

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8   In my opinion Bartolini's (2006: 52) fear that public contestation on Europe might change "original indifference
     or support to evolve in informed and qualified opposition" is no argument that challenges the democratization
     effect of politicization.

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