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Communicating the European (Lack of) Union. An Analysis of Greece's Financial Crisis in Communication Terms

Abstract

Our analysis starts from the theoretical discussions around the emergence of a European public sphere and the correlation with its intrinsically related concept of public sphere. Given the great amount of literature on the subject, we have chosen to briefly point out the ideas that have impacted the most upon the further developments of research carried out in the field. Our goal is to demonstrate how EU's current lack of intellectual leadership and political commitment is aggravated by the lack of (a) solid European public sphere(s) and consistent EU communication. The recent financial crisis that hit Greece is just an eloquent example.

Keywords: EU communication, European public sphere, communication deficit, legitimacy

1. Some Insights into the Concept of European Public Sphere

The last decade has known a flourishing academic literature on the topic of (a) European public sphere(s), which is considered to be a challenging research topic by scholars of European integration, political sciences, mass communication and sociology alike. Trenz (2005) emphasizes the centrality of the media and underscores the fact that the dedicated literature opens a new link between European studies and communication studies, which are considered to be vital for the advancements of research in the field (see also Bârgăoanu *et al.*, 2010). The concept of the public sphere is acknowledged to be a multidimensional one. It is referred to as “the engine of democratization”, „the social and communicative infrastructure of democracy”

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(Trenz, 2005:1), „a shared community of communication” (Risse, 2002:10) or „an open field of communicative exchange” (Trenz, 2008); the public sphere is a space where citizens discuss issues of public interest (Van de Steeg, 2004). Taking into account that the European public sphere is „the prerequisite for better governance, legitimacy and citizens’ participation in the emerging European polity” (Trenz, 2005:5) and that it „seeks to understand the engagement or lack of it among European citizens with the political project” (Golding, 2006:3) it becomes an essential feature for the future of the European Union (EU).

Regardless of the lively theoretical discussion, no consensus has been reached concerning a single definition of the European public sphere so far. Moreover, there are scholars who doubt its mere existence. McCormick (2007) doubts the possibility of a genuine public debate within the EU. Being a euro-skeptic, McCormick suggests that as long as the EU continues to be divided in autonomous sectors setting their own priorities and lacking strict governmental control, there will be little (or no) prospects for a public deliberation. In fact, the current EU functions as “*multiple Europes of varying regulatory levels*” (McCormick, 2007:280) in which member states will act as a consortium, and not as separate entities.

Among the theoreticians who endorse the idea of an emerging European public sphere, three models have been promoted and accepted: a) the development of a common European-wide public sphere, b) the Europeanization of national public spheres and c) the emergence of a European public sphere a consequence of the segmentation of transnational spheres of European publics (Kopper & Leppik, 2006). The first model urges the need for a common media system, a common language and the reception of European media by people in all EU member states. This seems to be rather unlikely, as one can not truly consider the prospects of a common language, in spite of the fact that the English language is considered to be the unofficial *lingua franca* of the communication within the EU (Bârgăoanu *et al.*, 2010). Moreover, the consolidation of a common media system and the issue of the reception of European media by people in all EU member states have resulted in failure so far.

The second model focuses on the coverage of European topics and the actions of EU’s decision-makers in national public spheres and their evaluation from a European and not from a national perspective (Kopper & Leppik, 2006, Kunelius & Sparks, 2001). Some authors have noted that the development of the European public sphere can only take the form of the Europeanization of the national public spheres

(Bruggemann, 2005:2). The media play a fundamental role in such Europeanized national public spheres as „according to the citizens themselves, their knowledge of the EU is derived largely from the mass media (television and radio)” (Kunelius & Sparks, 2001:9). In order for a European public sphere to evolve, national media have to transform themselves into the European mechanisms of public debate, and they have to focus on European issues, rather than national ones. Or, at least, they have to „use similar criteria of relevance and similar forms of reference across national publics spheres when discussing European issues” (Risse, 2003:3).

The third model of the European public sphere is premised on the idea of the emergence of a European public sphere as a result of the rise of transnational political communication and of the transnational (global) media. Put it differently, as a consequence of the increasing role of political communication within the EU, political issues have increased their chances to fall under public scrutiny, thus increasing the communicative and deliberative activity in the national public spheres (Bârgăoanu *et al.*, 2010:8). At the same time, this type of conceptualization emphasizes a major deficiency of the so called European public sphere: the transnational (global) media favor the emergence of a transnational public sphere, but this is not necessarily European. One actually deals with fragments of public spheres in which global topics/concerns are discussed in an *ad hoc* manner: environment and climate change, threat of terrorism, economic development, socio-economic gaps etc.

The very possibility regarding the emergence of a European public sphere is a matter of theoretical dispute, too. As Koopmans (2007:183) emphasizes, “the discrepancy between Europe’s institutional development, on the one hand, and the continuing predominance of the national political space as the arena for public debates and participatory citizenship, on the other, is at the core of Europe’s democratic deficit”. Moreover, citizens’ participation in debates on European affairs should start from a European and not from a national perspective: „In the absence of transnational interest groups, parties and social movements, we are unlikely to see an emerging European public sphere in which the issues are discussed from a European rather than the various national perspectives” (Risse, 2003:6). Still, the most important argument is the lack of a common collective identity of the meant-to-be “European citizens”, the lack of a European identity: „The lack of a collective identity renders the prospects for a viable European public sphere rather bleak. There is no agreement on common interests; different languages and disparate national cultures make opinion

formation and common action unlikely” (Eriksen *in* Lauristin, 2007: 399). In order for a public sphere to function, the minimum requirement is that “the members must recognize each other as being members of the same group” (Eriksen, 2007:24). A common vision and a shared mission are a basic condition for a European public sphere to genuinely emerge. This condition seems to be largely met by the civil servants and political representatives working for the EU institutions (Eder, 2009). These two prerequisites – common vision and shared mission – become serious and controversial when it comes to citizens, as the former rejections of the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe showed. Judging by the development of the Greece’s recent financial crisis, they become equally serious and controversial when it comes to the high-profile leaders of EU member-states, as this article will emphasize.

2. European Identity – a Prerequisite for a Functional European Public Sphere

As many theoreticians endorse, one of the major issues related to the concept of a European public sphere is the gap between the levels of institutional development – one can say institutional sophistication – of the EU and the sense of belonging to the EU (Beciu, 2004). Recognition of this problem is not new. EU officials started to look into the concept of a European identity beginning with the 1970s (Stråth *in* Schlesinger & Foret, 2007). Until then, while a “European consciousness might sometimes have been evoked; identity as such was not a card to play” (Schlesinger & Foret, 2007:127). The economic crisis of 1970s urged the member states to reinforce their global position by deepening the European construction. Thus, the EU leaders discovered the issue of the European identity and the EU communication policy, which has been a permanent concern of the EU institutions ever since. Therefore, in 1972, a “Declaration on a European Identity” defined European identity based on three pillars: (1) common heritage, interests and special obligations within the community; (2) the “dynamic nature” of European unification; and (3) the extent to which the nine member states are collaborating in relation to the rest of the world (Burgess, 2002:479). This embryo of the concept of European identity is based on internal unity and heritage with regard to the rest of the world. Thus, it was premised on the idea of common features of the (then) nine member states in relation to other international associations and states.

Trenz (2005:9) classifies the approaches in analyzing the formation of a European collective identity into two main categories: “searching a European identity in the degree of support that European citizens are willing to grant to the European Union” (by analyzing Eurobarometer surveys which, beginning with 1975 included questions regarding the sense of belonging to the European Union) and by looking at a European collective identity “as a projection that is developed in public discourse”. In our opinion, these two approaches have to be integrated in order to determine empirical results in the direction of creating a European identity, and they must be strongly correlated with the public communication of the EU institutions and the feedback that “EU citizens” offer.

The literature frames the concept of European identity into that of collective identity. Identity is mainly understood as “a network of feelings of belonging to, and exclusion from, human subgroups: a gender group, a given age group, a family, religion, race, community, nation, etc. The unique superposition of groups a human being feels attached to constitute his or her individual and unique ‘identity’, together with the definition of what constitutes the out-group” (Bruter, 2004:25). Furthermore, “collective identities are social constructions which use psychological needs and motives to provide an answer to the questions “whom do I belong to?” or “whom do we belong to?” (Eder, 2009:431). One person is able to have multiple identities, which do not exclude one another. This is an essential but often ignored aspect; for instance, when debating the issue of European identity, this is often related to the national identity and presented in zero-sum terms: citizens of member states may feel either French, British, Polish, etc. or European (belonging to the European Union). These are considered mutually exclusive and the idea of complementary identities is ruled out. Such assumptions have been widely controversial (Bruter, 2004; Risse, 2003; Burgess, 2002), since the Eurobarometer surveys show that “country first, but Europe, too” is the dominant outlook in most EU countries and people do not perceive this as contradictory (Risse, 2003). This appears to be a solid argument, since people definitely have multiple identities: a person relates first to their community identity, then to their regional identity, their national identity, their European/ Asian (and so on) identity, all to be integrated in a global identity. At this point, one has to bear in mind the difference between European and EU identity (in this paper European identity equals EU identity), as “people might feel a sense of belonging to Europe in general, while feeling no attachment to the EU at all – and vice versa” (Risse,

2003:9). We argue that, although the argument of multiple identities is valid, the preeminence of the national identity over the European identity of most of the people living across the EU is a serious matter when it comes to the EU democratic deficit, the lack of an EU demos and a European public sphere. It also becomes manifest under crisis circumstances, when different groups, communities or nations feel that their identity and interests are threatened by integration, as the 2010 “Greek tragedy” indicates: “the ‘national/territorial cleavage’ is manifest at the EU level if any of these features of national identity are threatened and/or if some nations are perceived to benefit (through gaining resources, for example) at the expense of others (Hix, 1998:8).

The mass media and the EU officials have a significant role in communicating Europe. EU’s PR and image politics “open up new ways of visualizing and popularizing the EU to its citizens” (Trenz & Eder, 2004:16). Although this is a basic condition of the emergence of a European public sphere, it is not a sufficient one for the development of a European identity. Rational debates are not enough in creating a “we feeling” among people across the EU. Genuine European citizens must also relate to “an emotionally loaded social imaginary of a common Europe” (Calhoun *in* Lauristin, 2007:407), must share the same mission and vision of the EU’s future. “A democratic EU needs a people conscious of itself as a people” (Eder, 2009:434). To this, we may add the need for the EU to have a crystallized EU leadership – identifying itself as European.

A functioning European public sphere and a functioning European Union need a strong European identity and a strong leadership conscious of and sharing this identity. According to Bruter (2004:22-23), who follows the path of traditional social contract theory (Jean Jacques Rousseau, Max Weber), “it seems that without identity, there can be no true, durable legitimacy attached to a political entity, no conscious acceptance of the power of the state”. If EU leadership fails to build a European identity first for itself and then for EU citizens and to involve them in the emergence and performance of a European public sphere, the future of the supra-national structure might be in danger.

3. The Chronicle of a Downfall Foretold

Greece's financial problems have been interpreted in a mixed manner¹. Two general opposing views have emerged, one seeing them as the consequence of the decline of the global economy, the other of the Greek government's profligacy, which has triggered the country's enormous debts and deficits. Some of the recent reflections and commentaries on the topic, made by preeminent figures in the fields of economy or political sciences, have brought forward solid arguments in favor of a rethinking of Greece's troubles, their source, and the solutions put forward by the local government and, more importantly, by the European Union of which Greece is a part. The debate over the plans that should be put in place in order to help Greece to overcome the crisis has recently switched from a local "Greek mess" to a global "Euro(pean)mess". The winner of the 2008 Nobel Prize for economy, Paul Krugman, wrote in *The New York Times* (The Making of a Euromess, February 14, 2010) that the economic situation in the old continent has gradually worsened since the adoption of the single currency by a Union not yet ready for such a complex experiment. According to Krugman, this rash decision, agreed to by more than half of the EU member states, has led to what he calls a "euromess", an expression used to describe the predicaments that many of the 16 countries of the Eurozone are facing to a greater or lesser extent. This is why Krugman and many other thinkers, such as Immanuel Wallerstein and Joseph Stiglitz, to name but two of the most renowned, believe that the Greece's crisis is, in fact, Europe's (i.e. EU) crisis, and that this is primarily a problem of the EU and not only of one of its member states. That the financial crisis in Greece has exposed deeper weaknesses of the EU is beyond doubt. What are the actions that the EU should take in order to help itself and Greece surmount these difficult times is still debatable. Opinions are divided, but we can acknowledge at least the general agreement that extreme positions such as "the Greeks should take care of their own finance" should be avoided. If the EU reconsiders its monetary union and, together with this, the status of the financial integration it seeks, is still to be seen. Germany,

¹ At the time this article was completed, the finance ministers of the group of 16 countries that use the euro and the European leaders agreed on a 30-billion-euro package of three-year loan at interest of about 5% if Greece seeks help (11 April 2010). See "Statement on the support to Greece by Euro area Members States", Brussels, 11 April 2010 (http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/113686.pdf) and "Euro zone aid provides short-term relief for Greece", published 13 April 2010 (www.euractiv.com). For a chronology of Greece's crisis, see www.euractiv.com.

Europe's deepest pocket, has agreed to bail out Greece only if this intervention is combined with the International Monetary Fund's assistance. The consensus on how the EU should approach this sensitive matter – the danger of breaking up of the Euro union – is far to be reached yet. Time will show if the discussions and the debates over the topic result in a wise decision. Meanwhile, both Greece and its “big brother/ or sister”, the EU, will continue to struggle with the financial and social problems that the budget-deficit disequilibrium triggers.

In the remaining of this article, we will propose a brief examination of two of the most invoked reasons that have been thought to constitute the roots of the tough times for the EU as a whole and for its member states, particularly Greece. First of all, one of the major decisions of the EU, which has greatly impacted upon its member states, was the creation of the euro and the adoption of the single currency by 16 of these countries. Giving up to their national currencies has proven to be a more complex issue than some of the group of 16 had imagined. Secondly, the recent global crisis has revealed a significant flaw in the projected construction of the monetary union – its lack of consistency, determined by the fact that the financial integration was never backed-up by political integration.

4. The Eurozone is in Trouble

Back in 1992, when the Treaty of Maastricht established the provisions for the creation and the introduction of the euro, the envisaged monetary union of all EU member states was seen as a turning point in the EU's history. Basically, the Treaty stated that all EU members of that time should start taking the necessary steps towards the adoption of the single currency. The document also provided a list of strict criteria that member states would need to meet in order to replace their national currencies with the euro. One of the requirements listed in the Treaty has been intensely recalled these days: the budget deficit per country tolerated within the Eurozone is less than 3% of that country's GDP. Other conditions were: a debt ratio of less than 60 % of GDP, low inflation and interest rates close to the EU average. Greece's deficit is of 12,7 % of GDP, a percentage that significantly exceeds the allowed threshold of 3%. Originally, the Greek government had notified the EU that the budget deficit was around 7% of GDP, but later, when Prime Minister Papandreou took office, he unveiled his predecessors' concealment of the true size of the deficit – approx. 13 %

of GDP. But this should not have struck the EU as news, as earlier reports of Greece's economic performance had shown that the country hadn't met the 3% requirement in any of the previous years, except 2006.

Table 1. Greece's deficit as notified to the European Commission

Greece deficit (% of GDP)	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Notification of								
2005								
March	-3.6	-4.1	-5.2	-6.1				
September	-6.1	-4.9	-5.7	-6.6				
2006								
April		-4.9	-5.8	-6.9	-4.5			
October		-5.2	-6.1	-7.8	-5.2			
2007								
April			-6.2	-7.9	-5.5	-2.6		
October			-5.6	-7.3	-5.1	-2.5		
2008								
April				-7.4	-5.1	-2.6	-2.8	
October				-7.5	-5.1	-2.8	-3.5	
2009								
April					-5.1	-2.8	-3.6	-5
October					-5.2	-2.9	-3.7	-7.7

Source: Report on Greek Government Deficit and Debt Statistics, January 2010, p. 14

The numbers speak for themselves; now both the Greek government and the EU officials deplore the seriousness of Greece's fall and seek to reach an agreement to safeguard stability in the country and in the euro area. To put it differently – this is tantamount to admitting that the eurozone's rules have proven to be too weak to withstand the economic crisis. However, some analysts believe that the failure lies not only in the non-compliance with the eurozone rules, but also in the lack of reaction to such observable violations. Fines have never been applied to member states that had

exceeded the 3% of GDP limit for staying in the eurozone. Greece is not the only one to provide an example of reckless spending and inadequate reaction to the economic realities of the time. As a matter of fact, its current crisis has sown concerns about the debts and deficits of other European countries. It is the case of Portugal, Ireland and Spain, which have been lumped together with Greece by the controversial acronym PIGS (later to include Italy, too – PIIGS). The lack of fiscal discipline and control measures across the eurozone has led not only Greece and other less solid economies to break the rules, but also states considered to be the pillars of the EU. In a recent article, Stiglitz has commented on a warning from Jean-Claude Trichet, the President of the European Central Bank, who considers that no favoritism should characterize the EU's response to financial problems that any of the eurozone countries might be facing. However, Stiglitz remarked that Trichet had “failed to note that there had long been a double standard – in effect two Maastricht treaties, one for the large and powerful countries, and another for the smaller and less powerful. When France broke the EU edict not to let deficit exceed 3% of GDP, there were strong words, but little else”.

Greece's unfortunate financial situation has given rise to much controversy regarding the viability of the eurozone and of the monetary union envisaged by the European Commission. At the same time, the downturn of some of the southern European economies has reinforced the concern for the political consolidation of the monetary bloc.

5. “The United States of Europe”

This is an expression with a long history: it was introduced by Victor Hugo at the International Peace Conference which he presided in Paris, in 1849. Hugo's vision of planting a tree in his garden so it would mature by the time that “the United States of Europe” would have sprung up still remains to be fulfilled. In spite of idealistic views, such as Krugman's proposal that “the European nations should start to function more like the American states”, finding thus their way out these difficult times, the romantic idea of a genuinely unified Europe still has a lot of road ahead. Nevertheless, the EU – the closest structure to the idea grasped by the expression “the United States of Europe” – must take great steps towards political integration of its members.

The main criticism of the development of the EU touches the lack of political integration across the Union. The main constraints of the eurozone are of a political nature, and it is only recently that the EU has acknowledged that the monetary unification comprises a political dimension as well. The lack of total political support for the economic decisions of the EU can no longer be left aside or even ignored. Particular situations, such as the downfall of European economies triggered by the global crisis, have shown that the lack of political integration in the EU has significantly delayed intervention. Needless to say, the debate over the nature of the intervention (either financial or political support, or both) is far to reach consensus. We consider that EU's prospects will not brighten unless the issue of a strong political commitment and strong EU leadership is resolved.

The current EU architecture rests on the theoretical foundation provided by the integration process. The "founding fathers" of the European project conceived the development of the EU in terms of the transformations carried out by the widening and deepening of integration. The spill-over of the solid, competitive economies has been thought to impact on the smaller ones; the desirable goals achieved by EU's powerful countries would propagate to the less powerful ones. However, together with the propagation of prosperity, the spill-over has also contributed to the diffusion of the difficulties and dangers faced by the strong countries. If a concern for political integration had been associated with the intense preoccupation for the creation of financial integration, there would have probably been considerably less panic in the EU market now and fewer severe reactions from EU states members.

It has already become an indisputable fact that the EU has adopted the single currency in haste. It has been made clear by recent events that the Union should have made parallel efforts towards the political union. Germany, one of Europe's sturdiest economies, has always been reluctant towards the creation of the eurozone. Before the single currency was adopted in 1999 by 11 out of the 16 countries of the euro area, the German chancellor at the time, Helmut Kohl, feared that the currency union could stumble, as the set of rules imposed by the Maastrich Treaty was not seen as strong enough to guarantee the stability of the eurozone. Kohl's alarm signal was strengthened by a declaration signed by over 100 German-speaking economists who asked for a delay of the introduction of the euro. It could have been the wrench felt by the Germans who in the midst of their country's post-war economic recovery had surrendered the Deutsche Mark to a currency that might not live up to the stability

criteria of the mark. It is no wonder then that Chancellor Helmut Kohl's statement of 1992, "We will not support anything that leads to a currency that does not live up to the stability criteria of the deutsche mark" hit the headlines again in the context of the 2010 financial crisis.

6. Is Europe a Communication Challenge?

Greece's crisis has been rightly underscored as a historic – though not defining – moment for the EU. We will "defend" this historical character against the theoretical insights outlined in the beginning of the article, those having to do with problems such as "EU Communication", "EU identity" and "European public space". The rejection of the draft Constitution by the French and the Dutch people and the initial rejection of the Lisbon Treaty by the Irish exposed some deficiencies of the European construction. These were immediately and somehow superficially clustered under the label "democratic deficit", which was then translated into the "communication deficit". As a result, major actions have been implemented since then in order to close this democratic or communication deficit, to close the gap between Europe and its citizens. Besides, the idea that the main deficiency of the EU has to do more with the weaknesses of its institutional communication and less with the weaknesses of the institutional design and construction themselves have become current orthodoxy. As the Bled manifesto on EU Communication underlined as early as 2006 (4), "Europe is in trouble and it is tempting to blame this upon inadequate information and communication". Although we strongly agree with the idea that communication is crucial in a larger, complex and more diverse Europe and that "EU" is not always easy to communicate, our assessment of the Greek crisis reveals a point that could have been hardly defended under "normal", no-crisis circumstances. The weaknesses of the EU are not to be linked to the problem of the EU communication, not even with the EU democratic deficit. As we have underlined elsewhere (Bârgăoanu *et al.*, 2010), "the difficulties pertaining to the communication deficit, the public sphere, the democratic deficit may not be of a communication nature; rather, they may have to do equally with the major problems that the EU as a supra-national structure has sought to solve and with the results obtained in this endeavor". Here are some arguments favoring the idea that, while communicating the European Union is still a challenge, EU Communication (deficit or not) is not the EU's challenge in the

first place. Communication-rooted solutions to the exposed deficiencies “may gloss over the real roots of the European crisis (Bled manifesto, 2006:4).

The European Union as it is today faces the problem of the lack of intellectual leadership. Let us note a statement made by a prominent EU scholar in 2006, under the circumstances created by EU eastward expansion: “How can it be that in Western Europe at this crucial historical juncture hardly any major intellectual voices can be heard vigorously defending the eastwards expansion of Europe against the timid, faint-hearted reservations of nationalists? – Will the spectrum of emotions from benign indifference to open, sometimes hateful rejection be sufficient to absorb the foreseeable fractures and breakdowns to which the project of European transformation exposes itself as it approaches the historic moment of eastwards enlargement? (Beck, 2006: 163–164). The parallelism with the Greek crisis is striking: as far as we know, the major intellectual figures analyzing this moment and likening it to the more encompassing problems related to what the EU fundamentally come from outside of Europe: I. Wallerstein (Greek Mess, Global Mess, March 1, 2010, New York Times), J. Stiglitz (A Principled Europe Would not Leave Greece to Bleed, Monday, January 25, 2010, guardian.co.uk.), Krugman (The Making of a Euromess, February 14, 2010, New York Times). Let us also note that the EU has been confronted with major rifts of the same magnitude with the rift over Greece’s financial crisis, besides that mentioned by Ulrich Beck and that went equally unnoticed by Europe’s intellectual figures. The first was created over US’ second intervention in Iraq, which found Old and New Member States in rather different camps. The second was exposed by the responses to the global financial crisis, which were largely national ones, while a so-called “EU recovery plan” was rather hard to identify.

Second, the crisis exposed some deficiencies related to the EU political leadership. Former US Foreign secretary Henry Kissinger once asked in a joking manner what was the EU’s phone number; this question was naturally followed by “who would answer an incoming call”. The Lisbon Treaty sought to address this problem in a serious manner and provided for the role of the full-time President of the European Council, thus allowing one person to “pick up the phone”. Yet, Greece’s crisis exposed at least three leaders of the EU: the formal one (Herman van Rompuy), although his public presence was rather low, the “quasi-formal” leader in the person of the President of the EU Commission, José Manuel Barroso, and the German

Chancellor, Angela Merkel². The problem was further compounded by the fact that the public messages of the last two were exposed in explicitly opposite terms on major issues: the creation of a European Monetary Fund, the need and later the terms of the bail-out for Greece, the involvement of the International Monetary Fund etc.

Third, the crisis revealed long-standing problems related to governance and the general design of the supra-national structure: common market without common governance, monetary policy without fiscal policy, common currency with no fiscal authority and no finance commissioner, etc. The crisis was also framed in strongly opposing, even irreconcilable terms: “old member states vs. new member states”, “irresponsible states vs. virtuous states”, “richer states vs. poorer states”, “euro-zone states vs. non-euro-zone states”, “inflationary states vs. deflationary states”. Disunity in diversity indeed!

Fourth, as one journalist remarked, “it is indicative that more than 70 percent of Germans want Greece out of the euro zone, and that a member of the German Parliament advised Athens that selling some of its islands would be the best way to deal with the crisis, while Greek media are busy running stories about the Nazi’s war time occupation of Greece, and insisting that Germany owes Greece war time reparations” (Ivan Krastev, Club Euro, an erratic door policy, <http://www.presseurop.eu/en/content/article/209721-club-euro-erratic-door-policy>). The crisis and the sense of (economic) threat that it propagated easily turned into a threat to national identities and interests, pretty much in line with what the theory predicts (see above). Going back to the fundamentals of what we call today the European Union, one should remember that one of these fundamentals was to contain Germany such as to prevent its expansion plans and thus to prevent a new large-scale war. The call for Germany’s engagement was, among other things, an irony of fate.

Based on these facts, we may assert that the prospects of a European public sphere whose functioning should add to the legitimacy of the European Union, together with the performance legitimacy derived from EU’s economic results, are considerably delayed. The crisis revealed the lack of a common EU identity at the level of EU prominent figures in the first place. In our view, the core of the problem

² For example, Angela Merkel was indicated as EU’s actual leader by the article “The Slow-Motion Merkel. Europe needs a leader, but the likely candidate doesn't want the job”, Stefan Theil, Newsweek, published Mar 5, 2010, from the magazine issue dated March 15, 2010.

does not have to do with the so called “structural deficiencies” of the EU Communication: cultural diversity, heterogeneous geographical space, lack of common language, etc – although these are real impediments; rather, it has to do with the structural problems of the political and economic project.

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