A VIRTUAL NATION? PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH AND EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

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Prelude: Gallup’s "Utopia” – Public Opinion Research

George Gallup, addressing the academic community of the “Baker Foundation” in 1939 on the meaning of "pubic opinion” in a democracy, noted that democratic states are confronted by the fact of their constant lack of knowledge about the opinions of their citizenry. On the one hand, citizens possess the inalienable right to comment on important decisions, while at the same time events move too quickly for the will of the population to be brought into the decision-making process; in other words: ”World events do not wait on elections” (Gallup 1939:5). According to Gallup, if one wants to live up to the basic idea of democratic states, namely that governments do not make important decisions ”outside” of the will of the citizenry, then the necessity arises for bringing the will of the population into the process at anytime (Gallup 1939:5). Public opinion research, he observed, could make a decisive contribution in this regard. National representative studies, conducted at specific time intervals, would allow pollsters to question the population about their needs and attitudes on the important topics of the day and thus give them a voice: ”By means of nation-wide studies taken at frequent intervals, research workers are today attempting to measure and give voice to the sentiments of the whole people on vital issues of the day” (Gallup 1939:9).
Gallup’s explanations reveal the problematic that justified the formation of the public opinion research in the first place, namely, the contradiction between the functional requirements of a democratic state and its inherent claim to legitimate its political order through the public. Public opinion research should build a bridge between these poles and eliminate the contradiction between them. Together with newspapers and broadcasting, continuous public opinion research measurement would bring to life those historic scenes in which the citizens gathered in order to discuss political problems and to come to decisions (town meetings):

"This means that the nation is literally in one great room. The newspaper and the radio conduct the debate on national issues, presenting both information and argument on both sides, just as the townsfolk did in person in the old forum meeting. And finally, through the process of the sampling referendum, the people, having heard the debate on both sides of every issue, can express their will. After one hundred and fifty years we return to the town meeting" (Gallup 1939: 15).

In addition, with the connection between mass media and public opinion research, possibilities are presented that were unavailable to the historic, fundamental, democratic meetings of citizens (town meetings): The decision-making would no longer take place simply within a circle of elected citizens; instead, taking advantage of the new possibilities, the whole nation could take part in the democratic discourse shaping opinion. Or in Gallup’s words: “This time the whole nation is within the door” (Gallup 1939:15).

The significance given to public opinion research in the European Community can be viewed within the framework whose central themes were defined by Gallup. It is precisely Gallup’s idea of a continual surveying of the population that is manifested in the public opinion research of the European Union (in the next section). Not only have the public opinion research institutions reached a certain scale, in terms of their size and scope, that was envisioned by Gallup; this institutional framework has evolved to fulfill the function that Gallup wanted to attribute to public opinion research, namely, that of reestablishing the broken connection between political rulers and the public (in the section on the institutionalization). Because the institutions that traditionally mediate between populations and institutions, that is, parliaments and referenda, are only weakly developed at the level of the European Community, complaints about the “democracy deficit” are ubiquitous.

Nevertheless, in the context of European integration, public opinion research encounters requirements that cannot be directly equated with those of public opinion research in the context of the nation-state. Precisely for this reason it is not insignificant when, on the basis of a public opinion survey of the attitude of the European population, something called “public opinion in the European Community” is named in the explanatory title of the corresponding public opinion

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1 In the end, the institution that coordinated the public opinion research of the European Commission until 1989 (Eurobarometer 31) would also bear his name: “European Omnibus Surveys (EOS-Gallup Europe).”
2 Parisian political scientist Jacques-René Rabier is closely connected with the creation of the Eurobarometers. A close co-worker of Jean Monnet, he came to Brussels, where, as Special Advisor to the Commission of the European Communities, he guided the development of the Eurobarometer surveys (cf. Reif and Inglehart 1991).
3 “It is the desire of the European Parliament that the information policy of the Commission will promote through decentralized action the formation of an independent European public opinion (Official Journal 32, 1972).”
research report to the Commission. Gallup himself never viewed public opinion research as an instrument that could simply be arbitrarily deployed to provide an "authentic" picture of popular opinion on whatever topic might be asked about. According to the professor of journalism, only in the context of the modern mass media is it possible for the potential of public opinion research to develop. This emphatically defined "freedom of the press" is compared to a similarly elaborated model of public opinion research, which is supposed to make possible its own independent game of research and results from a multiplicity of public opinion research institutes. Thus, Gallup was also opposed to the idea of the state itself conducting surveys, which would constitute a monopolization of public opinion research. The danger that surveys would be conducted so as to correspond only to the interests of the present government is too great. For Gallup, the ability of public opinion research to structurally bridge the gap between "modern societies" and a democratic form of government is above all dependent on the existence of a "public," which generates a common political space. This space, in turn, makes possible public discourse, and as its component also functions as the results of public opinion research (in the section on the historical and conceptual aspects).

However, it is precisely at the European level that a "public" does not appear to be developing. Despite the efforts of integration policy to the contrary, no all-European "communication space" appears on the horizon (see section on public opinion and lack of a public). If, however, the "function" of public opinion research to measure "public opinion" also depends on the existence of a system of publications and media presence, which are interconnected and generate a field of positions that is described as "public," then logically the following question poses itself: What does that construct called "European public opinion" actually mean, if these prerequisites are not present? Does this construct shape the everyday discourse that is conducted throughout Europe? In other words: Does public opinion research function throughout Europe as a mirror of comparable opinions about the European political order? Or, if we are not accept this "representation theory" unquestionably, we must ask what the questionnaires that are highlighted in reports on "the public opinion of Europe" actually "measure"? These questions about the origin of public opinion research at the European level and the results that it generates must be placed in the broader context of the construct of "public opinion" and its measurement by public opinion research (section on the promises of public opinion research). This chapter shows how public opinion research in the context of European integration actually takes on a different meaning, precisely due to the specifics of the supra-state structure (section on the official interpretation). We will show that there is no such thing as a pre-existing "European public opinion" that is articulated by this research; rather, the research creates "social facts" with very specific meanings (see section on the Maastricht referendum in France and on assessing power relationships in the Union). This means that, in the end, public opinion research results also need a special kind of evaluation, one that departs from the idea of mere representation.
Public Opinion Research as the Institution of Integration: The Public Opinion Research Apparatus of the Commission

Before we can discuss in detail the information that the public opinion research of the Commission generates, it is first necessary to discuss the public opinion research apparatus itself and to reveal the motives that led to the construction of such an apparatus in the first place. In this way, what is special about the application of public opinion research in the context of European integration will be brought to the fore.

The first public opinion research surveys regarding support for European integration trace their origins back to the postwar era. The United States Information Agency (USIA) started conducting research in the 1950s and 1960s on the attitudes of the population concerning European integration. However, the earlier institutions of the European Coal and Steel Community had already applied the instruments of public opinion research (see Inglehart, Rabier and Reif 1987:135). Public opinion research was first systematically employed in the early 1970s (see Figure 1) on the basis of the so-called “European Community Studies,” opinion polls conducted from 1970-1973 regarding attitudes toward the Common Market. These public opinion questions formed the basis for the Eurobarometer Surveys, which have been conducted every spring and autumn since 1974 in all the countries of the original Community.

Subsequently, with each planned expansion of the Community, the census area of the surveys was also expanded. While the previous studies included the original six members of the Community, the Eurobarometers researched nine member-states of the Community; Greece was added starting in 1981, and Spain and Portugal were incorporated in 1985. The formal client of all this research is the Commission. However, not only do the different offices of the Commission assign sets of questions for the surveys, the European Parliament also regularly initiates its own areas of investigation, as do the various European and non-European university research institutes. Rabier (1983) even mentions the possibility that single citizens (groups) could take the initiative to pose questions. Almost every imaginable topic is dealt with in the surveys, from attitudes toward European integration to health behavior, from trust in neighboring countries to travel patterns, from opinions about biogenetics to fears and hopes for the future. Approximately two months after the census, a report is presented to the public by the research committee; the committee is then placed at the disposal of interested Commission members and their staff members, journalists accredited with the Commission, and various libraries and organizations (see Hofrichter, 1993: 6f).

Since the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, the institution experienced a fundamental expansion through the demand for instant surveys and special surveys of the European “elite” (see Figure 1). But the Eurobarometer constitutes the axis of all the forms of public opinion research; it displays the greatest continuity and includes by far the largest quantity of data. With the Eurobarometers, public opinion research began to become institutionalized and was no longer an
instrument sporadically inserted into different institutions and institutes at the level of nation-states. Now it became a solid component of the work of the European Commission, or more precisely, of Directorate General X (Information, Communication, and Culture). Public opinion research is subordinated to an office that is concerned with information policy, within which it must be understood as the interface for information about the population as well as that which informs the population itself.

Figure 1. Public Opinion Research Institutions for Recording the Views of the European Population

| 1945 to 1970 | Sporadic public opinion research investigations of the European population through the European Coal and Steel Community. |
| 1970 to 1973 | European Community Studies as forerunners of the Eurobarometer, initially in six, later in nine countries. |
| 1974 until the 1990s | Eurobarometers twice annually throughout the EC; more precisely, in member-states of the EU since 1980; including Greece, Portugal and Spain since 1985; and including the former German Democratic Republic since 1990. Census two to five times annually on the basis of national representative samples. Publications and data are public. |
| Since the 1990s | Traditional Eurobarometer Carried out two to five times annually. Since 1990 also includes special Central and Eastern European research conducted annually. Parallel research is also conducted in the USA, Japan, and Israel. In addition, there is also the so-called "Latinobarometer" that was initiated by the Commission; it is conducted in six Latin American countries using the model of the Eurobarometer. Continuous Tracking Eurobarometer (since January 1996) 200 weekly telephone interviews in each member state, conducted 44 times per year. "Europinion Reports" are planned to appear every four weeks. The surveys are conducted exclusively for the president and the members of the Commission, however. Flash Eurobarometers (since 1992) Conducted by special order of the Commission. Particular groups are targeted (managers, "opinion leaders," teachers) using different techniques. Public status of results varies according to decision of the institution conducting the survey. Top-Decision-Makers-Eurobarometer (Pilot study 1995) Intended as an annual survey encompassing the political opinions and viewpoints of the political, administrative, media, economic, and cultural elites ("leaders") of the European Union. Public status of the results unknown at this time. |

For the foreseeable future, the Commission possesses a de facto monopoly regarding the regular surveying of the collective population of Europe, which is
understood as a service to the Community. With help of the surveys, writes Rabier (1983), the institutions in Brussels could gain encouragement for their political undertakings and knowledge about the expected “public reactions.” The press, it was noted, should obtain its information about the opinion of the populations in this way. National political institutions like administrations, associations, and parties could also gain valuable insights into their own populations. Last but not least, the data would also serve the social science research of the European population.

The significance that is attributed to the institution is also expressed in the terminology used in the research, according to which it is supposed to encompass the “public opinion” in Europe, that is, in the European Community. The title of the official reports is also indicative: “Eurobarometer: The Public Opinion in the European Community.”

With the surveys, the Commission hopes to be able to measure the change in public opinion in the Community, “to follow the trends in European public opinion with regard to Community activities, particularly the areas of most interest to the public” (Eurobarometer 1, 1971:1, cited in Hewstone 1991: 81) The Eurobarometers are presented to the public as an instrument of observation: “Just as a barometer can be used to measure the atmospheric pressure and thus give a short-range weather forecast, this Eurobarometer can be used to observe, and to some extent forecast, public attitudes towards the most important current events connected directly or indirectly with the development of the European Community and the unification of Europe” (Eurobarometer 1, 1971:1, cited in Hewstone 1991: 81). Thus, according to concept of its initiators, the instrument of public opinion research exists as it were beyond the reality of public opinion. The Eurobarometers incorporate the notion of a “European public opinion” that already exists and want to precisely predict its dynamic, a dynamic that is supposed to exist independent from the instrument measuring it.

The Institutionalization of Public Opinion Research in the European Community

The Eurobarometers not only observe an existing reality a posteriori, but simultaneously in their attempts to measure it, alter that reality. Thus, in the course of investigating the project of European integration, the Eurobarometers have at the same time stabilized it. This can be shown by tracing the initiatives that gave rise to the institutionalization of the public opinion research apparatus.

The Commission guides the implementation of the Eurobarometers, but the impetus for systematic public opinion research on the European Community actually comes from the European Parliament, which, with the introduction of systematic public opinion research, has complied with the duties of its role as “conditional

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agenda setter” (Tsebelis, 1994: 128) in the European integration process. In the framework of a “proposed resolution regarding the problems of information” in the communities, the European Parliament in 1960 emphasized “the basic meaning of an effective information policy in the European Community with respect to the formation of a public opinion that is conscious of the great cultural and material values of the unification of Europe.” In this context, the demand is made “that the activity of the Common Office [for press and information – F.K.] must have as a goal the explanation of the goals of the European Community on the basis of a scientific examination of the attitude of the citizens of our countries toward European unification (European Parliament, 1960:374, emphasis added).”

At this point, a second aspect of the information deficit of the authorities appears: Not only is knowledge lacking regarding the attitude of the population, there is little knowledge of the lack of information on the part of the European citizens themselves, which an effective information policy could address. Quite apart from the concept suggested by the Eurobarometers, the attitudes of the population (that appear as “public opinion” in the Eurobarometers) are now not something to be merely observed, but rather a “quantity” that is to be simultaneously created and changed through a directed (information) policy, whose ultimate aim is the support of efforts toward integration.

However, after these early ventures had received little approval, efforts toward a European information policy were renewed in 1971. Once again it was the European Parliament that took the initiative. According to the Political Committee, the crucial fact, and one that was reflected in new perspectives on integration efforts, was that a “new political generation” had grown up, in addition to which society itself had experienced rapid technological development (European Parliament 1972b: 14ff.) The background to these efforts at creating an information policy was the fact that “in a democracy no policy is possible without serious public information.” Parliament recognized that a “European public opinion” in this sense did not yet exist (European Parliament, 1972b:15; see also European Parliament 1972c: 202). This becomes all the more necessary, however, the more the need for European integration grows, and was to be created through the information policy and by means of public relations. In this regard a “creative aspect” clearly emerges alongside the function of observation. What the Eurobarometers pretend to observe, must first be created. In its corresponding resolution, the European Parliament postulates it in this way:

“Consideration of the fact that the information activity of the communities, apart from the information about daily activities, must still be oriented toward the shaping of an independent public opinion, which itself is a prerequisite not only for the continuity of the European unification policy but also for the future of parliamentary democracy in the Community” (Official Journal 1972: 32, emphasis added.)

This point seems to be so central that the request was repeated nearly word for word later in the resolution. Similarly, the Parliament also put forth the idea that “the meaning of public reaction to the decisions and events of the Community as

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*“It is the desire of the European Parliament that the information policy of the Commission will promote through decentralized action the formation of an independent European public opinion (Official Journal 32, 1972).”*
well as the information activity of the Community until now was not sufficiently recognized” (Official Journal 1972:33). In this sense and as component of this information policy, the Political Commission of the Parliament made an explicit demand for systematic public opinion research on the European population:

"Public opinion research constitutes a very important sector of reciprocal information [between officials of the Community and the population – F.K.]. Your Commission has observed that since the resolution adopted by the European Parliament on November 24, 1960, a significant number of opinion surveys have been undertaken, whose results were published. New censuses are in preparation. Your Commission hopes that the executive develops these opinion polls to such an extent that they become a regular and systematic working instrument, and that their complete results are submitted regularly" (European Parliament 1972a:1, emphasis added)

The parliament sees public opinion research as a component of an information policy that should become, in the words of one Euro MP, ”simultaneously tactical, operational, and strategic.” One lone voice warned of the all too instrumental application of the methods of the information policy. Public relations, as foreseen by the information policy, could become nothing but naked propaganda, to which the public in the ”democratic states” could react very ”sensitively.”

All in all, the demands of the Parliament clarify the two-edged nature of the instrument of the public opinion research: it should capture the opinions of the population, so that the resulting information can be used to manufacture a ”public opinion,” which in turn will be captured again by public opinion research. As the development of information policy and its public opinion research component suggests, the corresponding demands have been articulated as European integration itself qualitatively changed. The institutionalization of the public opinion research as well as its recent massive expansion coincide with an intensification of European integration efforts. Thus Rabier notes that 1972, the year in which the Eurobarometers were created, ”is at the same time an important date for the inclusion of the wider public into the historic work of the unification of Europe . . . whose first phases have been described as somewhat ‘elitist’” (Rabier 1982:7). In that year, referenda were conducted in various countries, which made European integration a component of the political debates in those countries. According to Rabier, the fact that the ”vox populi ” had asked to speak on European integration gave rise to resolutions demanding regular public opinion polls of the European population, which quickly became integrated into the praxis (Rabier 1982). From this point of view, it is easy to recognize that the renewed extension of public opinion research instruments at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s (see Figure 1) is connected to a renewed integration thrust in the second half of the 1980s. This expansion, taken in the context with the ”magic code word Maastricht,” was accompanied by referenda that renewed the ”somewhat elitist” integration project by referring to the consent for it from the corresponding populations.

In this broader context, we see that during the course of the European integration process an unparalleled public opinion research apparatus was created. The scope of the public opinion material, in terms of both time and geographic coverage, that has

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2 The Euro MP Terrinoire in European Parliament (1972c:210).
accumulated over the years through one conceptually unique and consistently administered census is something that is unsurpassed anywhere in the world (Reif and Inglehart 1991:1). This is not all: in the context of the needs that gave rise to the institutionalized public opinion research of the “Executive,” namely, uncertainty about the “opinions” of the population and the absence of an “independent public opinion” on the European level, the suspicion arises that the Eurobarometers do not simply capture but simultaneously produce the “public opinion” that signifies the degree of the support among the populations and delivers the legitimation that the integration process still lacks. Meanwhile, the question remains: Why is “public opinion” such a necessary and desirable commodity for the integration process, and why exactly is public opinion research offered as the way to satisfy this need? To understand this requires a review of some conceptual and historical considerations that should help us grasp the meaning of this construct in the context of European integration.

The Prerequisite for Public Opinion Research in the European context: Historical and State-theoretical Aspects of the Concept of "Public Opinion"

The concept of "public opinion" is marked by contradictions, which, over time, have given it very different meanings. In the end there is no agreement about what kind of social reality the construct possesses. Throughout, "public opinion," which the information policy of the European institutions simultaneously create and wants to capture, also possesses negative connotations. It has been regarded as unserious and inconstant, and a danger to the political order that must be opposed through censorship. On the other hand, the concept itself was anointed with state-theoretical significance and, in the context of the will of the corporate state, was even raised to the status of "the highest tribunal" and the "legitimate speaker of the nation" (Hölscher 1980:1026).

Such an emphatic and "classic" assessment assigns real political power to the concept. State institutions have had to answer to "public opinion," and it is "public opinion" that establishes the basic conditions of political behavior. However the construct also possesses a wider function: the "public opinion," and here we refer to the singular image of the concept, gathers the citizens into their own political unity (Hölscher 1978:451, 456). Political integration is an "achievement" of the concept just as rational control and legitimation are achievements of political rule. It is not difficult to recognize that it is precisely this presentation of the concept that elevates the concept to a desirable commodity. In this "classical conception," the existence of an "independent European public opinion" means nothing other than that a political space, a political unity of Europe has constituted itself, one that on the other hand would also be capable of supporting an "elitist" integration project. In this conception, the European nation asked to speak, expressed itself regarding unification policy, and also made possible the legitimation of the latter.

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The social and political reality “behind” the concept is not easy to determine, and, examined more closely, the concept threatens to take on a “phantomlike” character (Lippmann 1925). If a “public opinion” can be located in a political discourse, the question immediately poses itself: Who articulates it? Who claims it as their own? The political discourses are not only carried on by the politically active public, as the metaphor of town meetings suggests or the traditional meaning of the concept still postulates (cf. Schmidtchen 1965:300), but rather first and foremost by institutions like the mass media, associations, parties and state institutions. In other words: when we speak of “public opinion,” this is we are also speaking about a “fiction” that is not identifiable in the real behavior of the populations (Habermas 1990:34). This is precisely because the complexity of political communication prevents “public opinion” from being unequivo
cally, sociologically determined. Its place in the political discourse can be understood as a constantly changing location that can be comprehended by highly variable realities and practices that mutually “hold it in check” (Luhmann 1993) and precisely in this way animate the political debates. This is not to suggest that public opinion is insignificant; it is not, as the efforts of the information policy also indicate: The fact that it cannot be left up to a particular discursive practice to determine and holds an “empty” position in political communication is exactly what makes it attractive. From a temporarily fixed “public opinion,” it can be determined what is political and what is not; “public opinion” can legitimate critical conditions or define whether the facts of a matter are a political problem.

It is precisely because of its ultimately indeterminable character that proof of the existence of “European public opinion” derives its significance for the institutions of European integration, which are constantly fighting for their “democratic legitimation.” To put it another way: these institutions have trouble establishing a discourse of legitimation for the political order they are trying to create. A European “public opinion” provided the proof that not only was European integration not being carried out behind the “back” of the “public,” it was being discussed by that public. What is more, when that public opinion could be shown to give its approval, it could be taken as the sign of the legitimacy of the integration process, which was otherwise difficult to demonstrate. The corresponding desire for its existence is expressed, among other ways, by the fact that an “independent public opinion” was regarded by those in decisive positions not only as a “precondition” for the continuity of the European integration process, but also as decisive for the “future of parliamentary democracy” in Europe (Official Report 1972). When Rabier, in his exposition of the history of the Eurobarometer, writes, “Every power informs. Every power informs itself” (1983:5), we could also add: “Every power legitimates itself.” And here the evidence of an approving “public opinion” is useful. Or, consider the variation of the old expression “vox populi vox dei” contained in an essay written by Pierre Bourdieu on public opinion research: “Every exercise of power engages in a discourse whose goal is the legitimation of the power that it practices. Here the

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7 See the anthologies of Neidhart (1994) and Berelson and Janowitz (1966).
expression 'God is with us' finds its modern equivalent: 'Public opinion is with us' " (Bourdieu 1980:214).

A "European Public Opinion" without a "European Public"?

All this talk about the significance of "public opinion" is not without its assumptions. The concept of a "public opinion" is bound up with certain structural prerequisites, with contexts of communication that make its articulation possible and allow it to be summarized as "public." Beginning with Gallup, the mass media have been seen to have a decisive role in the shaping of "public opinion": It was through newspapers, that political discussion was first able to transcend the barriers of the exclusive discussion circles of an informed political elite and to permit a larger part of the population to become part of the public (cf. Gallup and Rae 1940:13). The close connection between mass media, the public and "public opinion" has not only been discussed again and again on a broader historical and theoretical level (Neidhardt 1994, Habermas 1990, Hölscher 1978, Lippmann 1964), or at least tacitly acknowledged (Fishkin 1995, Crespi 1989, Berelson and Janowitz 1966); at the level of European integration the production of "European public opinion" was also conceptualized in connection with the advancements in electronic and print media. The information policy, which was crucial for the institutionalization of public opinion research, was at the same time designed through the efforts of the Commission and the Parliament to create a mass media "European communication space" (Kleinsteuber and Rossmann, 1992): However, a public, in the sense of a "monitor" produced by mass media, which can be observed by political actors while decision-making is discussed, cannot be found, at least when measured at the level of the nation-state. (Gerhards 1992, 1993; Lodge 1994, Grande 1996).

The creation of the "European communication space" was not followed by the transfer of authority, controls and resources from the nation-state to the European institutions. In this regard, Gerhards speaks of a "public lag" in the integration process (Gerhards 1993:99): First, the institutional prerequisites for an independent European public are missing. Thus there is only a marginal all-European press and European electronic mass media have not (yet) been established. Second, a European public has not been realized through the Europeanization of the existing national publics. The connection between the politics of Europe and the content of the media at the level of the nation-state is very weak. As a reason for this, Gerhards (1992, 1993) cites the lack of transparency and openness of the political process on the European level. The public is excluded from the work of the Commission as well as the Council (Lodge 1994). From the certain point of view, insofar as the work of these institutions is largely disconnected from the direct consent of the citizens, a relative

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* At the level of the Commission, both public opinion research and media policy are subordinated to Directorate General X (Information, Communication, and Culture) (see Lodge 1994).
* Here we must point out that Gerhards's survey only covers the German media; however, Gerhards himself observes that his point can be extrapolated to the whole of the European situation (Gerhards 1993: 97).
disinterest on the part of the national “publics” with respect to European politics becomes rational. When the ineffectiveness of paying political attention is considered, one could even say that such disinterest would appear to be structurally based. Disinterest is also favored by the fact that, for the same reasons encountered by the social movements, the “mobilization of the public” (Neidhardt, 1994: 32) at the European level has little chance to articulate its views through the mass media. If a public should arise, it must first orchestrate its efforts and become established at the level of national publics; a public produced in this way necessarily has only an episodic character. In this sense, we could speak of the public in the European context in terms of its refeudalization (cf. Habermas 1990:337 and Grande 1996:339). Political power -- the decision-making institutions of the integration process-- disguises itself in order to then celebrate its edicts all the more effectively in the media, in order that the necessary acceptance is created.

The observation that European integration suffers from a “public lag” that is the precondition of the “democracy deficit” (Gerhards 1993) is formulated in the context of a political theory based on organized political reality at the level of the nation-state. However, it is precisely those viewpoints that transfer the political conceptions of the nation-state to the supra-state European level (and note well how this applies as well to the information policy of the Community) whose adequacy must also be questioned (Grande 1996). The well-known “model of democracy,” according to Grande (1996:347ff.), rested on prerequisites that are not applicable to the legitimation of the political rule of the European institutions; the prerequisites of the European supra-state structure are structurally too different.

Even if his diagnosis of political relationships in no way contradicts that of Gerhards (1992, 1993), Grande disputes Gerhards's conclusion that the political institutions of the nation-state should also function at the European level in order to legitimate the political organization of the Community. Grande proposes instead a concentration on other forms of political participation that are not caught up in the impossibility of nation-state-like representation at the European level. Instead remaining fixated on the model of democracy oriented to the nation-state, the possibilities for other forms of independent political articulation, such as political referenda, could be used to overcome the oft-complained about deficit of political participation and representation (and here one would need to consider whether a "European public” would be a prerequisite for this as well).

Grande's observations also indicate the "function gap" into which the public opinion research instrument would like to jump. It is thus remarkable that Verba (1996), in a summary of the meaning of public opinion research, writes that the surveys have developed an expanded form of political participation, which makes possible the representation of the public, which was previously lacking: “Surveys are not perfectly representative but offer, nevertheless, a better cross-section of the public than do almost any other means, and certainly they are more representative than any other modes of citizen activity (Verba 1996: 4).” On the basis of such a positive assessment of the instrument, which is reminiscent of Gallup’s utopia of “sampling referendums,” it is not surprising that the notion arises that the instrument of public opinion polls can bridge the legitimation gap between the European populations and
political institutions and elites (Bornschier 1996; Suski 1996) despite the fact that essential bearers of the "public opinion," namely social movements (Gerhards 1993) as well as political parties (Grande 1996) are not constituted as European but instead remain confined to the political fields of the nation-states.

The Promises of Public Opinion Research

In one sense, the extraordinary extension of public opinion research on the plane of European integration is readily explicable against the backdrop of the aforementioned problematic. The completely new type of "state formation in Europe" creates new structures that are overlaid on the time-honored social and political relationships; a knowledge deficit of unknown proportions is created, one that should be addressed with its own information policy, one of whose components is public opinion research. The political institutions of the nation-state, which were able to legitimate political power, were not able to be carried over to the European level, thus creating here a "deficit" of well-known voices in the political game. The fact that public opinion research is relatively young in comparison to the classical representatives of the state’s citizenry is only surprising if one does not take into account that public opinion research possesses a great political potential for directing attention to itself. It derives its persuasiveness not only from that fact that it borrows its logic from one of the most effective institutions of political participation, namely elections; it also claims to be grounded in social science and to articulate the legitimating construct of political discourse, namely "public opinion," which is precisely what the political authorities of European integration are lacking.

The attractiveness of public opinion research, and part of what explains its rapid expansion, is the fact that it imitates the logic of a political institution (Bourdieu 1980; Champagne 1991; Verba 1996). This process of the transference of legitimacy (Champagne 1991:518) can be easily traced through the history of public opinion research. As early as the nineteenth century, newspapers conducted so-called test votes ("straw votes"), although their predictive ability with respect to elections was rather limited. In the 1930s, George Gallup was the first to introduce a statistically based theory through his American Institute of Public Opinion. Gallup was not content with the mere counting of the collected ballots of the minority who made the effort to clip a coupon from the newspaper and sent it in. Instead, Gallup’s work made it possible to make statements based on a theory of spot-checking the eligible voters. If we depart from the narrower area of electoral research and prediction and seek to make statements in the form “45 percent of Americans believe that X,” we are no longer talking about the simulation of a game that will take place according to the rules of the political-administrative system and under the influence of current political conflicts, as with elections and referenda (the right to vote, election issues, and electoral units, i.e., parties and persons). Rather, we are dealing with a situation

* Compare this to the origins of public opinion research in the USA: Fishkin (1995), Crespi (1989) and Kern (1982).
in which a survey will be taken whose results will then be extrapolated to the entire collectivity. As before, this obeys the same logic as elections, although no referendum will ever be held on these views; at most, other opinion polls with the same question will be conducted. Not only is the statement “such and such percent of Americans agree that . . .” abstracted, the survey situation itself obeys a logic that is not unlike that of an electoral procedure. A certain aspect of “virtuality” is already present in the basic conception of the public opinion research: public opinion research institutes simulate the administrative centers of imaginary states, which conduct plebiscites among the population, and loans, as it were, these “miniature electorates” to the real states (Gallup and Rae 1940). In this sense, the political magic of elections also consecrates the results of the public opinion research. What is more, in the sense that it really engages the citizens, this kind of public opinion research encompasses parts of the population that otherwise would not have taken the trouble to go to the polls and is therefore more “representative” while simultaneously more “artificial” (Verba 1996).

However the results of public opinion research are generally not formulated as potential elections, whose logic they ultimately obey, but principally—and above all, as we have shown in the context of the European integration—as the expression of public opinion.

Thus, public opinion research—and not only in the Anglo-American realm is closely connected to the “classical” (that is, in terms of theories of the state) tradition of the concept of “public opinion” (Lazarsfeld, 1948, Noelle-Neumann, 1979, Stoetzel and Girard, 1973). Insofar as public opinion research is able to appropriate a significant (in terms of national law) and politically effective construct, it weakens the political significance of this state-theoretic construct. It is precisely the claim to adequately record “public opinion” that was constantly disputed from a very early point after the popularization of this research apparatus (cf., for example, Blumer 1948; Hennis 1957; Bourdieu 1980). Public opinion research, according to this critique, is not aware of what it is actually recording, poses questions that are far from the world of those being questioned, and therefore produces, by means of the summation of responses from completely different contexts, mere artifacts. Despite this extensive and well-known social science critique (see, for example, the summary in Crespi 1989) to which a political critique that maintains that such surveys actually intrude upon democracy itself is also joined (Druon 1972; Fröhner 1957), the institution of public opinion research expanded further and became an established institution in the field of politics and a part of the political game, so that every major political event is accompanied by a ritual in which its findings are disputed (cf. Champagne 1990, 1995; Brettschneider 1996).

This seemingly unobstructed expansion of public opinion research in the postwar era (leading to an actual “Sondomanie”; cf. Jaffré 1985), which at the level of European integration appears to have made other “forms of participation” obsolete, (and this despite the sustained criticism that accompanied the development of the instrument), becomes comprehensible if one proceeds from the fact that the “public opinion” still represents an inalienable part of the political discourse of real democracies. By letting a topic become political, it can thereby legitimate the way it is
handled politically. Presumably it is precisely because this "public opinion" cannot be clearly fixed, but rather occupies an empty place, that the contents and statements that public opinion research almost continually delivers demand (critical) attention.

In this respect the following hypothesis suggests itself: the function of public opinion research is not so much measuring or portraying existing "public opinion" as creating it in the first place; that is, public opinion research represents an attempt to temporarily fill an empty space on which the political system is dependent (cf. also Luhmann 1971, 1990). There is a seamless connection between this view and the fact that the Eurobarometers were called into existence "to promote the formation of an independent public opinion" that secures the continuity of the unification policy and serves as the precondition of the "future of parliamentary democracy in the Community" (Official Journal, 1972: 32). Just like the magic of elections, the promise of capturing the (missing) public opinion has allowed public opinion research to become an attractive instrument for providing public acceptance of the integration process. Since the instrument itself is not unproblematic, its results are all the more interesting for us to consider here.

The Official Interpretation of the Research Results

The desire to provide support for integration efforts through "public opinion" and thereby create the political base for the integration project appears to have succeeded according to the standards of public opinion research reality. In any case, official interpretations of the results of the Eurobarometers give the impression of a very favorable "European public opinion." On the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the Treaty of Rome, the Commission reported as follows:

"A wide majority of the citizens of the European community–62% (67% of those who responded, 72% of those in the original six member states)–views the membership of their own country in the Community as "a good thing." The Europeans are mainly of the opinion that the membership of their country in the Community is important or even very important: 74% of the interviewees (80% of the respondents) and in the original six member states even 80% of the interviewees (86% of the respondents). The balance is unequivocally positive from the European point of view: 53%, i.e., two of three respondents (sic!), think that their country benefits from membership in the EC. Among citizens of the original six member states, that is, those who can look back on thirty years of experience, the share is even greater: 65% (three of four respondents) (sic!). Since the time that this question was first asked in the Eurobarometer, the tendency toward positive answers has climbed constantly, even if the citizens are somewhat more restrained in the nine member-states." (Commission 1987: 24)

Generally the public opinion research of the Commission appears to be quite confident of the lasting support expressed in the results of its research among the European "public." According to the official interpretations of the results of opinion surveys, as soon as "the Europeans [provide information] about themselves" their "boldness" (Commission, 1983) regarding the integration project becomes clear: "The European citizens, with respect to European ideas" are consequently not only "very open," it is noted, they also "speak" openly about "successes, crises and failures–in opinion polls [they stand] unshakably for Europe" (Commission 1983:11). The public opinion surveys leave no doubt about the support itself, even if longer time periods are taken into consideration: "The twenty opinion polls examined in this edition
show that the population of the European Community consists of 14% opponents of the European unification movement, 15% indifferent, and 61% advocates (Commission 1983: blurb, emphasis added).

From the vantage point of the public opinion research of the Commission, the favorable "public opinion" toward European integration might as well be written in stone. Here and there the reports leave the impression that there is a veritable Europe-euphoria among the population. If a decline appears, it is immediately qualified with reference to the fact that the "still overwhelming" majority is in favor of unification. From the vantage point of the public opinion research of the Commission, the favorable "public opinion" toward European integration might as well be written in stone. Here and there the reports leave the impression that there is a veritable Europe-euphoria among the population. If a decline appears, it is immediately qualified with reference to the fact that the "still overwhelming" majority is in favor of unification.

Meanwhile, what exactly is being measured with the surveys remains unclear. At the same that that the reports register the views of the missing public (as communication structures in a European social space), they claim to articulate the views of "European public opinion" and finally to also give voice to the "man on the street." This vagueness is reinforced by the fact that the object of "public opinion," namely the "Europe" of European integration, is not at all constant; on the contrary, it is constantly changing, which in turn must change the meaning of the artifacts of public opinion research.

Despite this lack of clarity, it is not only the official voice of the Commission that recognizes clear support in favor of the integration project in its analysis of the Eurobarometers. Social science publications that analyze the opinion polls of the Commission present similar results, even if they do so with a sober intonation. "Public support for European integration has stabilized at a high level during the past two decades," write Inglehart, Rabier and Reif (Inglehart, Rabier and Reif 1987:135), who later reaffirm this view (Reif and Inglehart, 1991). Niedermayer also comes to the conclusion that a general (in the sense of not specific) support for the integration project exists, and a "Europeanization of public opinion" has become so widely apparent that support for the political system prevails (Niedermayer 1991:332). In any case— even if a variation of the high level of "approval" is noted (Handley, 1981) — in light of various surveys it is assumed that the population favors the integration concept through a "permissive consensus" (Gabel and Palmer 1995).

The picture that public opinion surveys present in this way is one of a "Europe" that is united in every way behind the integration project. This appears all the more impressive in that the surveys promise a more extensive and information-rich "representation" of the population than other political institutions (for example, elections) could offer. Insofar as it would like to represent the entire European population, including those individuals who have not become politically active, the public opinion research apparatus of the Commission is confronted by the fact that the knowledge it produces is also unopposed. What other voice could report over such a long period of time regarding support for the integration project among the populations (or parts of a population, such as the "Employed" or "Women")? This also means that public opinion research does not merely provide "expanded"

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2 See Eurobarometer 30 (1988).
3 Reif and Inglehart (1991) have thoroughly acknowledged this point and also mention it in their work. On the other hand, this fact remains without consequence for their own analyses.
information for the political game (which wants to legitimate itself through that information) by virtue of not excluding anybody over time (something that at least Gallup and Verba see as an important function of public opinion research). What is more, this research possesses in a certain sense a "monopoly of knowledge" over the entire European population; other "sponsors" of political discourse, such as parties, social movements and mass media, which might otherwise be able to hold the results of public opinion research in "check" (Luhmann, 1993), have not constituted themselves at an all-European level. Verba has already pointed out that the broad claim made by survey research with respect to "European" society would hardly be taken seriously if made by another institution, which would pay dearly for the artificiality of such representations (Verba, 1996:4). Thus, embedded in this characteristic of the public opinion surveys of the Commission lies a certain "artificiality" of the world created by its research; in the absence of an alternative political reality, anything other than what it claims is difficult to prove. Public opinion research data represent their own reality, and create a "virtual" political space, one that has not existed in the same manner before, and thus one that cannot be connected to anything that already exists. Such a theory of representation and its metaphors of "games" or "barometers," which legitimates the public opinion research apparatus and its importance as a component of the information policy, cannot however be entirely dismissed as a result. The assumption that the results of the Eurobarometers in no way encompass an existing political discourse, and only pretend to be (or simulate) the political discourse that they want to measure, can only be selectively and indirectly established. Under certain circumstances this is possible, when an effective political mobilization of the (national) public takes place that permits the political reality ascertained by public opinion research to be questioned. Or when the research produces results that reveal the political ideas and assumptions on which the respondents’ answers, which are summarized by percentages, are based. We now turn to a discussion of the qualification of the knowledge produced by public opinion research, in which we examine the Maastricht referendum in France and an assessment of power relations in the EC.

**The Autonomy of Public Opinion Research Knowledge: The Maastricht Referendum in France**

The ratification of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 in France, an optional referendum initiated by François Mitterand, appeared initially to be nothing more than the disposal of a "formality." Thus it came as a surprise when the Maastricht Treaty was barely approved in France, receiving only 51 percent of the valid votes, a fact that at first glance was hard to reconcile with the picture of the overwhelmingly favorable "public opinion," particularly in the original six member states, portrayed by public opinion research. In addition, national opinion polls up to July had also indicated strong support for the treaty, with over 60 percent approval by those likely to vote (Ysmal 1993: 430). The debates had hardly begun to excite public attention about
ratification when the support identified by public opinion research began to dissolve, so that the election barely resulted in support for ratification. The degree to which voting on national political questions was overlaid on the question of ratification was not readily apparent (Schmuck 1992; Ysmal, 1993). Table 1 shows the results of the vote in comparison to central indicators whose evaluation at the time, the pollsters suggested, showed that “for 30 years an overwhelming majority has supported European unification” (Commission 1983: 22). If the results from France are examined, they would have suggested similar conclusions regarding widespread support for the integration project. From 1975 to 1985, an average of almost 80 percent of the respondents were in favor of efforts for European unification. This proportion rose insignificantly from 1986 to 1991, and by the time of the Maastricht referendum it had declined to just under eighty percent of the respondents. In contrast to this number, the number of those who preferred the skeptical response virtually disappeared. From 1975 to 1991, eight percent voiced disapproval of the integration process, approximately one-tenth the number of those who approved. In 1992, their share doubled to 17 percent, at the expense of those who declined to answer, but this group continued to vanish behind the overwhelming number of those whom public opinion research said were in favor of the process.

Table 1. Responses Regarding Support for European Integration and Election Results of the Maastricht Referendum in France (in percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>For and Against Maastricht Treaty: Results of Referenda 1992</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For</td>
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<tr>
<td>Against</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not voting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invalid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eligible voters (n=26,678,485)</td>
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<td>For</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>For</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Against</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (n = 40,076)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Against</td>
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<tr>
<td>Don’t Know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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</tbody>
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<tr>
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<td>Against</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not voting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Invalid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eligible voters (n=26,678,485)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Various Eurobarometer surveys and Ysmal (1993)
The questions regarding being for or against efforts for the unification of Western Europe (cf. Table 1), according to the text of the Commission, are primarily measures of the emotional, non-specific support for integration. Such an item commonly comes under the heading of "diffuse support" of the political system (Niedermayer 1991; Handley 1981). Even if the question is posed in terms of approval of the authorities that finally worked out the Maastricht Treaty, the picture of a supporting "public opinion" changes very little. On the question of whether the institutions of the Community are a "good thing" or a "bad thing," most of the respondents answered in favor of the positive alternative. According to these numbers, the minority who viewed European integration as only bad appears to be on the verge of disappearing.

The Maastricht vote shows a completely different picture than the reality suggested by the public opinion research of the Eurobarometers. Just 34 percent of the eligible voters supported the treaty and almost as many rejected it. The approval of the integration project as well as of the concrete political institutions of the Community, as determined by the Eurobarometer surveys, stands in striking contrast to the results of the referendum. How was it that the "boldness" of the (French) Europeans, of which the public opinion researchers so fondly spoke, and the "unshakable" will to support the integration project, as expressed by the "overwhelming majority" in favor of European unification, all evaporated?

In fact, such divergences between the results of the opinion polls with respect to European integration and the political debates over the European integration that immediately surfaced were noted early on. On the basis of the results of various surveys, Handley (1981: 337) put forward the hypothesis that the fundamental consensus defined by public opinion research collapses upon itself as soon as public attention turns towards European integration. The pollsters of the Community were also aware of this connection. One assumes that they would argue that the question regarding the Maastricht Treaty does not measure the "diffuse support" and that the debates on national questions are overlaid on that issue. Perhaps there is some truth in this argument. Indeed, the question is, what "diffuse support" for the Europe project actually means, apart from the actual political debates; does it only derive its reality from the Commission's public opinion research, and vanish as soon as the political public focuses its attention on European integration? Here the autonomy of the knowledge produced by public opinion research is once again revealed. Insofar as public opinion research over time produces stable pronouncements about support for the integration project, the selective qualification of "public opinion" cannot touch it. In contrast to the sometimes enflamed media discussions about European integration (Gerhards 1993) public opinion research is able to show its continuity, and as a result it can write off temporary variations in support as mere disturbance effects—like the media.

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The blame for the decline of responses in support of European integration in the context of the Maastricht Treaty (Schmuck 1992:212) was placed on the media: "In many other cases a retrograde trend can be noted as a result of the absolute record values and often represents fluctuations of opinion due to the dissemination by the media of mostly pessimistic prognoses prior to the Maastricht summit (Eurobarometer 36, 1991)."
An imaginary Europe: The Assessment of Power Relations in the Union

Even if the “public opinion” generated by public opinion research is qualified by virtue of the fact that it is not subject to public debates, upon closer examination its undisturbed reality is rejected by certain social processes that call into question the meaning of the knowledge it produces. Thus, the fact that the aforementioned results suggest a certain acceptance and approval, in different sense also can be seen as the consequence of social processes that underlie public opinion research praxis, but which do not necessarily express themselves in political “opinions” in the usual sense of the word. The survey situation is essentially that of a “single cell, the voting booth, in which a single person gives secret expression to his single opinion” (Bourdieu 1993:221). The existence of a collectivity of politically autonomous citizens, each of whom is able to form an opinion as a relatively coherent system of statements, is a visible component of a political culture (or ideology), that ascribes very high levels of authority to the individual (Verba 1996: 3) or rather a fiction without sociological background (Bourdieu, 1993). The summation of responses into a construct like “public opinion” in Europe presupposes their equivalence, in the sense that these responses have come into existence in the same manner, possess the same knowledge base, and have the same factual power in the political game (ibid.). It is precisely when questions refer to highly complex contexts that cannot be unambiguously described that this prerequisite is not fulfilled. The responses are embedded in different discourses among populations and in different worldviews that sneak into the process: different views about what is real are stamped as a percentage, which is what precisely negates those highly significant differences. This problematic can be analyzed by examining the results of questions regarding power relations in the Community, the answers to which provide information about the particular manner in which the imaginary (in the sense of “supposed”) political order to which the “opinions” and “assessments” of the European political population occasionally refer. EC citizens are regularly confronted with Eurobarometer surveys containing following question:

"Which one of the following institutions of the European Community is, in your opinion, the most powerful, in terms having the final say on European Community legislation: a) The European Commission in Brussels, b) The European Parliament, c) the Council of Ministers representing the governments of the Member States."

From a purely formal point of view, the “Council of Ministers” would be the correct answer to the question. The Council of Ministers grants final passage to legal acts and is, in the legislative sense, viewed as most important institution in the decision-making process of the EC. The Commission, meanwhile, functions as the ”motor” in the integration process, whose function is to propose initiatives; it has become the ”preferred target of lobbying activity” (Hrbeck 1996:182, Nollert 1996: 650f.). The Parliament is the only institution with its own “democratic legitimation,” while at the same time it represents the authority in the integration process that possesses the least power comparatively speaking. The resulting legitimation vacuum is a continuous topic of political discussion (Grande 1996). Although the position of the Parliament was improved in the course of the integration process, it is
still viewed as a "democratic propriety" (Pernice 1993:467). Meanwhile, the distribution of authority in the supranational structure enjoys a reputation as a "permanent authorization law in favor of the executive" (cf. Suski, 1996:188). The survey's simple question, which would appear to be easily answerable, disguises the fact that the decision-making process of the EC, especially since Maastricht, is not at all simple; in fact, it is extremely complex (Platzer 1993:62). What is more, it is not restricted to the political institutions but is also clearly related to the influence of economic interests—an alternative answer that is simply excluded by the formulation of the question. If the population was now to be confronted with this question, the summation of the answers would yield a picture that corresponds very poorly to the institutional reality of the Community (cf. Table 2). Among the group of respondents that feels capable of answering at all, the largest proportion are those who believe that the weakest institution has the most power in the decision-making process (about 30 percent Europe-wide). The Council is attributed the most power by 23 percent, while the percentage of the population that believes the Commission possesses the most power is by far the smallest. However, to speak of an all-European population is once again to speak of a construct. The differences among countries are quite large, which can be shown with the help of examples, and cannot be explained very easily. An "all-European" assessment of the relations of power would be an absolute illusion in this context, unless one were to artificially make identical the nationally fragmented and absolutely diverse political discourses and continuities of information.

Table 2. Assessments of the Distribution of Power in the EC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Power in the EC</th>
<th>Nation</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>NL</th>
<th>BRD</th>
<th>DK</th>
<th>UK</th>
<th>GR</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>EC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commission</td>
<td></td>
<td>24,3%</td>
<td>15,4%</td>
<td>15,3%</td>
<td>28,0%</td>
<td>24,8%</td>
<td>12,8%</td>
<td>7,0%</td>
<td>17,4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliament</td>
<td></td>
<td>27,1%</td>
<td>34,0%</td>
<td>30,7%</td>
<td>21,1%</td>
<td>23,3%</td>
<td>28,2%</td>
<td>28,4%</td>
<td>29,3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Council</td>
<td></td>
<td>25,6%</td>
<td>34,6%</td>
<td>26,9%</td>
<td>38,1%</td>
<td>21,9%</td>
<td>19,0%</td>
<td>16,5%</td>
<td>23,5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td></td>
<td>23,1%</td>
<td>16,0%</td>
<td>27,3%</td>
<td>12,7%</td>
<td>30,1%</td>
<td>40,0%</td>
<td>48,1%</td>
<td>29,7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Eurobarometer 37 (1992). Based on national representative samples (998 < n <1318). For the calculation of the distribution of power at the level of the EC a weighting variable was applied to transform each sample to yield an EC-wide representative size (n=12755).

Despite the differences among countries, a pattern can be seen in the responses to the question, namely "that the broad public tends to overestimate the present role of the European Parliament in the decision-making process in the Community" (Eurobarometer 30, 1988:55). What is noteworthy here is that the Commission and its information policy place a high value on pointing out the importance of the Parliament. Thus, the information brochures of the Commission return again and again to the central importance of the Parliament (Commission 1994a; Commission 1994b; Commission 1988; Commission 1995), which is rather amazing given that the

The problem that appears in the institutional critique of the Community and its "democracy deficit" is widely recognized. Accordingly, the Commission comments in an informational brochure as follows: "The decision-making process of the European Community is frequently attacked. The focal point of this criticism is the lack of rights held by the European Parliament (Commission 1994b:27)."
Commission's view has always been that the Parliament plays a role during the "hearings phase" (Commission 1993; Commission 1993:5; Commission 1994b:6). In the brochure, "Questions and Answers about the European Union," the question "How Democratic is the European Union?" is answered in a way that makes it appear that the Parliament occupies the foremost position of political power. Only later is the reader reminded that the "Council" represents the actual decision-making authority. Consequently, the "overestimation of the importance of the Parliament" in the Eurobarometer surveys essentially mirrors the self-portrayal of the Community—without revealing any direct causalities. The theme that we have been discussing from the outset, namely, the connection between information policy, information procurement and information dispersal, comes full circle here: The Commission wants to state the importance of the Parliament through its public relations on the one hand, while on the other hand its public opinion research instruments measure and report that the "European" population acknowledges the Parliament as most important institution of the Community.

Our discussion of this item provides an insight into how a public opinion research artifact arises; in this case, how the European population assesses power relations in the European Union. Broader segments of the population—a more precise analysis would show these are particularly the lower social strata—are denied the possibilities for becoming aware of the complex decision-making process and relations of power at the European level. The large number of respondents who simply did not answer suggests that the question asked too much of them. With respect to the identification of a favorable "public opinion," by far the most significant thing that this result proves is that the context of the different answers regarding European integration could not be more different. It means one thing if a respondent says that European integration is a "good thing" if he believes at the same time that the Parliament is the most powerful institution at the European level; it means quite another if he gives the same answer and is well aware that European integration is not legitimated in the classic sense of representative democracy.

The Maastricht referendum in France as well as the assessment of power relations in the EC empirically bring to light what is problematic about the conception that the Eurobarometer presents of itself as a spokesperson for a public that is having a discussion about European integration, one who would not be otherwise noticed, or, as Verba puts it, one who "hold[s] . . . the mirror up to the nation" (Verba 1996: 3) (although such qualifications would be rather rare due to the autonomy of the

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16 "The European Union is an amalgamation of democratic states," writes the Commission, "which counts among its most important institutions the European Parliament, the European Commission, the Court of Justice, the Council of the European Union and the Court of Auditors (Commission 1994b:5)."

17 After all, public opinion research possesses the possibility of mitigating other processes of political representation such as elections and voting (from whose logic it in no way departs, as we have shown), if such different worlds were to be summarized together in national elections and referenda. Compared to surveys, whose questions somewhat brusquely confront the population and whose results can be easily shoved into a drawer without public attention, elections and voting necessarily have greater political consequences and are always situated amidst larger political debates. While public opinion research can illuminate the results of an election, the reverse is also possible under certain circumstances, a fact that is illustrated in this case by the Maastricht referendum.
knowledge produced by public opinion research). The total impossibility of judging whether or not the picture presented by public opinion research is adequate should already make one skeptical. An assessment of the results of the Eurobarometers that does not want to deny that it is precisely the very discourses that the information policy wanted to create that actually exist would perhaps need to keep this autonomy in view, and would have to depart from the presentation of the “image.” Beyond all the overwhelming approval for European integration that is suggested by public opinion research, the traces of something quite artificial can never be completely removed, as we have tried to show in the two examples discussed above. One need only ask, what—if anything—do the percentages that result from the common question of whether the membership of one’s own country is a “good thing” or a “bad thing” mean, if a good part of the respondents answer with “neither” or “don’t know”? Perhaps such a result primarily illustrates helplessness—on the part of both the EC and the population.

**Conclusion: A “Virtual Nation”**

Gallup, who throughout his life possessed a utopian vision that public opinion research could contribute to improving the functioning of democratic states, warned earlier that governmental authorities themselves would undertake public opinion research. The temptation to position the surveys so that they support the state’s position and any results that point to problems are suppressed, is quite simply too great to allow public opinion research to be left up to state authorities (Gallup 1939:10). In this sense, it is truly remarkable that the European Community has built a public opinion research apparatus that is unparalleled in its magnitude: with help of the “public opinion” measured by public opinion research, European information policy attempts not only to maintain the continuity of the European integration project but also to guarantee “parliamentary democracy” within the Community. With its aim of creating a “public opinion,” the information policy actually refers to a central element of the legitimizing discourse of political rule, one which maintains its attractiveness for a European integration process that is perpetually wrestling with its “democratic legitimacy.”

The circle that Gallup spoke of has now closed itself: The corresponding results that the Commission’s public opinion research apparatus produces with respect to support for European unification appeared superficial at first glance but are in fact very useful for the integration process. The reports about “public opinion in Europe” reveal a “bold” population, that in the face of crises declares itself “unshakably” in favor of European integration. Just as the public opinion research reports, a broad and, over time, quite stable majority professes its support for membership of its won country in the European Community.

The information policy that made it possible to created in this way an “independent” European public opinion,” which bolstered and legitimized the integration process, forgets, however, that the construct of “public opinion” on a European level confronts prerequisites that cannot be simply equated with the
nation-state-like realities. The system of connections within a communication space, enables the playing of very particular realities against each other, is missing at the European level: despite the best efforts of the European information policy, a "European public" is nowhere to be found. This also means that the production of alternatives to certain questions regarding European integration as well as the labeling of these questions as potentially controversial political problems on the European level cannot take place. The answers give by the respondents to the public opinion researchers emerge outside the context of political communications that would allow the respondents to be summarized as a totality, which is what the existence of a "independent, European public opinion" actually must presuppose. In this respect, statements like "the majority of the European populations approve of a European central bank” suggest an all-European discussion, which has not taken place at all; at most such discussion has only flared up at the level of the individual nation-states. The corresponding results, insofar as they refer to a "European public opinion," are necessarily artificial.

At best selective, nevertheless this public opinion research knowledge occasionally experiences a qualification; this is conceivable if, on a national level, unforeseen political discourses about European integration appear or completely different images emerge of the political reality that lies behind the summarized answers to date (other examples could be given: for example, the effect of German reunification on the support for European integration). However, the conclusion that this knowledge about the opinions of the European population is merely artificial, is only correct if the point of reference is "European public opinion." Public opinion research results come about on the basis of certain social rules: it is only for this reason that they are not simply white noise, but rather remarkably stable results. Indeed the responses, or rather the non-responses, do not necessarily refer to the political problematic intended by public opinion researches of the Commission. The political reality to which respondents refer differs widely from that conceived by political science.

It is precisely this fact that underscores the "virtual" character of "public opinion" that results from summation of responses: because this process proceeds on the assumption that the responses have originated from the same social situations on the basis of the same political knowledge, which is a sociological sense is in no way the case. Since, generally speaking, the questions imply the context of an election, the respondents are confronted with a concrete set of answers, and consequently the population is classified into a few "opinion categories" ("for", "against," etc.). In this way, a homogeneity is produced, and a consensus about the problems and possible alternatives is generated, that is completely abstracted from the concrete discursive praxis and the specific social context in which the responses were given. Despite the fact that in this process a certain nod is given to other institutions of representation, such as elections and referenda, this homogeneity is an illusory, barren, but useful artifact. It is not only that, as Bourdieu points out, through this artificial consistency the concrete social power relations and inequalities become disarticulated. What is more, not every response, each of which becomes summarized as a percentage value of the overall "public opinion," has been expressed by a respondent whose opinion is
based on the same knowledge and possesses the same influence. The numbers of the public opinion researcher also lose their social memory if equal treatment of the unequal negates social differences laden with tension. As Verba puts it in this regard, "they ignore of the mainstreams of political life and this make them very artificial" (Verba 1996:4). In this way, the public opinion research manages not only to systematically create not only knowledge, expressed in the form of simple statements of artificial homogeneity like, "a majority is in favor of X," but also forgetting. If the concept of "European public opinion," developed on the model of the nation-state, is presented at the standard by which judgment is made about the validity of public opinion research, then we can confidently say that political reality has departed from the statistics of the public opinion research, if the latter is conceived as some sort of precise instrument. This is not to say that public opinion research is meaningless. On the contrary: attention should be paid to which social facts the public opinion researchers of the Commission create with it. From the viewpoint of the political institutions of the Community, which are interested in integration, the faits sociaux generated by the Eurobarometer are most welcome. Insofar as they pretend to a political discourse that de facto does not--or only occasionally--exists, they confront the respondents with already existing social facts (for example the EC membership of their own country), that are not at all a component of the (momentary) debate, but in response to whose normative power the respondents must speak. Despite their artificiality, they can henceforth be articulated as a normative force with respect to the population. This illustrates the effort of the Commission to create an impression, through public relations and impressively illustrated glossy brochures full of colorful Eurobarometer tables, that the integration project is supported by the European population.

However, the statement that public opinion research produces "false" results is just as embarrassing. To what should knowledge produced by public opinion research refer then? The idea of the existence of an "authentic" European public opinion, originating in an all-European "public," was developed in the image of the nation-state, whose political actors and institutions--like "public opinion"--change or lose their meaning in the context of completely different relationships; thus, like "public opinion," it threatens to become raised to the level of a fetish. In context, an individual political institution, like public opinion research, that makes the claim to be "more representative" of the population than other forms of political participation is in danger of creating its own reality, if the special context of the European level is not taken into account. The enormous mass of data that the European public opinion research machinery delivers continually probably needs reevaluation, one that is not based on categories and concepts taken from the model of the nation-state (where, it should be noted, upon closer examination they do not work any better). Instead of the metaphor of the "mirror" or the "barometer," that of the monitor would perhaps be more suitable, a monitor on which a reality emerges, based on rows of statistical numbers, which itself could no longer be understood as the image of something that already exists. This monitor could put in their place all those institutions and actors who at any point claim to represent some of all of the "European" population. In that
case, Gallup might have praised the necessity of public opinion research by writing that the nation is virtually, rather than literally, "in one great room."
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