# DIVERSITY, POLITY, AND THE EUROPEAN PUBLIC SPHERE

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## Abstract

This article proposes a conceptual and analytical framework for analysing the ongoing structuring of the European public sphere. It views the public sphere as being in a symbiotic, but non-deterministic relationship with polity forms and diversity accommodations. Operationalising the public sphere as a four-dimensional matrix of governance levels, networks, discourses, and collective actors, which takes into account the aforementioned relationship, it identifies the elements of the public sphere that should be focused on research about the European public sphere and locates the individual articles in this issue of *Javnost – The Public* within this matrix.

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## Introduction

Post war political change in Europe is characterised by an incessant democratisation process in which the distinction between rulers and ruled is gradually fading away. As the *demos* becomes both the ruler and the ruled through advanced democracy, the notion of rulers' legitimacy loses its common sense meaning, and individuals' legitimacy *vis-à-vis* the liberal democratic state also gains in significance. An inadvertent outcome of advanced democracy is, thus, the notion of individuals' legitimacy in the eyes of the *demos* and of its elected government.

The notion of "legitimacy of individuals" has historical roots, and its content is determined according to different criteria in different socio-political contexts. In social and political theory, examples of such criteria are individuals' *consent* in the rules of the democratic game (Habermas 1994a, 1994b), their *express consent* in and *recognition* of the values, virtues, and conventions of the *demos* in particularised socio-political contexts, which are thought to have universal features (Oldfield 1990), *cultural belonging* to the community (Taylor 1992), *national belonging* to the polity (Miller 2000), and *primordial belonging* to a community (Scruton 1980, 1990).

In this context of reciprocal legitimacy claims by rulers and ruled, which, in an ideal democracy, are merged in one and the same entity (*demos*), criteria determining the states' legitimacy are supplemented with criteria determining individuals' legitimacy – based on persons' belonging, race, ideology, origin, loyalty, participation, gender, sexuality, class, life-style, participation, contribution to community, etc. These criteria are devised and institutionalised by the ruling and ruled *demos* through democratic processes.

Legitimacy of individuals unfolds itself not only as privileging of individuals and groups who qualify as "real" and "worthy" citizens, but also as exclusion and marginalisation of "semi-legitimate" and "illegitimate" citizens, something which also has consequences for citizens' exercise of basic political rights – such as limitations or pressures on the right of free speech, participation, and upward mobility – often resulting in the citizens' absence or limited appearance in the public sphere. Rousseau called such "legitimately" semi-excluded citizens "foreigners amongst citizens" (Rousseau 1989).

To be sure, these are criteria for *internal* inclusion and exclusion of citizens, and they are related to citizens' affairs with the power-holders. However, political systems also have *external* inclusion and exclusion machineries – e.g., immigration, asylum, non-citizens' rights, enlargement issues. What happens at external boundaries also recurs onto internal boundaries of society, and vice versa. The interplay between internal and external boundary making shapes the notion of diversity, which in turn structures the public sphere according to the power relations between different groups. Any attempt at studying the public sphere needs to focus on the interplay between internal and external boundary making, exclusion and inclusion in the public spheres resulting from this interplay, how such inclusion and exclusion patterns structure the public sphere, and the consequences of these for democracy.

Earlier research on the European public sphere (EPS) has made crucial contributions to our understanding of the making of today's Europe. It has shown us that it is difficult to realise a common EPS in the foreseeable future but that there

are traces of a segmented EPS in the making on some policy issues (Eriksen 2005). Most important of all, it has drawn our attention to integrative (de Beus 2010), democratising (Fossum and Schlesinger 2007), legitimising (Lord and Beetham 2001), and meaning-creating (Calhoun 2005) functions of the public sphere. The normatively well-justified view of the EPS as a means of achieving democratic legitimacy at the European level, on the other hand, has not been substantiated empirically, and earlier research teaches us little about how a public sphere can be inclusive in the European context of deep and complex diversities. Existence of a near-to-perfect procedural or deliberative democracy, including a public sphere where citizens freely exercise their rights of free speech, assembly, critique, and deliberation in order to form the public will, is a necessary but not sufficient condition for democracy. If we accept that any notion of state legitimacy produces a corresponding notion of legitimacy of individuals, it is important to inquire into which forms of public sphere include/exclude which groups, in what degree, and on which matters.

In this sense, I take a complementary normative stance with a focus on inclusion/exclusion in and at the boundaries of the public sphere. It is of urgent importance to investigate whether the focus on democratic legitimacy in mainstream EPS studies has inadvertently led to the emergence of new criteria defining who the (il)legitimate participants of the public sphere should be. Indeed, it has been empirically shown in numerous case studies of national public spaces that, in contexts of diversity, such standards can be discriminatory, marginalising, and excluding.[1] As a supplement to the contributions made by the democratic legitimacy debate in EPS studies, I conceptualise the EPS as *a means of inclusion for democracy* with the following overall research question: Is an inclusive EPS possible under conditions of complex diversity, multi-level governance, and shifting boundaries within and of the EU?

The word "inclusive," combined with this special issue's sub-title, "towards a citizens' Europe," is a manifestation of my overall normative orientation toward the public sphere as a site of inclusion and accommodation of diversity. On the other hand, this is also an empirical research orientation positioned against earlier European research's primary focus on the procedures, mechanisms, and legitimising and democratising functions of public spheres, leaving barely answered the substantial question of "what kind of diversity and openness are allowed in public spheres?" – i.e., the main normative question posed by diversity, gender, minority, race, sexuality, disability, and marginalisation researchers.

This research question brings into focus the different approaches to inclusion and diversity, which also impinge upon how one envisions the public sphere, politics, society, and the state. For example, it is possible to view inclusion as assimilation, integration, institutional segregation in a shared polity, or simply as co-existence under a minimal state. It is also possible to view diversity in terms of collective or individual identities and belongings; essentialised collective identities like ethnicity, race, sex, religion, and nation; or in terms of constructed group or individual identities. This all depends on the ontological beliefs of the viewer, and not necessarily the reality. No need to say, each of these priorities includes certain groups as the relevant components of society, on which the public sphere and political institutions are to be based, and, also, which policymaking should

address. Consequently, while determining the relevance of groups and issues, each of these approaches excludes certain groups, individuals, and issues based on their ontological priorities.[2]

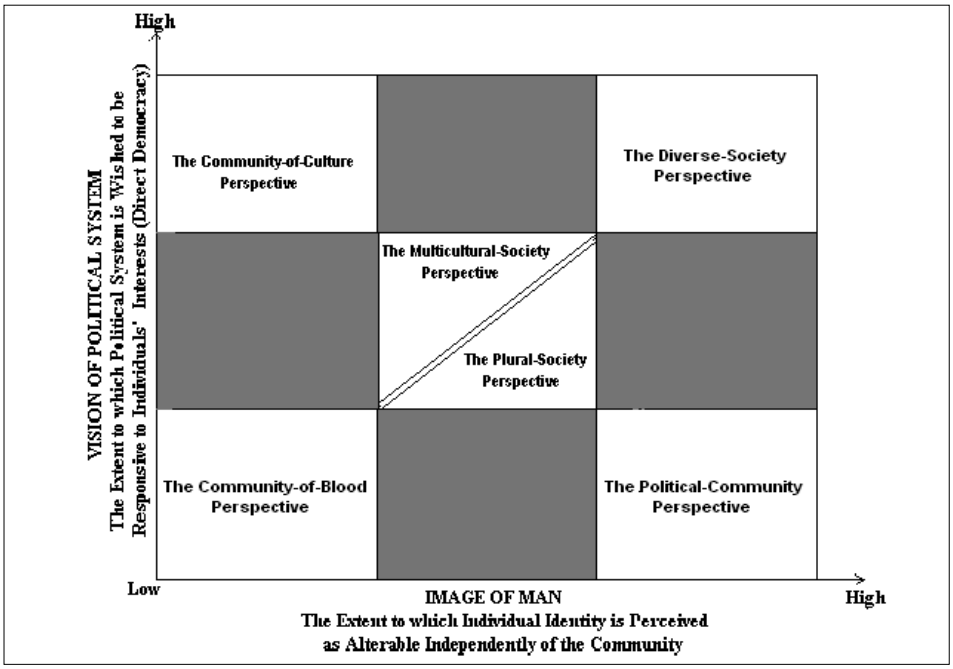
Through exclusions and inclusions, ontologies and normative visions have direct consequences for, among other things, notions of politics, society, polity, and citizenship.[3] The different ontological points of departure and their normative exhortations have consequences for the definition of the EPS, European diversity, the European polity, and the design of empirical research on these phenomena. After such a choice is made, the resultant research design will reinforce certain visions of society, polity, and public sphere and justify certain inclusions/exclusions in the public sphere. If research ought to be committed to nourishing our restless wonderments about how society and politics are possible (as opposed to how certain visions of society and politics can be realised), it is of the utmost importance to assess which models of EPS are more inclusive than others in a given context. Indeed, this is one of the main objectives of this special issue, and each of the articles included address different kinds of inclusions and exclusions that are observed in our empirical material about the EPS.

## Polity, Diversity, and the Public Sphere

Approaches to the public sphere, especially concerning its purpose and structure, are inspired by discussions between individualists, communalists, multiculturalists, and pluralists. To accommodate individual differences, individualists[4] suggest a single, discursive public sphere (e.g., Habermas 1989). For the European case, this implies "Europeanisation of national public spheres" (e.g., Gerhards 2000; Eriksen 2005). Communalists and multiculturalists propose multiple, segmented public spheres at two levels to accommodate separate historical/cultural communities in one polity (e.g., Taylor 1992; Kymlicka 1995).[5] In the case of Europe, this implies a segmented public sphere divided along the lines of national (and sub-national) cultures (e.g., Kielmannsegg 2003). Criticising both alternatives because of their singular recipes for the good life, pluralists[6] advocate the midway perspective of accommodating both individual and group differences in multiple, multi-level public spheres (e.g., Fraser's (2007) subaltern counter-publics). The implication of this for the European case is "a European sphere of publics" (e.g., Schlesinger 2003).

These four normative approaches unfold differently at various intersections of (1) individualism/collectivism and (2) internal and external openness/closedness of the political system. Figure 1 illustrates a ranking of six models of political society along two dimensions: *vision of political system* and *image of person*. The former dimension represents "political visions" in terms of preferences concerning direct democracy, which empowers all social groups to be influential in the political decision-making process and allow radical changes in the political system through mass participation. The latter dimension conceptualises "image of man" in terms of beliefs about the alterability of human identity and belonging independently of individuals' immediate surroundings. The combination of these two dimensions implies six political society models as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Six Normative Models of Society




The conceptual frameworks in Figure 1 comprise various relationships between internal and external boundaries, norms, institutions, public sphere, form of political society (the perpendicular axis), and individuals' belongings and identities (the horizontal axis). The models which advocate radical openness for internal systemic changes through direct democracy, and which at the same time assume that individuals' basic features, such as culture, life-style, identity, and political preferences, are unalterable, prescribe the most restrictive models of inclusion in the public sphere (e.g. the community-of-culture perspective). On the other end of this continuum, those models which advocate radical openness for systemic changes and which simultaneously hold that human identity is utterly changeable, prescribe the most inclusive models of public sphere (e.g. the diverse-society perspective). The way of conceptualising diversity and inclusion/exclusion of different types of belongings in each model is different.

Table 1 gives a simplified overview of the theoretical relationships between visions of political society, notions of diversity, and envisioned models of public sphere. The horizontal axis (*types of belongings*) lists the belongings acceptable for inclusion in the public sphere. The perpendicular axis (*visions of society*) represents the envisaged forms of political society. Corresponding public sphere models are placed on the diagonal at different intersections of the two prime dimensions. The first three models (*community of culture, multicultural society, and civic political community*) have particularistic or universalistic presuppositions concerning the relationship between diversity and public sphere. The other three models (*civil political community, civil plural society, and the civic diverse society*) can be distinguished

Table 1: Theoretical Relations between Models of Public Sphere, Polity, and Diversity

| **Visions of Political Society** | ***Types of Belongings and Diversity Allowed in the Public Sphere*** | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Singular and Historically Fixed | Singular and Socially Fixed | Singular and Politically Fixed | Singular and Alterable | Multiple and Alterable | Multi-dimensional, Alterable, Mobile |
| The community of culture | 1. Single Protected Sphere | | | | | |
| The multicultural society | | 2. Multiple Segmented Spheres | | | | |
| The civic political society | | | 3. Single Shared Sphere | | | |
| The civil political society | | | | 4. Multi-level Overlapping Nested Spheres | | |
| The civil plural society | | | | | 5. Multi-level Differential Spheres | |
| The civic diverse society | | | | | | 6. Multiple Composite Eurospheres |

from the former three models by their ambition of context-sensitivity. The common concern in the last three models is to include, give voice to, and empower all the segments of society in the public sphere, though in different ways. Their differences lie primarily in the ontological status they give to individuals' different modes of belonging in their perspectives of diversity.

The first model, "community of culture," largely corresponds to the communitarian vision of society which views the common culture as the essential element of a society that provides a meaning frame for individuals – there is no meaning outside the context of a community culture. Without the community, thus, the individual cannot exist. In this understanding, the public sphere is a social space that accommodates and ensures the continuation of a collective meaning frame that is shared by all members of the community, in a Deweyan or Taylorian sense (Dewey 1985; Taylor 1985). The public sphere is not only an instrument providing democratic legitimacy to power-holders. As a space where the gist of the community is created, preserved, reproduced, and transferred from generation to generation, the community's common public sphere is an end in itself. Hence, the public sphere has to be a *protected space*, since by shielding it we also save the community and its meaning frame. According to this understanding, the only way of protecting the community and its public sphere is to organise the society as a small polity, as Dewey suggested, territorially and institutionally separate from other communities. In the case of the European Union, this model's viability is low. Indeed, the communitarian paradigm would be against creating a single, common EPS shared by all because this would mean the destruction of meaning-bearing communities.

The "multicultural society" model unfolds differently in communalist and individualist perspectives. Communalist multiculturalism does not regard organisation in a small sovereign polity as a necessity. Instead, it demands political autonomy for groups claiming a right to a unique culture (e.g., ethno-religious and ethno-national groups) in territorially divided federal political systems. Apart from suggesting co-existence with other communities in a common federal polity, communalist multiculturalism is similar to the "community-of-culture" perspective in its ontological and normative premises. In communalist multiculturalism, the public sphere model is *segmented along the boundaries of the communities* constituting the federal polity, and there is little horizontal communication and interaction across the boundaries of communities' public spaces, but much communication, deliberation, interaction, and collaboration through community representatives at the federal level.

The third model, "civic political society," corresponds to the liberal-republican society model. Belongings are viewed as alterable independently of individuals' belonging backgrounds – an assumption that fits nicely this model's requirement of citizens' assimilation into a common political culture and abidance by the rules of the democratic game, while allowing for all types of belongings in the private sphere (cf. Habermas 1994a, 1994b). As a space between the state and civil society where power-holders are criticised and held accountable, the public sphere's main function is the formation of common will through public deliberations, following certain rules of communication and deliberation in the public sphere. For this to happen, all citizens and residents are expected to participate in political processes and public deliberation, no matter what belongings they may have. Hence, the civic political society perspective does not tolerate segmentations in the public sphere because, then, the formation of common will would be impossible. What we read between the lines of liberal-republican writings is that the civic political society model requires a *single public sphere*, shared and freely participated in by all citizens and residents of a unitary polity.

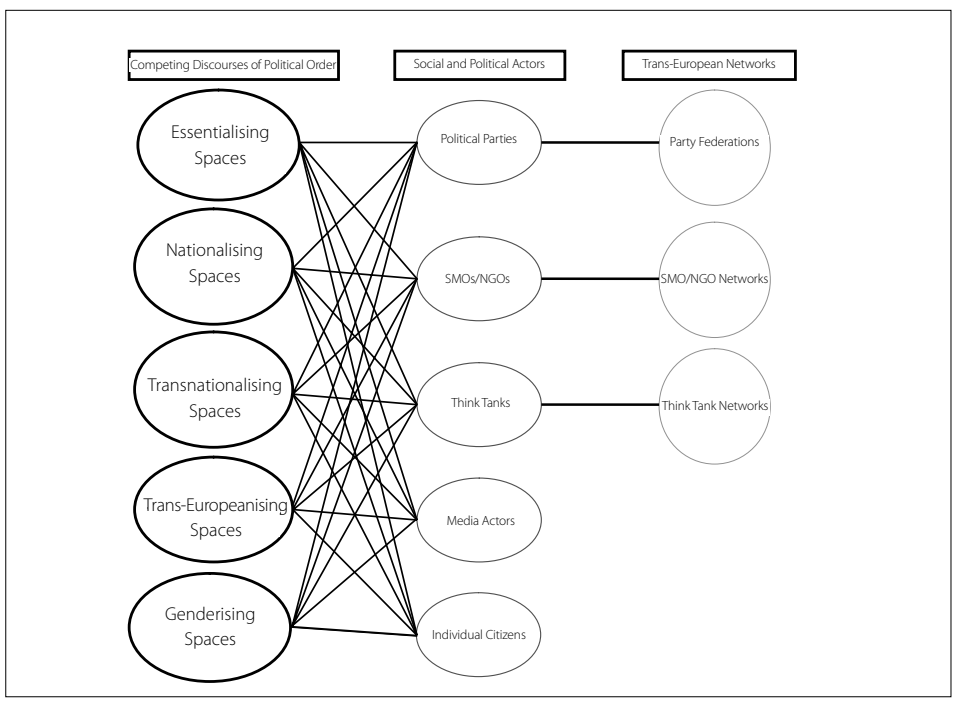
The last three models agree that the plurality of belongings should be accommodated in *interconnected multiple public spheres*; however, their designs vary between *nested-overlapping*, *differential*, and *embracive* spaces. The "civil political community model" is the individualist version of multiculturalism. Viewing the right to belong to a community as an individual choice, the individualist version of multiculturalism does not insist on strict communal autonomy but allows it if this is the choice of individuals who freely come together to form a community. The model gives priority to discrete, singular, and alterable forms of belonging in its approach to diversity; structures the public space based on such belongings; and proposes *ad hoc* institutional solutions for inclusion of multiple and mobile forms of belonging. Its nested-overlapping public spaces pre-suppose a degree of homogeneity of belonging in nested, multi-level political units, based on the existing limitations that the Westphalian states system poses, where the communities have a high degree of autonomy to bypass governance levels above themselves. Therefore, it pre-supposes the existence of a complex set of community-specific public spaces which overlap and interact with each other, as components of a larger public sphere. The "civil plural society model," on the other hand, recognises the multiple and alterable nature of individuals and proposes a public space model

that gives differential access to citizens and residents. The degree of inclusion in the public sphere increases with respect to individuals' degree of "insiderness" in the political system, defined by society-determined diversity categories. The "civic diverse society model" recognises all the above forms of belonging as equally valid and moral modes of being, and it problematises the exclusion of belongings that are based on identities that are mobile between different references of identification and thus that cannot be classified under the political-system-defined group/citizen categories.

## The Founding Elements of the European Public Sphere

What complicates the task of understanding the EPS is that the aforementioned types of public space all co-exist in it. The EPS should be conceptualised as a sphere that consists of several different types of public spaces that co-exist at different levels, where the transnational European (trans-European) public sphere is only one of the constituent public spaces. Consequently, a trans-European public is only one of the multiple types of public that constitute the European public (see also Sicakkan's article in this issue).

Figure 2: Discourses, Actors, and Networks in the Public Sphere




These public spaces are inhabited by a complex diversity of historical and new publics – e.g., minority publics, national publics, transnational publics, trans-European publics, and new publics. They create their own distinct, internal discursive spaces. More importantly, the institutional and other collective actors emerging from and operating in these spaces, and voicing the publics that inhabit these spaces,

interact increasingly more beyond the existing boundaries and across the levels of governance to create the trans-European spaces.

Some of the trans-boundary communications and interactions – be they collaborations, conflicts, exchanges, or contestations – are explained by common pasts, shared cultural heritage, collective identities, geographical proximity, economic structures and incentives, practical suitability, exit/voice possibilities, and political opportunity structures. This special issue is about the ingredients of this reality that cannot be explained exclusively by such factors, but also with the increasing ability of people to transcend their immediate surroundings and identify with distant political entities, hard-to-imagine collectivities, and less tangible ideas about their own belongings.

The social and political dynamics triggering the emergence of the EPS must be sought in the tensions between, on one hand, the architects and gatekeepers and, on the other, the transcenders and trespassers of borders and boundaries within and around the co-existing publics and public spaces. Each article in this special issue addresses this tension in different ways by focusing on different kinds of actors and public spaces that compete with the trans-European spaces.

## Articles in This Issue

Concerning the articulation of the EPS, this special issue focuses on the impact of two specific building blocks of European society, which are seen to be amongst the crucial factors impinging upon the shaping of a public sphere:

• *The roles of different types of social and political* ***actors*** and their ***networks*** *in the articulation of inclusive EPS* – whether or how different types of social and political actors contribute to or impede the formation of a certain model of EPS.

- individual citizens
- think tanks/policy research institutes
- political parties
- social movement/non-governmental organisations
- print and broadcast media

• *The impacts of different social and political* ***spaces*** *on the articulation of inclusive EPS* – whether or how different types of social and political spaces facilitate or impede the emergence of a certain model of EPS.

- essentialising (ethnic/minority) spaces
- nationalising spaces
- transnationalising spaces
- trans-Europeanising
- gendering spaces

These choices are not arbitrary: A focus on the public sphere has to include citizens', institutional civil society actors', and the mass media's framings of issues. Concerning institutions, one has to focus on key civil society actors operating/maneuvering in the public sphere (see Sicakkan's article for criteria for sample selection). Further, both citizens and civil society organisations still relate to the different and sometimes multiple types of public spaces that developed historically as components of the existing national public spheres, which will also have to remain as components of an emerging EPS for a long time.

Table 2: Types of Actors and Public Spaces Covered by the Articles in This Issue

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2" rowspan="2"></td><td colspan="5">Type of Public Space</td></tr>
<tr><td>Gendering</td><td>Essentialising</td><td>Nationalising</td><td>Trans-nationalising</td><td>Trans-Europeanising</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="5">Type of Actor</td><td>Individual Citizens</td><td colspan="5">Klicperova-Baker and Kostal</td></tr>
<tr><td>Political Parties</td><td rowspan="2">Bruell, Mokre and Siim</td><td rowspan="2">Bruell, Mokre and Siim / Sicakkan</td><td colspan="3">Sata/Sicakkan</td></tr>
<tr><td>SMOs / NGOs</td><td colspan="2">Sicakkan</td><td>Kutay/ Sicakkan</td></tr>
<tr><td>Think Tanks</td><td rowspan="2">None</td><td colspan="3">Sicakkan</td></tr>
<tr><td>Media Actors</td><td colspan="3">Sicakkan/Zografova, Bakalova and Mizova</td></tr>
</table>

With a focus on different types of actors and public spaces, as summarised in Table 2, the articles in this issue show how the EPS is structured by a variety of tensions between the architects/gatekeepers and transcenders/trespassers of borders and boundaries in Europe.

Acar Kutay presents a case study of the Platform of European Social NGOs (Social Platform) and discusses the tension between the EU's aim to Europeanise the national civil society organizations' aim of gaining political influence at the European level.

Bruell, Mokre, and Siim discover three contesting discourses about intersectionality between gender and diversity and show how these have become a site of contestation between the diversity-oriented trans-European networks and the gender-equality-oriented national political parties and social movements.

Robert Sata gives an account of how diversity preferences of national political parties affect their willingness to become the transcendrs of national boundaries, finding that this depends on the domestic cleavage structures and competition.

Yolanda Zografova, Diana Bakalova, and Bistra Mizova's study of national media's reporting of the news about two EU-related themes documents that media, even on the core EU issues, are lagging behind the other types of actors when it comes to transcending the national boundaries, which confirms the horizontal segmentation of the media sphere component of the EPS.

Focusing on how the tension between elites and citizens is structuring the EPS, Martina Klicperová-Baker and Jaroslav Košťál map out the matches and mismatches between elite and citizen views on diversity, indicating a vertical segmentation of discourses.

Finally, with a focus on the tension between "trans-Europeanising" and other types of public spaces, this author shows in his article that the EPS is in the process of becoming both horizontally and vertically segmented.

In its entirety, this special issue substantiates the hypothesis that the different types of public spaces, including the trans-European ones, constitute a partially interconnected system of spaces, an EPS, through the mechanisms of gatekeeping and trespassing at different levels of society. Each article also presents findings about the new possible and observed inclusions and exclusions that this EPS legitimises.

Acknowledgment

Around 40 senior researchers and 90 junior researchers from 17 universities in 16 European countries contributed to the project in its different phases and stages. The authors in this special issue are grateful for their invaluable contribution. Special thanks to Professor Slavko Splichal, the editor of *Javnost – The Public* for useful comments. The articles in this issue present part of the results from the EUROSPHERE project (http://eurospheres.org). EUROSPHERE is an integrated project led by Hakan G. Sicakkan at the University of Bergen and funded by the European Commission through the 6th Framework Programme (http://cordis.europa.eu/fp6/dc/index.cfm?fuseaction=UserSite.FP6HomePage). We devote this special issue to the memory of our dear colleague **Professor Michael Bommes** at Osnabrück University, who passed away on 26 December 2010, after finishing his tasks in our common project.

## Notes:

1. A huge body of contemporary race, ethnicity, minority, and migrant integration research; gender and gay studies; research on the disabled; and on other marginalised groups strengthen the view that universalistic discourses and rules of participation/communication in public debates result in exclusion of some groups. For examples of theoretical discussions about these, see, among many others, Bader (1995), Fraser (2007), Sandel (1998), Sicakkan (2005, 2006, 2008), Taylor (1992), Walzer (1983), and Young (1989, 1990, 2000).

2. I do not have enough space here to give an overview of the details of relevant approaches, nor to list what each ontology excludes. However, I did this in my earlier work (cf. Sicakkan 2006, 2008).

3. Note that some different normative theories have ended up with similar policy proposals concerning e.g., citizenship, migration and asylum policy, etc. For examples of these, please see the following footnotes. Although this is true at the policy level, the disagreements about models remain strong and still have consequences for which trade-offs are possible.

4. The liberal-republican version of the individualist approach emerges from a rapprochement between liberals and republicans. On the liberal side, Habermas (1994a, 1994b) asserted that individual identities needed to change in order to function in a democratic constitutional state because membership in a democratic constitutional state requires a civic political culture based on public deliberation and communicative action. Effectivity in the public sphere as participating citizens and, for this purpose, assimilation into the deliberative political culture was what Habermas expected from all individuals. In the private sphere, he concurred, individuals did not need to adapt their particular identities to society at large. The limit to change was political culture. This stance is, on the one hand, republican, because it requires individuals' assimilation into a political culture and their identification with a constitution – i.e. constitutional patriotism. On the other, it is also liberal because it allows individual and group identities to exist in the private sphere. From the republican side, Barber argued that it was necessary to create the civic identity that is essential in a "strong democracy," without requiring individuals to abandon their group identities, as long as such identities allow individuals to assume their civic responsibilities and duties (Barber 1984).

5. There are varieties of multiculturalism: Amongst reputed multiculturalists, Kymlicka (1995) advocated "liberal policies of multiculturalism." Based on the ontological priority of individuals and their autonomy, he asserted that individuals can choose to belong to certain communities. As long as a communal identity is an individual choice, he claimed, multiculturalist policies and rights regimes based on groups were defensible. On the communitarian side, Walzer defended a type of communitarianism based on individuals' choice. Walzer made a distinction between two types of liberalism (Walzer 1990). In Walzer's framework, Liberalism-1 can be similar to the Kantian or Lockean liberalisms. Liberalism-2 emerges from Liberalism-1 as a result of individuals' free choices to belong to a particular community. In Walzer's approach, communal identity is defended because it is understood as an individual choice. On the other hand, departing from communitarian premises, Taylor, too, defended multiculturalist policies and rights regimes, but those which were based on

the priority and autonomy of communities (Taylor 1992). Although their ethical and ontological premises were substantially different, liberal and communitarian multiculturalisms have become quite similar in their policy implications: recognition of group rights, affirmative action policies, sovereignty devolutions/autonomy to suppressed historical minorities, etc.

6. Similarly, one finds a multitude of pluralist approaches to diversity. Radical pluralism (e.g., Gray 2000) argues with a point of departure in the incommensurability of value-sets in diverse society. Proposing a context-sensitive *modus vivendi* as a solution for co-existence in diverse societies, the basic assumption in radical pluralism seems to be a momentous fixity of individuals' and groups' cognitive positions in relation to different identification alternatives that are available in society. The diversity perspective of Eurosphere, accepting the incommensurability argument only partially, assumes that individuals have different degrees of mobility of minds between the existing alternatives as well as self-created alternatives.

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