

7 The European void

The democratic deficit as a cultural deficiency

Abram de Swaan

On croit souvent que la vie intellectuelle est spontanément internationale.
Rien n'est plus faux.

(Bourdieu 2002: 3)

A Europeanization of perspectives is occurring (at least the first signs of it).
(Beck 2005: 109)

In the past half century, a peculiar political construct has emerged from the combination of European states: the European Union is more than a confederation but less than a federation; more than just a free-trade zone but not quite an economic whole (Therborn 2002);¹ almost a world power but one without an army or an effective foreign policy of its own; with a common currency, the euro, but with coins that reserve a different verso for each member state. And yet, taken together, in less than a lifetime, these are major achievements. The ambitions are even more grandiose: ever eastward. The Union, after expanding to Central and Eastern Europe, and the Baltic, one day may well come to include all of the Balkans, Turkey and, in the end, who knows, Ukraine, Georgia and even Russia. This geographic expansion is to be managed by further political integration. The Constitutional Treaty would have elevated the Union above a mere regulatory apparatus and closer towards a federal entity, to adopt the terms proposed in the introduction to this book.²

For the time being, however, the recent referenda in France and the Netherlands have put a damper on these designs, while the Austrian EU presidency during the first semester of 2006 set itself the objective of preventing the accession of Turkey.

An uneasy mood reigned among the Europeans even before the negative French and Dutch votes brought about an acute crisis, which in turn much acerbated the existing malaise. The institutions of the EU, elected directly or indirectly, have failed to capture the imagination of the electorate.

There is a Council of Ministers, in which the governments of the

member states are represented, each supported by a freely elected parliamentary majority at home. There is a European Parliament (EP), directly elected by the citizens of each country. There is a European Commission (EC), which must take into account the Parliament's majority. Yet, no doubt, much of the widespread unease among the citizens of Europe is connected to the notorious 'democratic deficit' of the Union.³ But the very plebiscites that had been staged to make up for this shortcoming elicited a resounding rejection.

The fragmentation of European public space

Europeans do not speak the same language and hence do not understand each other well enough to differ or agree. But quite apart from the confusion of tongues, opinions everywhere are shaped within separate national frameworks. What is passionately debated in one country is often not even an issue in adjacent countries where a different agenda prevails. In many respects, however, the debate on the European Constitution, and especially the referendum campaigns waged in France and the Netherlands, represented a turning point in the formation of a European public space. Not only did the proposed constitution evoke intense exchanges in each member state, it also elicited a vivid interest in the discussions going on in the other member states. Equally, the bomb attacks in Madrid and London on 11 March 2004 and 7 July 2005, respectively, were not reported as threats to the affected countries exclusively but rather as a menace to all of Europe. The riots in the French *banlieue* in October and November 2005 again prompted discussions elsewhere in Europe about the odds of similar troubles there. At an earlier stage, events such as mad cow disease or the introduction of the euro inspired synchronous discussion of identical issues across the EU (cf. Grundmann 1999). This also created an interest in the debates that went on in adjacent countries and in the European institutions.⁴

Yet, such common European debates are still the exception rather than the rule, and it is a rare event that prompts a discussion allowing voices from all member states to agree or disagree on the same issues, according to a common agenda. Even today, the political and cultural debate mainly proceeds in relative isolation within each national society. Abroad, it hardly meets any response. In short, there is no such thing as a European public space, as yet. As stated by Philip Schlesinger:

The mediated public sphere in the EU remains first, overwhelmingly national; second, where it is not national it is transnational and anglophone but elitist in class terms; third, where it is ostensibly transnational, but not anglophone, it still decants principally into national modes of address.

(Schlesinger 2003: 18)

In discussing Europe as a communicative space, much attention has been paid to the distribution of news and information, the professional task of journalists. Schlesinger (2000) and others have shown that news about the EU is perceived by reporters through national filters, edited according to a domestic agenda, and only sparsely absorbed by the home audience. Transnational media are almost without exception in English and aimed at a select public of financial, corporate and political elites.

The remarkable lack of interest in the culture and politics of other European states, even in neighbouring countries with an identical language, a similar culture and a shared past, is hard to explain. It registers as a sleepiness, a sudden onset of boredom whenever the other country comes within one's circle of perception. And underneath there often may linger disdain, or resentment, or both, reflecting past and enduring relations between more powerful and less powerful neighbours, or between centre and periphery. All this is part of a lasting national habitus which incorporates the relations of cultural capital that prevail within and between national societies. In fact, this pervasive habitus of disinterest is a result of the lack of debate and exchange that transcends borders. This, in turn, is due to the absence of a cultural opportunity structure that would allow public intellectuals, authors, artists and scientists to manifest themselves throughout Europe. It sometimes seems as if any intellectual who attempts to overcome this national closure is pulled back by the invisible gravity of the domestic institutional structure.⁵

So far, on the one hand, the paucity of resources and opportunities has discouraged intellectual entrepreneurs from seeking a transnational, European audience. First of all they have had to look for resources in their home society. On the other hand, the relatively laggard nature of European cultural elite formation has done little to prompt politicians or private sponsors to provide opportunities and resources at the European level.⁶

In the meantime, and in the absence of a single European public space, there are myriads of European niches, each providing a distinct meeting place for participants from all member states with shared interests. And the more circumscribed the agenda, the more smoothly the all-European exchange proceeds: experts, technicians and specialists have no trouble finding one another, nor do entrepreneurs from the same branch, believers from the same church, athletes from the same sport or scientists from the same discipline find it hard to congregate and communicate.

But these multifarious niches, neatly separated as they are, do not add up to a European space. On the contrary, as the agenda widens and comes to encompass broader cultural, social and political issues, communication becomes much more difficult. There are literally thousands of specialised journals that carry the epithet 'European' or an equivalent in their title.⁷ But when it comes to general cultural and political reviews, there may be no more than a dozen that achieve a genuine European distribution, and almost all of these are in English.

It is unlikely that these specialised networks of exchange will coalesce into broader structures of communication. They do not at the national level. The mutual isolation between academic disciplines, or between technological specialities, is notorious (and once again, the opportunity structure, or rather the reward distribution, prevailing in these fields discourages adventurous, transdisciplinary initiatives). It is all the more unlikely that this vertical fragmentation would be overcome at the transnational level. Nor is it very likely that the elite publics that are each connected with a prestigious transnational medium, such as the *Financial Times*, the *International Herald Tribune* or *Le Monde Diplomatique*, will in due time be 'knitted together'. There is not much that connects the subscribers to different media, and their owners will be the last to encourage such promiscuity.

The impasse in the development of border-transcending media or associations is characteristic of general cultural and political communication in Europe but not for specific scientific, technological or commercial exchange. The more specific the theme of the network or the periodical, the more easy it is to put it together and keep it going. There is no dearth of associations, conferences or journals dedicated to a scientific or technological discipline, sub- or even sub-sub-discipline. Researchers and experts are very well informed about their peers throughout Europe and the rest of the world and keep in continual contact. On the other hand, the broader the scope of the intellectual encounter, the harder it is to create and maintain a shared agenda, to define common ground, across borders and across languages. But the vocation of the public intellectual is precisely to engage in debate on the broad issues of the day, and many in the audience want to hear a voice that is familiar from earlier discussions express its opinion on ongoing issues. One function of the much maligned celebrity intellectuals (cf. Bourdieu 1996) is to function as beacons that shed their light on the many and diverse issues that pop up in the sea of current events from a steady and familiar vantage point (much as familiar critics can help readers situate a work of art in the context of the art world, whether or not readers share their tastes). Another function of media intellectuals is to define new issues and introduce them into public debate. This is usually a shared endeavour, most often accomplished in mutual antagonism, by the debaters on both sides. Vital public opinion exists in a public of divided opinion. Intellectual debaters need a theatrical quality to command attention, to impose themselves upon a public that is constituted in the very course of the spectacle: assisting at a dramatic *choc des opinions* that may not always yield the truth, but is certain to inspire passion about public issues and thereby create a public.

The role of intellectuals in Europe

The deficient communication between the nations that make up the EU is not due to lack of political culture, or a scarcity of debate and polemics in each of the member states. On the contrary, every national society boasts the full gamut of newspapers, from the popular press to the most prestigious dailies. Each country is served by an array of TV channels, and a few of those provide some space for the discussion of public issues. In all member states, there are politicians and intellectuals galore who are perfectly capable and quite eager to discuss questions of politics, culture and morality. But time and again, the gravitational force of the national culture pulls back those intellectuals who might aspire to transcend the borders of their nation and the barriers of their language.

After all, it was the emergence, during the Modern Era, of the nation state in tandem with a national society that spawned a public space where people could exchange their opinions. Yet the history of the origins and evolution of a public sphere in European national societies offers a precedent, but it does not provide a blueprint to emulate on a European scale.⁸ After all, most of these nations have been under the rule of a more or less autonomous, more or less effective regime for centuries. In each country, the various regional languages were gradually pushed aside by the language of the court and the capital city, which set the tone for the entire society. Hence, a coherent, literate public that shared a language and an agenda could emerge. A new kind of entrepreneur found its audience: independent authors who wrote for a clientele that bought and read books and newspapers. They were mostly small, self-employed operators trading in sentiments and opinions, in brief, intellectuals: people who speak and write professionally in public about concepts and ideas.

Intellectuals still exist today; there are even many more of them, although nowadays there are very few who still work on their own account, as 'freelancers'. By far, most are employed by universities, publishers and the media. All these institutions are very much oriented towards their domestic environment when recruiting students, seeking a readership or addressing an audience.⁹ Moreover, they are bound to the soil of their national language. They also depend on the national government for legal protection and as the case may be, for financial support. As a consequence, academics, editors and journalists find almost all of their connections within nationally defined networks and build up their reputation within the confines of their home society. Thus, there are German intellectuals, and French, Greek, Portuguese and also Dutch intellectuals, each addressing their particular domestic public. But on the whole, the intellectuals *in* Europe are not the intellectuals *of* Europe.¹⁰

Intellectuals very rarely find a European audience or manifest themselves at the all-European level. Only a very small number have achieved a reputation that goes beyond the borders of their own society, allowing

them to publish, in translation, in the other countries of the Union. The few who have achieved international renown as intellectuals have done so mostly on the strength of a literary or an academic oeuvre that was translated and published abroad, or because they have made a name for themselves as commentators on international affairs and in due time have been reprinted in other countries. Literary fame especially has allowed a select company of authors to make themselves heard throughout the Union, such as Günter Grass, Milan Kundera and Umberto Eco. Their observations on political and cultural issues are published and read throughout the Union after their novels have already provided them with an audience that recognises their voice. There are other remarkable exceptions, such as Jürgen Habermas and the late Pierre Bourdieu, both philosophers and sociologists, whose comments on the predicaments of contemporary society have resonated far beyond their home countries. But almost all the others among the handful of authors who have succeeded in building a transnationally valid reputational capital started out in the UK or the US, writing in English, before they acquired a name across the EU (even if they were born elsewhere in the former British empire and started life with a different mother tongue). Transnational reputational capital remains very scarce for intellectuals (and even more so for almost everyone else). The vast majority of reputations does not reach across the borders of language and culture.

Very few politicians have succeeded in extending their reputation beyond the confines of their home society, except through incidental news items. For example, Tony Blair, Silvio Berlusconi and Jacques Chirac are certainly well known all over Europe, but it is doubtful whether they can conquer an audience abroad beyond the eight-o'clock TV news. Winston Churchill and Charles de Gaulle are the shining exceptions as the great heroes of the Second World War, who were both authors in their own right. Surprisingly, the European commissioners have not achieved much transnational capital either, even though they appear exceptionally well positioned to do so. These admittedly haphazard examples seem to suggest that lasting, border-transcending reputations, surprisingly, are built more on a written oeuvre than on political capital or celebrity media exposure. At least among an elite public, literary and academic prestige seem to command more lasting attention from audiences than simple fame. The scarcity of border-crossing intellectual reputations seems to be a consequence of language barriers, but also of the 'cultural opportunity structure' of the Union and its constituent states. The concept is a variation of the notion of a 'political opportunity structure', current in the study of social movements, where it denotes the totality of 'signals to the social and political actor which either encourage or discourage them to use their internal resources to form social movements' (Kriesi *et al.* 1995: xiii).¹¹ Likewise, the structure of cultural opportunities determines the chances and incentives for aca-

demics, artists, authors and other intellectuals to reach an audience and earn an income through cultural pursuits.

What makes the concept interesting is the shift away from individual motivation and competence towards the broader social context in which people operate. Thus, the prevailing constellation of universities, newspapers, reviews and foundations granting subsidies or awards may much influence the career moves that intellectuals make.

Further, the networks that academics and authors form with their peers, and the way these ties are structured, may also shape their choices. Such networks may connect close colleagues but also members of an editorial board or an organising committee, comprising ties to departments in other universities, to translators and publishers. Citation networks chart another aspect of this opportunity structure. There is little doubt that invitations to conferences or acceptance for publication in reviews are more likely to be forthcoming for scholars or authors already connected with the organizers or the editors, and also in other respects well situated within the network.

To outsiders this may smack of favouritism, but from the inside it seems a simple matter of affinity of style and opinion, and of predictable performance. And finally, there is the overriding structural fact of the prevailing language. Most often, its impact remains largely unnoticed in the domestic context, where the single national language is shared as a matter of course. The European constellation of languages is the topic of the final section of this chapter.

The existing cultural opportunity structures in the national societies of Europe operate strongly against the emergence of border-transcending intellectual reputations. First of all, in order to cross borders, more often than not authors must switch languages. This compels them either to invest heavily in the cost of mastering a language to such a degree of perfection as to be able to write and publish in it, or it imposes the considerable costs of translation (and how to get editors and publishers interested in a text that has not been translated yet?). More fundamentally, language differences delimit the scope of attention and delineate networks of affinity among intellectuals. People 'naturally' (i.e. 'structurally') prefer to read texts in their own language.

Institutions provide very few career opportunities for intellectuals, writers, journalists and scholars outside their national societies. Language requirements severely restrict employment for academics at foreign universities (even for those who speak English) and they entirely rule out editorial or publishing jobs abroad. Equally scarce at the all-European level are the other ingredients of a successful career and a major reputation: awards, subsidies, commissions, committee or jury memberships and so on. Almost all these resources are proffered by national institutions rather than by European agencies. Moreover, as argued above, the odds of obtaining such prizes and positions are much improved by mutual

acquaintance, while acquaintanceship networks rarely extend beyond the borders of nationality and language. There are, admittedly, a few very prestigious prizes intended for laureates from all over Europe, such as the Amalfi, the Erasmus or the Charles the Fifth awards. Further, there are the European University Institute near Florence, the College of Europe in Bruges and in Warsaw, and some 'Jean Monnet' and 'European Union' university chairs here and there. But even the rare intellectuals who qualify for such privileges must first build their reputation and win laurels within their own national societies.

Granted, things are changing in the direction of increasing European exchange, also among scholars and authors. A finely branched circuit of conferences and workshops has taken shape by now and continually brings together intellectuals, scholars, writers or artists from all over Europe. Moreover, a small number of periodicals already appear in several languages, such as *Liber*, now defunct, directed by the late Pierre Bourdieu, or *Le Monde Diplomatique*. But with the exception of the latter, the most widely read transnational publications in Europe are all British or American: from *The New York Review of Books*, the *London Review of Books*, *The Times Literary Supplement* and *The Economist*, to the *International Herald Tribune* and the *Financial Times*.¹²

The role of elite media

In 1990 the British newspaper tycoon Robert Maxwell decided to launch 'Europe's first national newspaper', aiming for an all-European readership. A few years later the daily was defunct and survived a few years more as a weekly publication. Losses have been reported at £70 million.¹³ This debacle may have functioned as a warning for anyone attempting to try and embark on a similar enterprise again. There are, however, as mentioned, media that have succeeded in crossing borders.

In fact, the weekly British *The Economist* produces a special 'continental edition' for mainland Europe, with a circulation of 200,000 (as compared with the 150,000 of the UK edition and an overall global circulation of more than one million).¹⁴ The London-based *Financial Times*, with a total circulation of 426,000, reaches 119,000 readers in mainland Europe and participates in 'partner' editions in German, French and Chinese.¹⁵ Both publications cater mainly to the business elite throughout the EU, but they devote considerable space to general political and cultural issues, making them significant media of intellectual debate on the continent. The same applies to another worldwide publication, the *International Herald Tribune* (owned by the *New York Times*, which provides much of its editorial content). It mainly addresses American expatriates and the foreign business community with an overall circulation of almost 250,000 and a European readership of 145,000 (most other readers live in East Asia).¹⁶ The largest intellectual, even 'high-brow'

medium, is the bi-weekly *New York Review of Books*, with an impressive worldwide circulation of over 1.4 million, mostly American readers. In Europe, its combined subscription, news-stand and bookshop readership numbers about 13,000.¹⁷ The bi-weekly *London Review of Books*, with a much smaller total circulation of 43,000, distributes a few thousand copies in continental Europe.¹⁸

These English language publications are mostly read in the Western part of Europe. Central and Eastern European countries may yet have to catch up, since foreign media became accessible only after 1989. The one exception to the predominance of the English language media that are based in London or New York is the astonishingly successful *Le Monde Diplomatique*, a political and cultural bi-monthly with a global printed circulation of 1.5 million in 21 languages. Its editorial position is clearly to the left, or rather *altermondialiste*. Outside France, *Le Monde Diplomatique* is usually published as a monthly supplement to a local newspaper or review, in the Middle East, Latin America and also the EU, where it has a combined foreign readership of almost 600,000. In the EU, it is the most widely distributed transnational medium for intellectual debate and the only one of some importance that is not based in the US or the UK.¹⁹

The impact of the electronic media is much harder to assess, since viewers and listeners tend to tune in whenever it suits them, and their habits must be assessed through periodical survey questionnaires of contested validity. Thus, Radio France Internationale (RFI), the French international radio and TV network, claims 44 million 'regular listeners' all over the world (the majority in Francophone Africa) and more than two million in Europe, 'West and East', for its broadcasts.²⁰ The French international TV channel TV5 Monde reports 72 million weekly viewers, 29 million in Europe alone.²¹ These figures cover the audience for sports and news as well as more intellectual items such as documentaries and political or cultural features. The same applies to Deutsche Welle, which broadcasts mainly in German and English, mostly to a European audience, estimated to number some 65 million 'weekly' listeners and 28 million viewers. In the EU, it reaches roughly five million viewers and six million listeners on a weekly basis (especially in Central and Eastern Europe).²²

BBC World, the British international TV network, provides programming in English for 4.5 million viewers every week, over the entire range of genres, with very frequent news broadcasts and a sizeable share of general cultural and political items.²³ The Franco-German channel Arte broadcasts its 'high-brow' programmes simultaneously in French and German throughout Europe for a rather small audience (e.g. 0.4 per cent of the market in Germany, corresponding to some 240,000 adult viewers).²⁴

The Dutch Radio Netherlands (*Wereldomroep*) broadcasts in nine languages and reaches about 50 million weekly listeners, making it the fourth largest global network (the Voice of America is still the world's largest

global broadcaster).²⁵ Many other countries support an international TV or radio station, broadcasting in several languages, but with rather small audiences. The smaller international stations increasingly rely on global news agencies, thus increasing the similarity of news broadcast across the globe, while at the same time increasing the variation of available items in any single location.²⁶

A number of TV and radio stations limit themselves to news or sports broadcasts, such as CNN, in English (with a reported weekly audience of 7.5 million in Europe),²⁷ or CNBC, with 2.7 million European viewers on a weekly basis.²⁸ Most interesting for the present purposes is EuroNews, an editorially independent station under contract to the EU, which broadcasts in seven languages to 6.7 million European viewers every week.²⁹ Further, Eurosport is a highly successful channel, broadcasting in eighteen languages for a pan-European audience and devoted exclusively to sports coverage.³⁰

Most printed periodicals as well as radio and TV stations have by now created websites that present published editorial material, usually with added comments, arguments, supporting documentation, audience reactions, etc. Increasingly, multilingual international websites that cater to a political and cultural elite appear on the World Wide Web, the most notable instances being Eurozine (edited in Vienna), with articles from some 100 cultural magazines in Europe, quite often in translation.³¹ A site hosted by the European Cultural Foundation in Amsterdam will soon present a daily digest of major European newspapers in several languages.³²

Sports and entertainment coverage crosses the barriers of language and nation with much greater ease than political and cultural items. Many of the programmes are initially produced by American media enterprises. But some are indeed of European origin and scope: the Eurovision Song Contest and the European Football Championship are among the most notable examples of shows that capture a vast audience throughout the Union (Martin 1999).

The emerging European public sphere

The national framework shapes opinion within each country, the national past determines shared memories, and the cultural opportunity structure in each society controls the intellectuals. It sometimes seems as if some kind of national gravity holds them back from even trying to transcend borders. It also reveals structures of national sentiment and practice that usually remain unnoticed, because they are so 'banal' (Billig 1995). This apt expression conveys the unreflective, unremarked upon, even unconscious implications of opinions, sentiments and practices that make up nationality in the course of everyday life.

And yet, some kind of European public space is bound to take shape in

the not too distant future. It will certainly not be as coherent and homogenous as the term suggests in the singular. Like the public sphere in national societies, it will be fragmented, with the fragments hanging more or less together: 'a sphere of publics' (Schlesinger and Kevin 2000). In normal times, that is. There are moments in a given society when everyone's attention is drawn by one and the same topic. Fleeting moments of unanimous interest are achieved by the tragic death of a young celebrity, the exciting marriage of a royal couple, or the triumphant victory of a major football team. Other events have a more lasting impact on the attention economy of the nation, and they usually have to do with disaster, rebellion, crisis and war. Medrano (2003) speaks of a '*thematische Synchronizität*' ('thematic synchronicity') in the news coverage of the EU, and an increasing similarity of themes and political options in the separate member states. But the absence of debate across borders and the limited participation in national debate on the EU point to a public sphere that will remain fragmented, or 'pillarized' (*versäult*), into separate but congruent national spheres.

The recent debate on the European Constitution proceeded as a series of parallel national discussions, albeit in the awareness that the neighbours were talking about the same things at the same time (Medrano 2003). Clearly, no politicians or intellectuals managed to express what was at stake in terms that could have captured audiences across borders and beyond language barriers. This may have been due to the highly technical and rarified nature of the laws being proposed. Actually, during the debate that preceded the referendums in France and the Netherlands, rather strong feelings about the alleged impact of 'Brussels' on domestic politics and about the competition the enlargement of the Union would bring for workers at home became manifest. But such resistance is no less 'European' than a wholehearted acceptance of further integration. What was 'unEuropean' in these campaigns was the predominance of national politics, a symbolic use of the vote against the governments of Jacques Chirac and Jan Peter Balkenende, regardless of the European issues at stake.

Barring major disasters and wars, the most probable way for a European sphere of publics to take shape would be in the course of a fundamental conflict throughout the EU, not only similar and synchronous, but also this time interconnected across borders. The simultaneous rise of an anti-immigrant radical right and a fundamentalist immigrant movement in Europe might provide the fuel for a conflict that can command the attention of audiences across the EU and begin to connect the discussions in the individual member states. Under such conditions, journalists will provide the accounts that draw the public's interest, and intellectuals will coin the ideas and concepts that shape opinion and sentiment. The murder of the Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh by a young Dutch Islamist, the train bombings in Madrid and London and the widespread

unrest evoked by the rioting youth in the French suburbs all elicited reactions throughout the EU, at times reacting upon the reactions in other member states in the manner of an incipient all-European debate. Another case in point: the commotion in Islamic countries about the cartoons in a Danish newspaper portraying Mohammed, and the concern that this in turn caused among European publics, provoking discussion throughout the Union, statements by national leaders and even a formal declaration by the EC. As might be expected, this communicative integration was brought about by an exterior reaction that was perceived as hostile to the Union in its entirety. But interior developments, such as low-wage competition from the new member states, or the takeovers of major national industries by competitors from other countries within or outside the Union also inspired spirited, synchronous, parallel debates, at times even interacting with those in other member states.

The inadequate cultural opportunity structure is coupled with a most persistent cultural obstacle structure: the coexistence of two dozen languages within the EU. This multiplicity, of course, also greatly hampers the emergence of a public debate at the European level, and hence prevents the formation of a public space.

The European language constellation and public space

The EU boasts a common currency, but so far lacks a common language. It continues to speak officially in all the languages of the member states, initially four, at present twenty-three and in the not too distant future possibly even twenty-five or more. This prospect has prompted much alarm but so far rarely any serious debate beyond the circle of specialists. French turned out to be stronger than the franc, Dutch more stubborn than the guilder and German even harder than the deutsche mark.

In fact, there is hardly a language policy for the EP, or for the Commission's bureaucracy, let alone for *l'Europe des citoyens*, for civil society in the EU. At the time, the six founding members contributed Dutch, French, German and Italian, an almost manageable number. The official languages of the member states were admitted as the languages of the Community. Without much discussion, French was accepted as the working language of the Community's budding bureaucracy, as it had been the language of diplomacy until then and the sole language of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) that preceded the European Economic Community (EEC). In those post-war years, the Germans and Italians kept a low profile, and the Dutch (even when counting in the Dutch-speaking Flemish of Belgium) were not numerous enough to impose their linguistic interests.

The first great expansion of the European Community, in 1973, brought in the British, the Irish (almost all of them native English speakers)³³ and the Danes, of whom the vast majority had learned English in

school. As soon as the UK joined the EC, English became the second working language in the corridors and meeting rooms of the Commission and the Parliament (cf. Schlossmacher 1994; Bellier 1995; see also Mamadouh 1995). As new members joined the Community, the number of languages grew accordingly.

In the meantime, from the 1960s on, secondary education had been rapidly expanding throughout Europe. Quite independently, the member states realized sweeping reforms of their secondary school systems. In the process, most of them reduced the number of compulsory foreign languages taught but kept English, either making it compulsory or leaving the choice to the students, who tended to opt for English anyway, since it seems to hold the best job prospects and radiates the glory of global mass culture. Due to the expansion of secondary education, there are now more citizens in the Union who speak French, German, Spanish or Italian as a foreign language than ever before, but many more, still, have learned English: almost 90 per cent of all high-school students in the Union. French scores half this percentage, German a quarter and Spanish one eighth.

This makes English, in fact, the vehicular language of Europe; however, not by right. First, the Union happens to be a combination of states which all hold on to their own official languages; second, numerous decisions taken by the Union directly affect the citizens in the member states and therefore must be couched in their own legal language. The Union's multilingualism is therefore a matter of democratic principle and fundamental treaty law. The current 20 languages are prescribed in the public meetings of the Council and the Parliament and for all decisions that immediately bear upon the citizens. Behind closed doors, however, the languages of choice are French, increasingly English and, far behind, in third place, German.

There can be no doubt that Germany, as the most populous nation and a founding member of the Union, is entitled to have its language treated on an equal footing with English and French. However this would compel Spain to insist on equal treatment for Spanish, which among the languages of the EU is second as a world language only to English. This would force Italy as a founding member of the Union to demand the same position for its language, and then unavoidably, the turn would come for another founding member, the Netherlands and so on, until all members would have formally secured the position of their language in the EU and everything would be exactly where it is now: all official languages are also formally working languages but only two are actually used on a day-to-day basis (De Swaan 2001: 169–71).

In border-crossing encounters, the Europeans speak English; in the East, they use German at times and in the South sometimes French. Within each national society (except Ireland and the UK) English presses on as the principal foreign language, the language of business, science

and technology, international sports, transport and tourism, and of the worldwide mass media. As long as each state continues to support its own language in schools and courts, in national politics and administration, English, even though widely used, does not represent an acute threat. A condition of 'diglossia' prevails in all these countries: a rather precarious equilibrium between the domestic language and English, in which each one predominates in a different series of domains.

Since English is so visibly, so audibly present and so much more than before, one hardly notices the domains where it has not penetrated. In the private sphere, at home and among friends or close colleagues, people speak their mother tongue with abandon, eagerly adorned with anglicisms, but they use no English there. Many people read English books, but very few read newspapers in English. English is often spoken on TV, but it either comes with a 'dubbed' soundtrack or with subtitles in the home language. Quite a few people can follow a discussion, even at a high level, in English, very few can stand their ground in a debate in that language, unless it has been acquired as a native tongue. Almost no one who had to learn the language at a later age can write publishable English.

Within the prevailing cultural opportunity structure, English is the paramount medium of international exchange. Yet, reflection and debate in English are not encouraged at the European level, since the Commission does not want to appear to favour one language above other languages of the Union. Apparently, the British government does not consider its task to be active promotion of exchanges of opinion in English on the European continent, as this might even evoke contrary reactions from the other countries of the EU.³⁴

The governments of the member states do not want to privilege a foreign language, out of 'language envy', even if their own language does not stand a chance abroad. The pattern is familiar from postcolonial societies where, notwithstanding strong anti-colonial sentiments and a new nationalistic fervour, the debate about a national language ultimately ground down into a stalemate: at independence, each indigenous language group supported the idea of a single indigenous language of country-wide communication for the new nation, but they all agreed that it was not to be the language of the other group. Since both the colonial bureaucratic elite and the liberation movement had used the colonial language as the unifying means of communication, only a very strong consensus and radical educational policies could have overcome the predominance of the colonial language at the time. Indonesia indeed succeeded in imposing Bahasa Indonesia (Malay) to replace Dutch and Javanese. Tanzania successfully introduced Swahili instead of (and next to) English.

Swahili and Malay were indigenous languages, but neither was strongly identified with a single, dominant ethnic group. Hindi in India, Afrikaans in South Africa, Wolof in Senegal, on the other hand, evoked language

envy among the other groups. As a result, in many formerly colonised countries, English, or French, remained in place as the languages of government and administration, of business, science and technology, and nationwide elite media (cf. De Swaan 2001).

Another mechanism operated in the same direction: parents opposed the initiatives by well-meaning reformers to introduce indigenous languages as the medium of instruction in the schools. In public they would support the introduction of an indigenous language as the national medium, but in private they preferred their children to learn the language that promised the best opportunities in the labour market, the world language introduced by the former colonisers. This is a clear case of 'public virtue and private vice', as David Laitin (2000) astutely observed.

Likewise, the EU, in its campaigns for language learning and in its initiatives to support the smaller languages, officially and publicly continues to profess its unwavering commitment to full multilingualism. For their part, the envious member states will not allow any other language to take precedence over their own. In the meantime, European youngsters overwhelmingly (almost 90 per cent) choose or accept to learn English as a foreign language. In doing so, they privately undermine the collective, public commitment to the promotion of a variety of foreign languages. Such diversity, however, while favouring no single language, would leave all these new multilingual citizens with their different foreign languages still unable to communicate across the Union.

The EU is bound by treaty to leave matters of culture to the separate member states: this follows from the founding treaties and from the principle of subsidiarity which reserves all issues that can be dealt with separately by the individual member states for the national governments. However, the member states are in no position to introduce a common language for all-European communication, let alone to create a European public space. No intellectual networks can emerge in Europe; no all-European journals with a broad political or cultural orientation will appear, as long as intellectual exchange is hampered by the barriers of language and by the constraints of national frameworks. Given the cultural opportunity structure in the countries of Europe, there can be no substantive democratisation, no exchange of opinion that will affect Europe's citizens in sizable numbers. This is the principal democratic deficit of Europe.

There may be remedies. At the institutional level, the EC and the EP, faced with a Babylonian plethora of almost two dozen different languages, are currently experimenting with pragmatic arrangements in the hope of reducing the avalanche of translation and interpretation to manageable proportions.³⁵ Thus, committee meetings may proceed in English, French and, as the case may be, German or Spanish. Instead of translation from and into each EU language, facilities are gradually limited to interpretation from all languages into only two or three 'relay' languages and from those into all languages that participants may request. The Commission's

officials use English and French in their oral communication and for the internal preparatory documents. Semi-official publications appear in English or French only. But the principle of full multilingualism continues to receive unabated lip service and a full public debate on the issue is strenuously avoided.

Clearly, the European language predicament is very similar to that prevailing in India and South Africa: both are highly multicultural and very multilingual polities, the former having succeeded in maintaining a degree of democratic rule for more than half a century and the latter having achieved a transition towards democracy in the past ten years. In this case, rather than the primeval model of the nation state – France – or the prime instance of a democratic federation – the United States – India and South Africa may provide the most relevant instances of comparison for the evolving EU. Both must cope with a multiplicity of languages and a great variety of ethnic and religious groups. Nevertheless, a democracy with a shared and lively public space has emerged in each country. Institutions and concepts that originated in Europe play a major role in both India and South Africa, in combination with Asian and African political traditions and practices. In one respect, the EU has a major advantage: the level of education is high and almost every child has an opportunity to learn at least one foreign language. But which one? As in the EU, so in South Africa and India, hypocrisy is the tribute that vice pays to virtue. Piously protesting the ideal of full equality for all languages, in fact both governments allow English to continue in its privileged position, thus permitting the educated elites to reap the benefits of their competence in that language.

As in the EU, the prevalence of English is a foregone but tacit conclusion. At this point, in the argument, Pierre Bourdieu once exclaimed (in French) '*Il faut désangliciser l'Anglais*'. But how to expropriate English from its native speakers? It is after all the first second language on a continent where it is nobody's first. A Euro-English dialect with its own generally accepted standards will not emerge, just as no Afro-English or Asian-English standard has appeared. The English-speaking elites have a vested interest in maintaining full intelligibility between their version of English and 'world-English' and the same applies to Europeans using the language for continental and global communication.

Thus, for a long time to come, 'transatlantic' English will remain the standard in Europe and in the rest of the world. In Chapter 8, Lars Blichner proposes to adopt a European 'meta-lingual language' that would systematise and unify the political concepts circulating in the Union's many different languages. But, whatever 'meta-lingual' may mean in this context, this proposal refers only to the lexical and semantic aspects of European usage; it has nothing to do with the morphological properties of current, natural languages in the EU. What is indeed needed is a good lexicon of 'Euro-speak' in 25 languages, a formidable task in itself.

The only promising interpretation of Bourdieu's exclamation would be to adopt English tooth and claw, but to 'de-anglicize' the institutional means of communication and distribution: create European journals, owned by European companies and run by European editors, found European distribution agencies for films and books that select productions from one member state to present in the others and initiate European scientific and cultural associations as an alternative to organizations under American tutelage.

English is not the problem; it is the solution. The problem is that British and American organisations control the distribution and exchange of cultural expression and scientific findings. That is what makes it hard for authors, artists and scientists in one European country to get access to the public in another country, unless they have first been selected by an editor, publisher or distributor in New York or London.

It appears that in the individual member states, in the long run, democracy cannot work if the major decisions are taken at a higher, European, level, without intellectual exchange and political debate taking place on a corresponding European scale. If that is indeed the case, then a European public space will in the end turn out to be a necessary condition for the survival of national democracies as well. That is why the individual member states and the Union as a whole should improve the cultural opportunity structure at the European level. That requires European journals, websites and newspapers, European universities and academies, and European cultural meeting points and intellectual networks.³⁶ In this manner the material conditions may be realised for a public debate, not delimited for the greater part by language and nation, but shaped by a joint, European agenda of dissent and consensus.

Notes

- 1 As Therborn points out, by dint of its heritage and present global position, it is also the most important force towards 'transnational normativity' in the contemporary world.
- 2 For a different perspective on a possible European future, see Axford and Huggins (1999) who perceive the EU as an emergent, highly differentiated network of networks, where spaces matter, not borders.
- 3 'Though the EU dresses itself up in the rhetoric of democracy – a fundamental requisite for Member States – it is covered at best by the scantiest of fig leaves.' (Bellamy and Castiglione 2000: 65). But this does beg the question of what democratic institutions would fit 'the mixed character of the European polity' (p. 83).
- 4 Christophe Meyer (2000) shows that since 1987 the number of journalists accredited in Brussels has grown steadily and that, as a corollary, coverage of EU news grew at a pace. Leonard Novy also stresses the national perspective of news reports on the EU. The EP, however, he qualifies as '*beimah öffentlichkeitsabstinent*' (almost entirely abstemious from any publicity); see his article 'Vom Schweigen der Union', *Eurozine*, 21 July 2004, www.eurozine.com/articles/2004-07-21-novy-de.html (accessed 13 September 2006).

- 5 This may be the structural basis of the sociological mentality that Ulrich Beck (2005) has aptly called 'methodological nationalism': an incapacity to grasp the emerging realities of the EU.
- 6 I have convincing experimental proof of my thesis. Some years ago, I intended to submit to the Brussels authorities a research proposal on the emergence, or rather the non-emergence, of European cultural elites. I was strongly discouraged by the research consultants in Brussels. The EU, I was told, avoids cultural topics and eschews anything to do with elites. Sadly, my assumptions were confirmed even before the research began.
- 7 Just typing 'European' in the periodicals catalogue of a large library yields thousands of hits: at the latest count 4,020 for the University of Amsterdam library. Many of those may, however, lead to the same publications or point to items other than reviews and journals.
- 8 Of course, there exists a spontaneous tendency to define an idealised version of the nation state as the final objective of European integration. Against it, a more sophisticated view considers the nation state completely irrelevant in conceptualising the integration process. Quite interestingly, Dennis Smith (1999: 246) argues in terms inspired by Norbert Elias, 'that the sociogenesis of the EU is a process that has a similar structure to the sociogenesis of the state, except that this process operates at a higher level of integration.' According to the author: 'At the centre of Europe-formation is a shift from national states that mainly *impose* discipline on those subject to their domination to national states which are themselves to a very considerable extent *subject* to continuing discipline from "above"' (ibid.: 249–50).
- 9 See Craig Calhoun, 'The Democratic Integration of Europe: Interests, Identity, and the Public Sphere', *Eurozine*, 21 June 2004, www.eurozine.com/articles/2004-06-21-calhoun-en.html (accessed 13 September 2006).
- 10 Thus, in May 2003, when seven European newspapers decided to publish the reactions by seven of the most celebrated intellectuals in Europe (Jacques Derrida, Umberto Eco, Jürgen Habermas, Adolf Muschg, Richard Rorty, Fernando Savater and Gianni Vattimo), to the question 'What is Europe?' commentators in each member state concentrated almost exclusively on the contribution from their countryman: 'Despite its grandiose pretensions, the Habermas initiative has become a striking example of the difficulties confronting the modern Babylon that goes by the name of Europe in establishing a transnational discursive and deliberative space worth its salt.' See Carl Henrik Frederiksson, 'Energizing the European Public Space', *Eurozine*, 13 May 2004, www.eurozine.com/articles/2004-05-13-fredriksson-en.html (accessed 13 September 2006). Frederiksson is editor of *Eurozine* (www.eurozine.com), which is among the most successful of pan-European cultural and intellectual websites.
- 11 The formula cited here has been adopted from Sidney Tarrow. The concept has been around at least since the early 1970s.
- 12 'Although [...] the press remains almost exclusively a national medium, there are, nevertheless, newspapers and magazines that self-consciously address a European (as well as global) elite audience' (Schlesinger 1999: 271).
- 13 Cf. Frederiksson, *supra* note 10.
- 14 Audit Bureau of Circulations, www.abc.org.uk (accessed 25 November 2005). The author wishes to express his gratitude to Christine Lohmeier for her research into the circulation figures quoted here; to Isabelle Steenbergen, who made an initial inventory of border-transcending printed and electronic media in the EU; and to Marianne Bernard, who revised it for publication on a website of the European Cultural Foundation.
- 15 Audit Bureau of Circulations, www.abc.org.uk (accessed 25 November 2005).

- 16 Information from *International Herald Tribune* marketing department and www.iht.com (accessed 25 November 2005).
- 17 Information from *The New York Review of Books* marketing department, 27 November 2005.
- 18 See the *London Review of Books* media information, www.lrb.co.uk/advertising/media.php (accessed 27 November 2005).
- 19 Oral communication by Dominique Vidal; see also www.monde-diplomatique.fr/int (accessed 9 December 2005).
- 20 RFI, Direction des Études et des Relations Auditeurs; see also www.rfi.fr/pressefr/articles/072/article_30.asp (accessed 12 March 2006).
- 21 See TV5 Monde at www.tv5.org/TV5Site/tv5monde/publicite.php (accessed 10 February 2006).
- 22 Communication from Dr. Roland Schürhoff; see also *Deutsche Welle*, 'Weltweite Schätzung der täglichen und wöchentlichen Reichweiten für das DW-Programangebot' (14 January 2005).
- 23 In addition, BBC World Service broadcasts news and features in some forty different languages all over the world for 146 million listeners across the globe as of June 2004; see www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2004/06_june/21/ws_figures.shtml (accessed 28 November 2005).
- 24 Communication from 'Arbeitsgemeinschaft Fernsehforschung', see www.agf.de/daten/zuschauermarkt/marktanteile (accessed 23 November 2005).
- 25 See 'Facts and figures about Radio Netherlands', 28 October 2004, www.radionetherlands.nl/aboutus/aboutrnw_facts (accessed 6 July 2006).
- 26 This, in a generalised version, is of course an apt definition of globalisation in general; see De Swaan 2002.
- 27 Written communication from CNN.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 No overall viewer ratings are available, only those for the highly educated audience.
- 31 See www.eurozine.com.
- 32 See www.eurocult.org for recent developments of the site under construction.
- 33 Although Ireland joined the Union in 1973, Irish was not adopted as an official and working language of the Union until 2005. In a population of 5.5 million (including Northern Ireland), there are about one million speakers of Irish, and some 50,000 citizens who speak the language on a daily basis (*Gaeltacht*); the others speak no Irish at all. Cf. Price 1998, also Kloss and McConnell 1989.
- 34 British publishers, and especially the providers of language courses do, however, actively promote English abroad; see Graddol 1997.
- 35 Chris Longman (2007) relates how during the plenary meetings of the Convention on the Future of Europe (2002–2003) all official languages (11 at the time) were used, while in the Praesidium and the working groups English and French were predominant in written and spoken communication, for practical considerations, obviously.
- 36 See the challenging diagnosis and remedies in Klaić 2005.