

**NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF POLITICAL STUDIES AND PUBLIC
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**THE EUROPEAN UNION – FROM A EUROPEANIZED
MEDIA DISCOURSE TO CITIZENS’ AGENDA. STEPS
TOWARDS A EUROPEAN IDENTITY**

- Summary of PhD thesis -

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Introduction and structure of the thesis

The European Union is facing a series of trials in its efforts to strengthen the project and to sustain its political development, trials that lately seem to test the consistency and the sustainability of the Union itself. The failure in overcoming these obstacles might translate in the failure of the European project and its future developments. The euro crisis is one of the most important current challenges that calls for prompt action as it threatens one of the basic pillars of the European project, namely the economic union. The EU has to offer solutions for the communication and democracy deficits in order to gain legitimacy regarding its political dimension and to benefit from citizens' support in its future developments. The Union cannot advance towards a political project, towards a common identity without involving the citizens and bridging the gap between citizens and elites. The European Union needs its political dimension to face global challenges and to act as a whole, as a single actor.

A network of Europeanized public spheres and a consolidated European identity could support the Union's efforts to institutionalize common political solutions, procedures and sometimes very expensive economic commitments such as those regarding the Greek situation. Therefore, there is a high interest in forming a European identity that would provide a foundation, a basis for agreeing on sacrifices that might sustain future developments. A lasting European project relying on extended public support is possible through the existence of a shared attachment to a common future or through a sense of affiliation to the European community. In this respect, media have an essential role in the Europeanization process and in creating a sense of shared identity, a sense of belonging to the European community. Media can help consolidating the Europeanization process and transcending the parochial public spheres by raising the visibility of European topics, by providing a European contextualization in interpreting the topics and by promoting the European actors. The citizens would have thus the necessary informational basis to understand the European implications, to sustain a high interest in EU aspects and involve in debates.

The Union cannot remain an elites' project especially since in the context of the current crisis, the citizens face concrete implications. The general dissatisfaction regarding the European Union comes from the lack of a direct popular control, the citizens feeling excluded from decision-making processes that involve their future. The economic situation along with the evaluation of

costs and benefits of EU integration is also shaping the citizens' attitudes towards the democratic process or their satisfaction with the EU's structures. Citizens' attitudes toward EU may include feelings of affiliation to the European community, feelings of reluctance and fear about the influence of Europeanization at the level of national cultures, positive or negative reactions regarding the activity of the European institutions and their democratic functioning, as well as regarding the utilitarian aspects of the integration. Media coverage and framing of the EU topics shape the public support for the European Union and the attitudes regarding the future of the European project (see Krouwel & Abts, 2007; Vliegenthart et al., 2008; Boomgaarden et al., 2011).

In this context, the thesis aims at analyzing the media involvement in the Europeanization process and in supporting the formation of a European identity, in parallel with determining the EU's place on citizens' interpersonal conversations agenda, the citizens' interest in European issues and the way they understand and experience the feeling of Europeanness. The thesis comprises seven chapters, three theoretical chapters and four chapters dedicated to the empirical study.

The first theoretical chapter, *Europeanization - perspectives and developments*, addresses the Europeanization process and its conceptual delineations, the perspectives on EU's developments and the afferent communication policies, along with the supporting factors in the Europeanization process. The chapter also tackles the concept of public sphere, with a particular view regarding the Europeanized national public sphere and its implications on society. Other important aspects addressed in this section include the citizens' attitudes towards the European Union and the Europeanization process, as well as the problematic aspects and the effects of the European crisis.

The literature doesn't offer a widely recognized or comprehensive definition of Europeanization, but multiple and various approaches. The process of Europeanization has a significant impact on domestic practices and policies, causing significant changes at the member states level. These changes can regard both the formal structures, and the values and norms within the member states, causing an increasing degree of convergence and overlap (see Hughes, Sasse & Gordon, 2004; Eder, 2004; Börzel & Risse, 2000; Brüggemann & Kleinen-von Königslöw, 2009; Radaelli, 2000; Ladrech, 2002; Featherstone, 2003; Radaelli, 2004). Europeanization is, therefore, a complex process that implies transformation whether we refer to institutional adaptation, to norms, procedures, and European policy implementation, or to changes regarding

the adoption of common European values in the concrete lives of citizens. Public communication is crucial for legitimizing and strengthening the Union, and for promoting the European policies in order to obtain the citizens' support.

Media have a decisive role in improving the EU communication and in supporting the Europeanization of national public sphere. This perspective is in line with the realist model of the EU public sphere that refers to a common space for debate relying on a network of Europeanized national public sphere connected through streams of information. One of the main conditions in the Europeanization of national public spheres is an increased media visibility of European topics, along with a European perspective in covering and evaluating the topics in the national media (see Brüggemann, 2005; Kopper & Leppik, 2006; Gripsrud, 2007; de Vreese, 2007; Habermas, 2009; Brüggemann & Kleinen-von Königslöw, 2009; Risse, 2010). A Europeanized public sphere is an important step for the future of the Union, for solving the legitimacy and democracy deficits along with offering the necessary framework for popular involvement (Castells, 2008). The Union needs a consolidated European public for its future developments, especially for its political plans.

The second chapter, *European identity – from construction to assumption*, addresses the concept of identity and its delineations, the relation between national and European identities in terms of conflict or complementarity, the concept of European identity along with its cultural, civic and instrumental dimensions, and the factors and circumstances that favor the feeling of European identity. The European identity is a fundamental element in the evolution of the political dimension of the Union, especially since the EU's actions and initiatives have an increasing influence in people's lives. Although the research in the field of political science addresses more the issue of public support for the integration process than the way citizens assume a political identity (Inglehart, 1997), recent findings indicate that a sustainable, legitimate European project needs a complementary identity (Bruter, 2005).

The European identity, seen either as having a vital role in the European political institutions (Bruter, 2005; Herrmann & Brewer, 2004) or just a small contribution to social integration (Grundy & Jamieson, 2007), is a real concept with concrete implications in the way citizens relate to the integration process (see Bruter, 2003, 2005, 2009; Diez Medrano, 2003; Habermas & Derrida, 2003; Eriksen & Fossum, 2004; Delanty & Rumford, 2005; Risse, 2005; Duchesne, 2008). Moreover, the support for the European integration and its democratic legitimacy are dependent on the development of a stronger collective attachment towards Europe

(Beus, 2001; Decker, 2002). The European identity consists mainly in a sense of affiliation to the European Union. Seen from the perspective of the multiple identities theory (Bruter, 2004; Risse, 2003), the identification with the European Union is complementary to the national identity, being activated according to individual characteristics, factors and contexts (see Wiener, 1998; Duchesne, 2008; Augoustinos & Walker, 1995; Thompson, 1995; Gripsrud, 2007).

The way people understand the European identity is different from one individual to another according to their experiences and to their different ways of relating to the European community. These multiple representations can coexist and can be activated depending on particular situations (Fry & Lewis, 2008). Therefore, the European identity is perceived as one of the multiple identities that citizens possess and exhibit in certain contexts, being a social construct with multiple layers negotiated in everyday interactions (Bruter, 2005; Duchesne & Frogner, 2007; Smith, 2011).

Citizens can assume a cultural, civic or instrumental European identity according to their different experiences. Although the civic and instrumental aspects of identity prevail among citizens (see Caporaso, 2005; Bruter, 2005; Ruiz Jimenez, Gorniak, Kosic, Kiss & Kandulla, 2004), the Union needs to rely on deeper reserves of attachment, loyalty and support that come from common sacrifices, common objectives that are meant to fulfill the interest of all member states, and from a common feeling of affiliation to a European community which includes a cultural identity (Bruter, 2005; Thiel, 2011). If citizens are aware and informed about the European events and decisions, their level of understanding and engagement in European issues increases, along with their support for the European project.

The third chapter, *Media – roles and attributions in the Europeanization process*, addresses the media instruments that might contribute in supporting the Europeanization process, the concept of media framing and framing effects, the media impact on citizens' interest and sense of belonging to the European community, as well as the limits of a Europeanized media discourse and the obstacles that may arise in the process of Europeanization. Media are an essential element in strengthening the Europeanization process by spreading information on the European Union and offering citizens the necessary informational basis to engage in debates. A Europeanized media discourse implies a high visibility for the European topics and the prevalence of a European perspective that goes beyond national implications and interests, as well as similar frames of reference across member states that ensure common ways of interpretation and evaluation of

European issues. However, distributing more news on EU does not necessarily imply a Europeanized communication system or a European public, especially if the national viewpoints prevail in the news (see Van de Steeg, 2002; Koopmans & Erbe, 2003; Machill, Beiler & Fischer, 2006, Lauristin, 2007).

Media set the public agenda and the place held by the EU on this agenda, influencing the EU's place on citizens' agenda and the importance they allocate to the European issues. Another important factor in the Europeanization process is the usage of frames that can shape citizens' perceptions by influencing their interpretation schemes and by setting evaluation patterns (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Chong & Druckman, 2007; D'Angelo & Kuypers, 2010). Media contribution in the Europeanization process has also a significant impact in terms of supporting the development of a European identity feeling especially since media are a space where the national identity can be expressed in relation to the European identity (Gripsrud, 2007). In this context, an analysis concerning the involvement of media in the Europeanization process and in building a European identity through media coverage and framing of the European topics can provide valuable information about the developments in Europeanizing the national public sphere and in attracting citizens' support and engagement in debates.

The fourth chapter, *Research objectives and methodology*, addresses the objectives and the research questions that guided the empirical study, the research design and data collection. The fifth chapter, *Quantitative research. Analyzing media activity and framing effects in Europeanizing the national public sphere and creating a European identity*, and the sixth chapter, *Qualitative research. Analyzing citizens' interest in European topics, the EU's place on the interpersonal conversations agenda and how they assume a European identity*, contains the research results and data interpretation. The last section of the thesis comprises the research conclusions which offer a comparative approach of the two research sections, the research limitations and the conclusions of the thesis.

Considering the theoretical approach and research results, the thesis provides relevant and important information on media involvement in Europeanizing the national public sphere, as well as on the citizens' interest and involvement in debates on European topics, on how they assess the media coverage of European issues, how they experience the feeling of Europeanness, and how they perceive the European identity.

Research design

The empirical study addressed the following research objectives: 1. Analyzing media activity in Europeanizing the national public sphere by determining the visibility and the prominence of European topics, the preponderant type of actors and media frames that are present in the European topics considering two periods of analysis that comprised important events for the EU from 2013 and 2014, the last period including the European elections; 2. Determining the EU's place on citizens' interpersonal conversations agenda, and the media effects at the level of citizens' opinions and debates about the EU and their influence in creating a Europeanized public sphere; 3. Determining the factors and the contexts that might facilitate the feeling of European identity, the way young citizens perceive and define the European identity, as well as the relation between the national and the European identity in terms of coexistence or exclusion.

Research questions:

1. To what extent the media coverage of EU topics contribute in creating a Europeanized public sphere and how does it influence Romanian citizens in what concerns the development of a European identity?
2. To what extent and with what type of framing can the European topics presented in the media be found on citizens' interpersonal conversations agenda?
3. What are the aspects/contexts fostering the feeling of Europeanness among young educated Romanian citizens and to what extent they assume a European identity?
5. What is the relationship between the European and national identity layers in terms of coexistence or exclusion?

In order to analyze the media activity in the Europeanization process and creating a Europeanized national public sphere, we used a quantitative approach, namely the content analysis based on a pre-established grid. The analyzed corpus included 11310 news – all the articles published during two periods with important events for the European Union, including the European elections (March 2013 and 25 April-25 May 2014) on the two main online news portals in Romania, *ziare.com* and *hotnews.ro*. In order to identify how citizens understand and experience the European identity and to determine the EU's place on the interpersonal conversations agenda,

39 semi-structured, in-depth interviews have been carried out as part of the qualitative research. A first set of 20 interviews were conducted between March 25 to April 7, 2013, followed by a set of 19 interviews during May 26-June 8, 2014, both sets being conducted within two weeks starting the end of the period selected for media analysis, given the limited duration of framing effects (Druckman & Nelson, 2003; de Vreese, 2004; Tewksbury et al., 2008; de Vreese, 2012).

The novelty of the research is mirroring the media activity in the Europeanization process in the way it reflects at the level of citizens. An analysis of the Europeanized media discourse as proof for a Europeanized public sphere is insufficient without including the citizens' interest and perceptions regarding the European topics, and the way they address the European issues in discussions. The interviews were conducted among Romanian graduate students, starting from the premise that educated young people who speak foreign languages, travel and interact with foreigners have higher chances in developing a European identity and be interested in aspects regarding the European Union (Arts & Halman, 2006; Green, 2007; Fligstein, 2009). Especially in the context of the European elections in 2014, the research offered new insights about young citizens' views regarding the elections, the turnout motivations, and the interest in the European campaign, the way they approached the European topics in their discussions and used the prominent media frames, and the perspective they had about media activity during the European campaign.

Research results and conclusions

The thesis aimed at analyzing the media involvement in the Europeanization process, in creating a Europeanized national public sphere and developing the feeling of European identity. The media analysis was conducted in parallel with the determination of EU's place on citizens' interpersonal conversations agenda, of their interest in EU issues and of the way they understand and experience the feeling of Europeanness.

A first research objective consisted in analyzing the media activity in Europeanizing the national public sphere, considering the visibility and prominence of EU topics, the predominant actors and media frames used in two periods with important events for the EU, including the European elections from 2014. The media analysis reveals a low visibility of European topics in periods that include important events for the EU both in 2013 and in 2014 during the European

elections, the visibility percentage being under the European mean. National media need to have a higher involvement in providing information about European topics in order to support the Europeanization process. The European topics that have a high share on the media agenda regard issues that are important for the EU as well as for the national plan, media paying a particular attention to those events that affect the domestic level. The predominant contextualization in covering the European topics is also the internal one.

A Europeanized media discourse requires the EU-related topics to be addressed from a European perspective, taking into account the implications for the entire European project. Although the prevailing media contextualization is internal, the references regarding the impact of the European events and decisions at the citizens' level are very low. If the citizens do not understand how the European issues are impacting their lives, they cannot have an increased interest in European topics. In what concerns the actors present in the European news, it can be observed a tendency towards horizontal Europeanization which implies communication linkages at the level of member states rather than a focus on the EU as a whole or on the European institutions and leaders.

Considering the low visibility of EU topics, the low prominence of EU actors and of a European contextualization at the level of EU related news, we cannot speak of a Europeanized media discourse, but of an Europeanization process in an incipient stage. Regarding the predominant media frames used in covering the EU topics, the responsibility frames or the guilt attribution still prevail in the media, along with the economic and conflict frames. The analysis of issue-specific media frames indicates the presence of elements that support the formation of a common European identity, but they regard the pragmatic aspects of the EU integration rather than the cultural ones. During the European elections, media have put more emphasis on EU identity aspects than in the previous analyzed period, the issue-specific frames registering a higher mean than the generic frames.

The civic and instrumental European identity elements are predominant in the media. However, there is a need for media support in developing a cultural European identity as well, a sense of belonging to a European family. In the absence of a cultural dimension regarding the European identity, the citizens are more prone to the influence of contextual fluctuations in terms of advantages of the EU integration, the support for the Union ranging in the same way. Considering the realist model of the public sphere, meaning the Europeanization of national public

sphere through an increased coverage of EU topics in the media and addressing EU topics that go beyond the interest of the nation state from a European perspective, it can be observed based on the media analysis that we are still dealing with a parochial public sphere. However, the research results indicate that Europeanization tendencies are present especially considering the horizontal dimension of Europeanization which favors the communication links at the level of member states.

The second research objective was to determine the EU's place on the interpersonal conversations agenda and the media effects on citizens' opinions and debates, and on the formation of a Europeanized public sphere. The analysis aimed at determining the citizens' interest in European topics, the involvement in debates, the transfer of topics, perspectives and prevailing media frames from the news to citizens' agenda, evaluations and conversations. According to the qualitative research results, we cannot speak of a high presence of European topics on the citizens' conversations agenda unless there is a high impact of the events at national or personal levels. Considering the low level of interest in European topics and the lack of debates, of European perspectives in evaluating and approaching EU issues, we cannot speak of a Europeanized public sphere, but of an Europeanization process in its early stages.

Although the high visibility of EU topics in the media is an important criterion to speak of a Europeanized public sphere and to set the premises for developing a European identity, most of the respondents believe that European topics are not visible enough unless there are some major events or if they have a high national impact. The media analysis indicates a low visibility of EU topics as well, the results emphasizing the need for an increased level of information on European issues. Media influences the attention paid to the EU topics by the citizens, as well as the way they evaluate and approach these subjects in discussions. There is a correspondence between the media and the citizens' agenda especially in the context of the European elections, the analysis indicating a transfer of the most visible EU topics in the media at the level of young graduates' interest and discussions. The interviewees' responses regarding the most visible EU topics in the media, the predominant actors, media frames, the contextualization and the attitude towards the issues presented in the media correspond to the results of the media content analysis.

However, the interest in EU issues and the involvement in debates on EU topics are motivated and triggered mostly by events that can affect the national plan or by major events that can influence the citizens' day by day life. Even in the case of European elections, both in the media, and at the citizens' level, all the attention was focused on the national plan, on national

candidates, domestic parties and their leaders. Thus, we cannot speak of a Europeanized public sphere when the interest is triggered by national implications and the EU topics are addressed from a national perspective. The media role remains highly significant in Europeanizing the national public sphere and creating a European identity through ensuring a high visibility of EU topics and maintaining a sense of affiliation to the European community based on an increased level of information and EU identity elements and symbols promoted in the news (see Koopmans & Erbe, 2003; Eriksen, 2005; D'Haenens, 2005; Machill, Beiler & Fischer, 2006; De Vreese, 2007; Lauristin, 2007).

The third research objective aimed at determining the factors and the contexts that facilitate the affiliation to the European community, as well as the way young people perceive and define the European identity and which is the relationship between the national and European identities in terms of coexistence or exclusion. The European identity is a key ingredient in the process of European integration and in supporting the development of the European project in the context of the Union's democratic deficit and the growing influence of the EU in the daily life of citizens (Habermas, 2001a; Eriksen, 2005).

In what concerns the citizens' views regarding the European identity, it can be observed a disjunction between how they define the European identity and how they experience it. When the respondents describe the European identity they take into consideration the cultural aspects of identity such as belonging to a community with shared values, being members of a European family, but when it comes to how they experience the feeling of Europeanness, the respondents refer to the pragmatic aspects of identity. A part of the interviewees refer to the feeling of Europeanness in its cultural sense, some understanding the Europeanness as a geographical identity, associating the European status with living on the European continent.

The citizens considered the experiences outside the country as having a high contribution in developing a greater sense of Europeanness, giving them the contexts in which to feel as European citizens and to become aware of the similarities they share with other Europeans. The factors that contributed the most to a sense of Europeanness included the freedom of movement, financial opportunities, study or employment opportunities as a result of the European integration, the use of the single currency, the contact with the EU symbols, and the interaction with other Europeans. Having experiences abroad made citizens to deal with some negative aspects as well, such as becoming aware of the disparities among European citizens in terms of economic

development, living standards and the ways of being treated by other citizens. Romanians have to deal with discrimination due to stereotypes and to a negative image at the European level. For the majority of respondents, being European is equivalent to being civilized, to be like Western Europeans, the Occident remaining for them an ideal of development and civilization. The citizens cannot really feel European as long as they feel there are significant differences and gaps at the EU level, so further actions need be taken to address these issues. Furthermore, there is a need for more information on EU topics at the level of citizens, for a European contextualization and for addressing the implications of the European events and decisions, as well as for creating a positive image of the EU.

The youths' perspective on European identity is generally an optimistic one. Although the interviewees have experienced only episodic moments of identification with other Europeans, they believe people will assume a European identity in the future. For each citizen, the European identity means something different and generally, it implies an identity accessed only in certain circumstances and added to the national one. The European and national identity layers are in a complementarity or coexistence relation, most citizens accessing a sense of Europeanness only in certain contexts and by dealing with specific factors. Therefore, we cannot speak yet of a constant assumption of a European identity. Citizens emphasize the need for more cooperation and understanding at the European level, as well as for more information and media involvement in developing a sense of European identity and in supporting the Europeanization process. The increased amount of information, intercultural exchanges and interaction with other European citizens, the access to opportunities and benefits possible due to the European integration, higher living standards and reduced discrimination among European citizens can enable the sense of European identity.

Considering that the success of the European project depends on the development of a shared European identity, the European and national institutions, along with the media system are responsible to support the sense of affiliation to the European community, although we cannot speak of a common representation regarding the European identity, every citizen understanding and experiencing it differently. Media hold a central role in informing citizens about EU issues, in constructing the image of the EU at a discursive level, in influencing citizens' attitudes toward Europeanization and creating a sense of European identity (see Brüggemann, 2005; Kopper & Leppik, 2006; Gripsrud, 2007; de Vreese, 2007; Habermas, 2009; Brüggemann & Kleinen-von

Königslöw, 2009; Risse, 2010). However, the media analysis and the interviewees' evaluation of the media activity indicate a low involvement in the Europeanization process, being necessary to increase the visibility of European topics and address them from a European perspective. Increasing the visibility of European topics is an essential condition for the Europeanization of media discourse as a first step in the process of Europeanizing the national public sphere, along with the public support and citizens' interest in European issues. However, at the present moment we cannot speak of a high interest in European topics at the level of citizens besides major events or aspects that have a national or personal impact. There is a need for more information on EU issues and analyses that would help citizens better understand the effects of European decisions and events, and increase the level of interest and willingness to engage in decision-making processes at European level.

The thesis provides relevant and important information on media involvement in the process of Europeanization, on citizens' interest and engagement in European related debates, as well as regarding the way citizens experience the feeling of Europeanness and define the European identity. In order to support the Europeanization process and consolidate a sense of European identity, there is a need for concrete initiatives at both a European and a national level aiming at raising the awareness regarding the European issues, introducing European related educational programs, reducing discrimination and economic disparities, restoring the image of Romanians in Europe and promote the opportunities offered by the European integration. The citizens need an increased contact with everything that Europe means, they need new ideals and perspectives that could give them hope for a better life, and which could trigger their interest and involvement in European matters. Europe also needs the support of its citizens so that the EU would be perceived as a whole, as a single actor on the global geopolitical scene, as a European community. The stake of the Europeanization process is, in fact, transforming the Union into a global player representing one of the main powers of the world beyond the economic dimension. The Union has to rely on the popular consent and support for developing and consolidating its political dimension. The cooptation of citizens in sustaining the future European measures and decisions represents one of the main tests of the Union along with solving the European crisis, and therefore, the future of the Union, its new development directions or a new European dream are dependent on providing positive solutions to current challenges.

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