

# The media integration project in Europe barely got off the ground, and with the current crisis it's not likely to anytime soon

*Examining interactions between global, regional and national media processes, **European Media** emphasises the transformation of political communication in Europe and the alleged emergence of a European public sphere and identity. **Damian Tambini** finds it offers an excellent overview and reference on some of the big shifts that characterise the evolving media scene in Europe.*



**European Media: Structures, Politics and Identity. Stylianos Papathanassopoulos and Ralph Negrine. Polity. July 2011.**

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As the Eurozone faces a choice between deeper integration and breakup, a book about the European media and their role in constructing European identity and a 'European public sphere' might seem to belong to another epoch: an epoch of the steady march of economic, political and cultural integration and of the continual erosion of barriers between national audiences and readerships by EU policy. European 'identity' seemed a distant dream even before the crisis. As the project falters, surely it is not even worth theorising?

But as the Greeks and Germans peer at one another in disbelieving contemplation of deeper fiscal Union, the question, posed by theorists such as Habermas and Garnham, of 'solidarity among strangers' in Europe is more current than ever. Ultimately it is subjective identities and solidarities that define the boundaries of political possibility in Athens and Berlin.

Judging from the findings presented in this book, European identity and solidarity, and the communicative infrastructure that support them, do not present much hope for Europe. The book reproduces selected survey data on interest in European affairs, participation in European politics, and other indicators of Europeanization from the citizen perspective. In contrast with mainstream books on European integration however they also give a detailed examination of the evolving media market structures in European countries. This book offers an excellent overview and reference on some of the big shifts that characterise the evolving media scene in Europe. It contains excellent data on changing markets – and data with a good deal of analytical value added.

They ask several questions of this data. On one hand they ask whether EC Directives on the media since 1989 have led or could lead, to a convergence of media systems within Europe. Is there a family resemblance of European Media Systems emerging? The answer to this question seems to be a qualified yes. Gradual harmonisation of media regulation is embedding the notion of a mixed broadcasting system with public interest regulation all over Europe including new member states. And on the other hand they are interested in whether a European media system, capable of sustaining European identity and public sphere is emerging. Here the answer appears to be no. Whilst the book



does not really draw together the accounts of regulation, markets, content and audiences into one account of Europeanization, the only implication that can be inferred from the individual chapters is that the project of media integration in Europe barely got off the ground.

Writing before the current Euro crisis, Papathanassopoulos and Negrine set out to place the normative debate about Europeanization of identity and the public sphere in a more solid empirical context, by describing the state of development of the media sector in European countries. The analysis is based in 'political economy' of the media. If there was a criticism of this excellent book it would be that this key notion is under-theorised: Political economy for these authors consists in issues such as the balance of private and public ownership – where recent years have seen the end of public service monopolies all over Europe and there has been a clear convergence around the 'dual system' of public plus commercial broadcasting that originated in the UK and Germany. Political economy refers to the regulatory architecture – where the EU sponsored model of independent, and increasingly 'converged' broadcasting and telecoms regulators has become the norm.

The other part of political economy of the media – that concerned with the realpolitik of media power and how it is exercised – lies beyond the horizon of this book, or perhaps buried in its assumptions. New EU member states have become incorporated in the social compact that has characterised media systems all over Europe: the balance of power within national states. A more radical and complete book might have posed the why? question of the state of media systems in Europe. Why have the media failed to report adequately on Europe in so many member states? In whose interest is a Europhile/Eurosceptic media, and why does it persist? How have political elites in the new member states negotiated the subtle power dynamics of the Europeanization of media regulation with dominant news providers and with what effect on democratic discourse? How do language and civic identity interact in European news production? What can Euronews tell us about the economics of European media distribution?

Books about the media always run the risk of exaggerating the role of the media in historical change, and this too is the pitfall of any view of European media that links them to the integrationist project of identity and the European public sphere. The truth is that EU media policy has operated with a multiplicity of separate visions, rationales and guiding ideologies and cultural integrationism was always weak among them. The authors don't cover in depth the impact of the Euro crisis on the emergence of European public sphere and the European identity, though it is likely that these events albeit refracted through the shifting, and enduringly national media institutions and markets, will determine whether the current period sees the emergence of a new identity and project or its failure. Jean Monnet is often quoted as saying that if he could start the Project of European Integration again he would start with culture. As Europe's leaders try to restart the project and negotiate a new compact, they find they have precious few resources of European solidarity to fall back on. They may wish he had done so.

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