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# Journal of Contemporary European Research

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Introduction

## Communicating European Integration: A Historical Perspective

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Since the 1990s, the so-called ‘democratic deficit’ of the EU has become an increasingly discussed topic in both academic and political circles. On the one hand, since the ‘Maastricht shock’ in 1992, when in a referendum Danish voters rejected the ratification of the recently signed Treaty on European Union, the idea that the European integration process could be legitimated simply by a ‘permissive consensus’ has lost its plausibility.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, the low turnouts of the European elections and the persistent lack of identification of European citizens with the EU institutions make clear that this permissive consensus has not (yet) been replaced by a new legitimating paradigm of supranational democracy. Despite the active efforts of the EU to cope with these shortcomings, the current financial crisis and the debates around how to deal with further crises have once more powerfully revealed that the legitimacy deficit of the EU still constitutes a pressing problem for the future of European integration. In this context, the – apparently inadequate – communication of European politics to the citizens of the Union has often been highlighted as a crucial point, and academic research has invested considerable efforts in trying to analyse and explain these problematic relationships.

These lines of research, however, have mainly concentrated on the present situation and especially the examination of public (media) debates about the EU. Among researchers from the social sciences, great importance has been assigned to defining the normative standards of a democratic ‘European public sphere’ and, subsequently, to analysing empirically whether these standards have actually been met in contemporary political debates.<sup>2</sup> In this context, the probably most common normative conceptualisation of a European public sphere goes back to the German researchers Klaus Eder and Cathleen Kantner. These so-called ‘Eder-Kantner criteria’,<sup>3</sup> originally inspired by Jürgen Habermas and first formulated in 2000, state that a (European) public sphere requires debates about ‘the same issues at the same time using the same criteria of relevance’.<sup>4</sup> As to the empirical findings, the general perspective has moved over time from denying the existence of any such kind of

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<sup>1</sup> The notion of a ‘permissive consensus’ was coined by L. Lindberg and S. Scheingold, *Europe’s Would-Be Polity. Patterns of Change in the European Community* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1970), 41. Its end was first stated by K. Reif, ‘Ein Ende des ‘Permissive Consensus’? Zum Wandel europapolitischer Einstellungen in der öffentlichen Meinung der EG-Mitgliedstaaten’, in R. Hrbek and P. Bofinger, eds, *Der Vertrag von Maastricht in der wissenschaftlichen Kontroverse. Beiträge für das Jahreskolloquium des Arbeitskreises Europäische Integration e.V., 12.-14. November 1992 in Bonn* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1993), 23-40. See also L. Hooghe and G. Marks, ‘A Postfunctional Theory of European Integration. From Permissive Consensus to Constraining Dissensus’, *British Journal of Political Science*, 39, 1 (2009), 1-23.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, J. Gerhards, ‘Westeuropäische Integration und die Schwierigkeiten der Entstehung einer europäischen Öffentlichkeit’, *Zeitschrift für Soziologie* 22, 2 (1993), 96-110; K. Eder and C. Kantner, ‘Transnationale Resonanzstrukturen in Europa. Eine Kritik der Rede vom Öffentlichkeitsdefizit’, in M. Bach, ed., *Die Europäisierung nationaler Gesellschaften. Sonderheft 40 der Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* (Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 2000), 306-331; J. Peter and C. H. de Vreese, ‘In Search of Europe. A Cross-National Comparative Study of the European Union in National Television News’, *Harvard Journal of Press/ Politics*, 9, 4 (2004), 3-24; C. O. Meyer, ‘The Europeanization of Publicised Debates. A Study of Quality Press Coverage of Economic Policy Coordination since Amsterdam’, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 43, 1 (2005), 121-148; H.-J. Trenz, *Europa in den Medien. Die europäische Integration im Spiegel nationaler Öffentlichkeit* (Frankfurt/Main, New York: Campus, 2005); T. Risse, ‘Auf dem Weg zu einer europäischen Kommunikationsgemeinschaft. Theoretische Überlegungen und empirische Evidenz’, in C. Franzius and U. Preuss, eds, *Europäische Öffentlichkeit* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2004), 139-151; T. Risse, *A Community of Europeans? Transnational Identities and Public Spheres*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010). See also the collaborative research projects ‘EUROPUB – The European Public Space Observatory’, available at <http://www.iccr-international.org/europub/> [last visited 10 January 2013]; ‘EUROSPHERE – Diversity and the European Public Sphere. Towards a Citizens’ Europe’, available at <http://eurospheres.org/> [last visited 10 January 2013] and ‘The Transnationalization of Public Spheres in Europe: Citizens’ (Re)Actions’, available at: <http://www.zemki.uni-bremen.de/index.php?id=167&L=1> [last visited 10 January 2013].

<sup>3</sup> T. Risse and M. van de Steeg, ‘The Emergence of a European Community of Communication. Insights from Empirical Research on the Europeanization of Public Spheres’, *KFG Working Paper Series*, 15 (August 2010), available at [http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/kfgeu/kfgwp/wpseries/WorkingPaperKFG\\_15.pdf](http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/kfgeu/kfgwp/wpseries/WorkingPaperKFG_15.pdf) [last visited 7 January 2013].

<sup>4</sup> Eder and Kantner, op. cit. n2.

European public sphere to a rather hopeful identification of its slow emergence. For instance, in 2000, the sociologist Jürgen Gerhards, following his earlier claim that the European public sphere is lagging behind the process of economic and political integration,<sup>5</sup> still came to the conclusion that European topics hardly received any permanent media attention in comparison to other issues.<sup>6</sup> A decade later, by contrast, Thomas Risse and Marianne van de Steeg summarised their comparative media analysis of the debates surrounding the appointment of Jörg Haider and the EU's Eastern enlargement as follows: 'At a minimum, we can observe the emergence of Europeanized national public spheres, at least when European issues are being discussed'.<sup>7</sup>

At the same time, however, the general analytical focus has increasingly shifted from the European public sphere as an assumed single entity to the examination of multiple public spheres and their Europeanization. Following the widespread post-modernist insight that the public sphere is always segmented and heterogeneous,<sup>8</sup> theorists of the European public sphere identified a multitude of division lines even inside national publics which, in their turn, produce partial public spheres which may undergo Europeanization processes in different forms and at different speed.<sup>9</sup> This at least partly explains the different outcomes of the various empirical studies, which often relied on a rather limited set of data sources. Obviously, the existence or non-existence of a (democratic) European public sphere cannot be assessed by a generic examination of a small number of newspapers alone, but requires detailed and differentiated analysis of a multifaceted variety of communication processes.

Moreover, concerning the specific research interests, the various disciplines are motivated by complementary, but far from identical questions. For example, while for most political scientists (and political sociologists) what is at stake in the European public sphere is the democratic legitimacy of the European political system,<sup>10</sup> other sociologists and also linguists are rather interested in the crucial role of discursive negotiations within the collective construction of a desirable European reality.<sup>11</sup> Other approaches focus on the change of identities in and identification with the EU.<sup>12</sup> Finally, researchers from the communication sciences mainly concentrate on the Europeanization of media coverage and national public spheres. Hereby, particular attention has been given to the differentiation between the vertical effects of European public communication between the EU and member state-level and horizontal, transnational communication among national public spheres.<sup>13</sup>

Despite the fact that most of these studies concentrate on the comparative analysis of mass media such as TV and newspapers, the actors behind the communications processes (such as, for instance, the correspondents in Brussels) have only very recently received increased attention. Here, political

<sup>5</sup> Gerhards, op. cit. n2.

<sup>6</sup> J. Gerhards, 'Europäisierung von Ökonomie und Politik und die Trägheit der Entstehung einer europäischen Öffentlichkeit', in M. Bach, ed., *Die Europäisierung nationaler Gesellschaften. Sonderheft 40 der Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* (Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 2000), 277-305, 294.

<sup>7</sup> Risse and Van de Steeg, op. cit. n3, 22.

<sup>8</sup> Cf., e.g., J. M. Roberts and N. Crossley, 'Introduction', in: N. Crossley and J. M. Roberts, eds, *After Habermas. New Perspectives on the Public Sphere* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 1-27, 14-16.

<sup>9</sup> See S. Mihelj, 'The European and the National in Communication Research', *European Journal of Communication*, 22, 4 (2007), 443-459, 451, identifying 'gender, age, ethnicity, political orientation, religious persuasion, leisure time preferences, etc.' as possible division lines.

<sup>10</sup> E.g. Gerhards, op. cit. n2; Eder and Kantner, op. cit. n2; Risse and Van de Steeg, op. cit. n3.

<sup>11</sup> E.g. R. Wodak, 'Communicating Europe'. Analyzing, Interpreting, and Understanding Multilingualism and the Discursive Construction of Transnational Identities', in: A. Duszak, ed., *Globalization, Discourse, Media. A Critical Perspective* (Warsaw: Warsaw University Press, 2010), 17-60.

<sup>12</sup> E.g. M. Bruter, *Citizens of Europe? The Emergence of a Mass European Identity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2005); Risse, op. cit. n2.

<sup>13</sup> See R. Koopmans and J. Erbe, *Towards a European Public Sphere? Vertical and Horizontal Dimensions of Europeanised Political Communication*. Discussion Paper SP IV 2003-403 (Berlin: Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung, 2003), available at <http://skylla.wzb.eu/pdf/2003/iv03-403.pdf> [last visited 12 January 2013].

scientists<sup>14</sup> and especially researchers from communication and journalism studies<sup>15</sup> in recent years have examined the working conditions of foreign correspondents in the EU capital as well as the changing ideas and identities among these transnational actors. In any case, all of the above-mentioned lines of research within the social sciences have so far mainly concentrated on the *present* situation without examining the long-term structures which might have led to it. The few exceptions where social scientists have indeed analysed the entire period of European integration<sup>16</sup> are mostly based on a very limited amount of data and their results can therefore 'only be treated as indicative'.<sup>17</sup>

These shortcomings could at least partly be compensated by historical studies on the development of the public communication of the European integration project from its beginnings to the present day. A historical examination of the actors behind the communication of European integration, and the means and strategies applied by them, could contribute to the understanding and explanation of the findings produced by the social sciences. They could add a notion of both temporal continuity and change in the public debates about Europe and contribute to a validation of the thesis of an 'emerging' transnational public sphere.

Against this background it is rather surprising that historians have started to research the historical foundations of a European public sphere only very recently.<sup>18</sup> In these studies, historians extended the perspective of social sciences by identifying long-term changes in the public perception of and discussions about 'Europe'. However, the historical research in question was interested in a space much more broadly defined than the actual history of the EU: most of the works concentrated on the 19th and early 20th century, without paying too much attention to the specificities of EC/EU integration. This broad research interest rather complicated the exchange with the social sciences. Methodological differences between the disciplines served to increase this gap further. Whereas social sciences mostly focus on (often quantitative) media analysis and surveys, historians tend to disregard such an approach for reasons such as a lack of accessibility to comparable data. At the same time, historians also apply concepts which are hardly used in the social sciences. Recent historical research, for instance, has focused on 'representations' and 'images of Europe' in order to analyse the perception of Europe before and after the beginning of European integration.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>14</sup> A.I. Martins, S. Lecheler, and C. H. de Vreese, 'Information Flow and Communication Deficit. Perceptions of Brussels-Based Correspondents and EU Officials', *Journal of European Integration*, 34, 4 (2012), 305-322; E. Siaperä, 'EU Correspondents in Brussels: Between Europe and the Nation-State' in T. Risse, R.K. Herrmann, and Marilyn B. Brewer, eds, *Transnational Identities. Becoming European in the EU* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), 129-157.

<sup>15</sup> M. Brüggemann and K. Kleinen-von Königslöw, 'Let's Talk about Europe. Why Europeanization Shows a Different Face in Different Newspapers', *European Journal of Communication*, 24, 1 (2009), 27-48; F. Corcoran and D. Fahy, 'Exploring the European Elite Sphere', *Journalism studies*, 10, 1 (2009), 100-113; K. Raeymaeckers, L. Cosijn, and A. Depez, 'Reporting the European Union', *Journalism Practice*, 1, 1 (2007), 102-119; R. Kunelius, 'Journalism and the EU. A Relationship in Contexts', *Journalism*, 9, 4 (2008), 371-376; P. Statham, 'Making Europe News. How Journalists View Their Role and Media Performance', *Journalism*, 9, 4 (2008), 398-422.

<sup>16</sup> E.g. Gerhards, op. cit. n6; J. Díez Medrano, *Framing Europe. Attitudes to European Integration in Germany, Spain, and the United Kingdom* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 2003).

<sup>17</sup> J.-H. Meyer, *The European Public Sphere. Media and Transnational Communication in European Integration 1969-1991* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2010), 33.

<sup>18</sup> E.g. M. Brüggemann and H. Schulz-Forberg, 'Becoming Pan-European? Transnational Media and the European Public Sphere', *International Communication Gazette*, 71, 8 (2009), 693-712; H. Schulz-Forberg, 'Europa entzaubert? Öffentlichkeit und Integration Europas', in J. Wienand and C. Winkler, eds, *Die kulturelle Integration Europas* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2010), 51-96; H. Kaelble, M. Kirsch, and A. Schmidt-Gering, eds, *Transnationale Öffentlichkeiten und Identitäten im 20. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt/Main: Campus, 2002); J. Requate and M. Schulze Wessel, eds, *Europäische Öffentlichkeit. Transnationale Kommunikation seit dem 18. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt/Main: Campus, 2002); R. Frank, H. Kaelble, M.-F. Lévy, and L. Passerini, eds, *Building a European Public Sphere. From the 1950s to the Present/Un espace public européen en construction. Des années 1950 à nos jours* (Bruxelles, Bern, Berlin: Peter Lang, 2010).

<sup>19</sup> E.g. F. Bösch, A. Brill, and F. Greiner, Florian, eds, *Europabilder im 20. Jahrhundert. Entstehung an der Peripherie* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2012). Cf. also the research done by the sub-project 'Representations of Europe in Comparison' of the Collaborative Research Centre 640 'Changing Representations of Social Order', at the Humboldt University of Berlin, see <http://www.sfb-repraesentationen.de/teilprojekte/a5/english> [last visited 12 January 2013].

Institutional borders further complicated the academic exchange, since historical research still has an arguably weak standing within the general field of European Studies. Thus, historical research that tries to connect itself to debates in the social sciences still remains scarce. The work of the interdisciplinary EMEDIATE project, which examined media discourses on Europe from the Treaty of Rome to the 'War on Terror',<sup>20</sup> and the investigation undertaken by Jan-Henrik Meyer<sup>21</sup> remain notable exceptions. Furthermore, while comprehensive historical research has been done on the content of discourses and representations of Europe,<sup>22</sup> the actual structures behind the public communication of European integration were only analysed at the fringe,<sup>23</sup> and examination of the role of specific actors in European communication has been practically non-existent in historical studies.

Thus, with regard to the scholarly debates around the history of communication and mediation of the European integration one can hardly speak of any kind of interdisciplinary consensus. The respective research projects are pushed on in relative isolation from the surrounding disciplines, missing important chances for synergy. This, however, is not only true for (absent) contacts between different disciplines: even inside historical research there are still institutional and national borders.

Besides the obvious necessity to widen the perspective of the social sciences both in terms of the time period analysed as well as the examined sources, two further shortcomings of the existing research should be confronted by historians.

First, stemming from the tradition of understanding the public sphere as a nearly-homogeneous space, the focus of many research projects is still based on the analysis of mass media and surveys. By contrast, the plurality of actual communication processes behind and beside the impact of mass media discourses has until now very rarely been scrutinised. Here, the influence and role of the different political actors involved, as well as the different types of media and strategies applied are still under-researched. For example, there should be more attention to the differences between a bottom-up approach in communication, like the one instituted with the European Ombudsman (see Vogiatzis in this issue), and a top-down communication like that preferred for a long time by the European Commission (see Reinfeldt in this issue). Also, although pressure groups outside the classical political arena have increasingly entered into the focus of academics in recent years, their role in the public communication of the European integration project still constitutes an under-explored field of research.

Second, more scepticism is necessary when considering the declarations of the political actors involved. The agents of the European Union, such as the Ombudsman and the Directorate-General for Communication, but also other actors like national governments, are very keen to explain past and present initiatives in order to communicate the functions and politics of the EU to the citizens of Europe as a success story. These proclamations should be contrasted with specific academic research on the actual results of realised attempts to communicate the process of European integration.

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<sup>20</sup> 'EMEDIATE: Media and Ethics of a European Public Sphere from the Treaty of Rome to the "War on Terror"', available at <http://www.eui.eu/RSCAS/Research/EMEDIATE/> [last visited 10 January 2013].

<sup>21</sup> J.-H. Meyer, 'Tracing Transnational Communication in the European Public Sphere. The Summit of The Hague 1969', in W. Kaiser, B. Leucht, and M. Rasmussen, eds, *The History of the European Union. Origins of a Trans- and Supranational Polity 1950-72* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2009), 110-128; J.-H. Meyer, *The European Public Sphere. Media and Transnational Communication in European Integration 1969-1991* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2010).

<sup>22</sup> E.g. Díez Medrano, op. cit. n16.

<sup>23</sup> See C. Henrich-Franke, 'From a Supranational Air Authority to the Founding of the European Civil Aviation Conference (ECAC)', *Journal of European Integration History*, 13, 1 (2007), 69-90; C. Henrich-Franke, 'Creating Transnationality through an International Organization? The European Broadcasting Union's (EBU) Television Programme Activities', *Media History*, 1 (2010), 67-81.

The contributions to this special issue, written by authors from diverse disciplinary backgrounds, address some of these gaps, complementing the existing research with a specifically historical perspective. In contrast to an earlier issue of the *Journal for Contemporary European Research* on a similar topic,<sup>24</sup> the articles assembled here focus mostly on the supranational European level. In order to account for changes in attempts to communicate the process of European integration, the time range covered will include the entire period of European integration, from the precursory debates in the years 1914-45 up to the present day. Besides the diversity of methods, sources and topics, the articles in this special issue therefore will give in chronological order an overview of the historical development of the attempts to communicate the process to integrate Europe. The three main thematic pillars will be the *actors* of European communication, the *strategies* they applied in order to achieve concrete political goals, and the *media or means* of communication they used. However, as will be seen below, there is not always a clear-cut difference between these topics, and most of the articles discuss at least two of them.

Although the role of central political actors in the process of European integration has been the object of historical research for quite some time now, the detailed investigation of specific transnational networks<sup>25</sup> as well as the role of societal actors<sup>26</sup> has only very recently received increased attention. In this context, however, there is still relatively little research on the respective influence of specific actors in shaping the public discourse about Europe.

Among the most important 'actors of communication' were obviously the supranational institutions, whose activities will be addressed in several contributions. Thus, Alexander Reinfeldt looks at the High Authority of the ECSC and the early EEC and Euratom commissions, raising the question of why these elite-driven institutions, which saw their own legitimacy as based on rational functionalism rather than democratic accountability, pursued public information policies at all. As Reinfeldt points out, the actual purpose of these communicative efforts focused more on creating transnational integration and cooperation among decision-makers and experts, rather than addressing public opinion itself.

In contrast, Annelies van Brussels explains the communication policy of the European Commission since 2001 as, for a time, an outward-orientated policy: much more conscious of the need for civic participation in decision-making than in previous times, the Commission not only tried to communicate its politics to a broader public, but also to encourage communicative feedback by the citizens of the Union. However, this approach seems to have been restricted again after 2009.

But it was not only the information policy of the European Commission that changed over time. In 1993, the Maastricht Treaty created the new post of a European Ombudsman, charged with the task of providing citizens with a direct addressee for complaints of maladministration against EU institutions. Nikos Vogiatzis analyses how the subsequent office holders communicated this mandate in their Annual Reports, e.g. trying to spread a certain understanding of 'good administration', but also raising public awareness of the limits of their own legal capacity.

However, not only institutional, but also societal actors contributed to the communication of the idea of European unity. Among this second group, the European Movement, and more concretely its federalist activists, played an important role, especially during the early years of the integration

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<sup>24</sup> See *Media and Communication in Europe. Babel Revisited, Special Issue of the Journal of Contemporary European Research*, 4, 4 (2008), available at <http://www.jcer.net/index.php/jcer/issue/view/11> [last visited 11 January 2013].

<sup>25</sup> E.g. W. Kaiser, B. Leucht, and M. Gehler, eds, *Transnational Networks in Regional Integration: Governing Europe 1945-83* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

<sup>26</sup> E.g. W. Kaiser and J.-H. Meyer, eds, *Societal Actors in European Integration. Polity-Building and Policy-Making, 1958-1992* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); W. Kaiser and J.-H. Meyer, 'Non-State Actors in European Integration in the 1970s. Towards a Polity of Transnational Contestation', *Comparativ. Zeitschrift für Globalgeschichte und vergleichende Gesellschaftsforschung. Special Issue*, 10, 3 (2010).

process. In his article, Eric O'Connor examines how a supranationalist 'suffrage movement' criticised the legitimacy deficit of the European Communities and propagated the idea of pan-European elections – not least as a means to overcome the lack of broad transnational public debates.

In any case, the idea of a united Europe did not emerge only after the Second World War, but was already present in debates of the interwar period. Florian Greiner analyses the discourses that German, English and American quality newspapers raised on the political, economic and cultural integration of Europe between 1914 and 1945. As Greiner argues, in a time of strong political nationalism the journalists of these quality papers began to prepare the ground for integrationist thinking and sometimes even turned themselves into 'political actors'.

As we can see, the actors involved in shaping the discourse of European integration generally did not use communication as an objective in itself, but in order to achieve specific political goals. Therefore, it is necessary to analyse their communicative *strategies*, i.e. the methods by which they tried to reach and possibly convince their addressees. In this context, the articles by Alexander Reinfeldt, Annelies van Brussel and Nikos Vogiatzis address the changing information policies of the supranational institutions. Moreover, Carlos López Gómez highlights the strategic communication of European integration during the democratic transition in post-Francoist Spain. As he argues, the appeal to 'European' political values had been one of the most important discursive tools of the anti-Francoist opposition in order to denounce the regime. This notion of Europe as a symbol of democracy and welfare shaped a cross-party consensus in Spain and legitimised the political reforms undertaken after the death of the dictator, but also fostered a rather uncritical attitude towards European integration as such.

Last but not least, a long-standing objective in European communication has been the active promotion of a common European identity, loaded with a set of specific – and contested – political values. In this context, whereas much of the existing research has concentrated on newspapers as sources, there are several other, and possibly even more powerful *means* of communication which were actively employed in order to convey specific concepts of European integration and identity.

Thus, Anne Bruch and Eugen Pfister study newsreels and information films of the late 1940s and 1950s, which transported images and connotations of European integration across different national contexts. These films pretended to shape a new collective cultural memory. Resorting to old iconographic traditions, they aimed at promoting a consistent picture of 'Europe', based on a symbolism of political community, democracy, open barriers, and economic prosperity.

Finally, Pieter A. Huistra, Marijn Molema and Daniel Wirt examine a more recent intent of fostering a common European identity: the Museum of European History, which was supposed to follow the role model of national historic museums such as the German Haus der Geschichte. This, however, led to sharp conflicts and tensions between experts and politicians, who pursued different objectives with the project: whereas its political sponsors in the European Parliament aimed at the presentation of European integration as a success story of progressing community and democracy, historians and museologists defended a more nuanced and relativising approach.

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<sup>27</sup> The conference programme and a detailed conference report are available at <http://hum.port.ac.uk/heirs/> [last visited 11 February 2014].