

The European Public Sphere

From Critical Thinking to Responsible Action

Luciano MORGANTI & Léonce BEKEMANS (eds.)



P.I.E. Peter Lang

The development of a fully fledged European Public Sphere is seen by many as the solution to the legitimization crisis the European Union is suffering today. It is conceived as a space in which a Europe-wide debate about the current economic, social and political crises can take place and through which solutions can be developed.

This book proposes a new multi-disciplinary approach to discuss the European Public Sphere, arguing that it should be approached as a complex and interlinking concept, considering issues such as identity, citizenship building and multi-level governance structures and actors, and that it should not be analysed merely from the traditional perspectives of information and communication policies.

The volume presents both academic papers and more policy-oriented contributions, offering perspectives from scholars, politicians, consultants and administrators to give the reader a truly multi-disciplinary understanding of the European Public Sphere.

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to Responsible Action**



P.I.E. Peter Lang

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to Responsible Action**

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Table of Contents

FOREWORD

Communicating Europe: Going Local.....	11
<i>Laurent Thieule</i>	

FOREWORD

European Communication Scholars, European Public Sphere	15
<i>François Heinderyckx</i>	

INTRODUCTION

Towards a Multidisciplinary Approach to the Comprehension of the European Public Sphere	17
<i>Luciano Morganti & Léonce Bekemans</i>	

PART 1

PRELIMINARY REFLECTIONS ON THE EUROPEAN PUBLIC SPHERE

Public Sphere(s) and Space(s) in Europe	23
<i>Luc Van den Brande</i>	
Critical Ideas and Reflections on the European Public Sphere	31
<i>Jostein Gripsrud</i>	

PART 2

THE EUROPEAN PUBLIC SPHERE AND EUROPEAN IDENTITY-BUILDING AND CITIZENSHIP-BUILDING

The European Public Sphere. An Overview on Perspectives of Identity and Citizenship Building.....	43
<i>Carmina Crusafon</i>	
New Borders, New Citizens. Virtual Communication Strategies for Remaking European Union Citizenship	51
<i>Simon Moore & Sean McDonald</i>	
Europe Beyond the Crisis? Citizens' (re)actions on the Multi-segmentation of the European Public Sphere	69
<i>Andreas Hepp, Swantje Lingenberg, Anke Offerhaus, Johanna Möller, Monika Elsler & Anne Mollen</i>	

The European Parliament's Online Communication Strategy. Creation of the European Public Sphere	85
--	-----------

Lucia Vesnic-Ahujevic

Homolingualism and the Interaction Taboo. Simultaneous Interpretation in the European Public Sphere	95
--	-----------

Stephanie Jo Kent

The Forbidden Policies of Identity. The Social Responsibility of Business	109
--	------------

Joan Ramon Rodriguez-Amat & Sarah Fröb

PART 3

EUROPEAN PUBLIC SPHERE(S), COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION STRATEGIES AND POLICIES

Communication and Information Strategies and Policies for the European Public Sphere. Between Rhetoric and Facts	121
---	------------

Luciano Morganti & Leo Van Audenhove

The Mass Media. A Privileged Channel for the EU's Political Communication	129
--	------------

Chiara Valentini & Bo Laursen

Conditions of the Emergence of a European Public Sphere. Political Actors and Mass Media Under Scrutiny	147
--	------------

Annett Heft & Barbara Pfetsch

The EU Information Machine. High Time for Refuelling	165
---	------------

Jan Bierhoff

Public Sphere and Political Communication. How Does the Public Sphere Evolve with the Development of ICTs in French Local Politics?	183
--	------------

Simon Gadras

The Local Communication Flow as a Strategic Resource in the Construction of a European Public Sphere	197
---	------------

Marinella Belluati

PART 4
THE EUROPEAN PUBLIC SPHERE AND MULTI-LEVEL
GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES AND ACTORS

Multilevel Governance and the European Public Sphere.....	213
<i>Jamal Shahin & Georgios Terzis</i>	
The Process of Accountability. A Justificatory Link for the Role and Components of a European Public Sphere	223
<i>Rachel Barlow</i>	
The European Public Sphere and the NUTS. An Approach Towards Multilevel Activation of the European Citizenship	237
<i>Gerhard Michael Ambrosi</i>	
Asymmetries, Mediated Communication and Conflicts in Horizontal and Vertical Relationships in the European Public Sphere.....	255
<i>Luigi Martignetti</i>	
A Policy-based European Public Sphere. The Underpinnings of the Europe of Experts.....	265
<i>Luca Barani</i>	
The Contribution of Civil Society to the European Public Sphere. The Case of the Debates in the European Constitution (2002-2005).....	279
<i>Luis Bouza García</i>	
Authors' Bios	293

Foreword

Communicating Europe: Going Local

What do we mean by a European Public Sphere? In other words, can we speak about one unique European public opinion?

The position and approach of the Committee of the Regions would be to consider that public opinions and public debates find their place in a superposition of European, national and regional spheres. And that what one calls a European Public opinion is, in fact, the pure addition of several territorial opinions.

Moreover, we can observe that we are in a deep process of nationalisation and even deeper into the regionalisation of European Union communication.

Furthermore, it is a nationalisation of the governance of UE communication: most of the Member States want to keep a certain amount of the impact from this UE communication.

How do we feed these different publics and decentralised spheres – composed of half a billion individuals – with information that makes the construction of Europe more transparent and accessible?

The Lisbon Treaty has introduced a new political architecture to the European Union, with a new distribution of power and, of course, the rise of new actors.

Therefore we need to find a new architecture for communicating Europe, adopting a multi-level approach which connects, through a network, European institutions, Member States, regions and cities.

There is space for all, messages for all, a European ideal to share, a multitude of European histories to tell our local and regional media and our citizens. One of the challenges of this new Communication on Europe is that it must be endorsed by faces familiar to the citizens: obviously by European Parliamentarians, but also by politicians elected in territories, presidents of regions and mayors, who will join the institutional leaders who usually convey communication on the Union.

This “Multi-Face” communication is a key factor in making Europe familiar and accessible.

Providing the evidence to back up the claims in these communications is essential: how and in what terms does the Union contribute to improving its citizens’ everyday life? We are entering a domain where,

as previously mentioned, we need to tell a multitude of European stories, with facts and results that are easy to understand. This is what the men and women from our regions, our cities and our countryside are waiting for.

We need to make Europe affordable and practical for its citizens.

How do we go about raising the profile of this new form of public communication about Europe?

In Brussels, relations among the European Institutions have to improve in harmony – we must together go further than before. Only 5% of the European communication budget is dedicated to inter-institutional cooperation, symbolised by “Communicating Europe in Partnership”.

That said, the expression “Going local” has to become a focal point and one of the strongest features of European communication. Decentralised communication must become one of the challenges of the next decade for the European Union. Let’s not be afraid to open routes from Brussels to decentralised communication in the territories.

The contribution provided by regions and cities, as well as by their elected representatives, offers major advantages for successful communication in Europe:

- proximity with and confidence from their citizens;
- knowledge of their citizens’ expectations from Europe;
- legitimacy to inform their own people on the Union;
- popularity – they are leading social networks with thousands of supporters.

Regions and cities and their elected representatives thus have a key role to play.

But it is also time to reflect on what could be a common strategic approach to communicating both on Europe, and in Europe, from Brussels. We face a democracy of 500 millions citizens, with differing expectations, very distant from what is often perceived as our Brussels-based *bubble*.

– Do we have any other choice than to speak less of our respective European institutions and more on behalf of the European Union as the carrier of a successful project?

– Should we not consider the setting up of a true communications policy, with the possibility of uniting the successful “Made in Europe” project – Europe 2020, Erasmus, Regional policy, Galileo, etc. ?

– Should we not imagine working towards the setting up of an “EU political brand” (“Branding Europe”) – transposing what is already being carried out by cities, regions and Member States?

This is a strategic challenge for European construction and for the EU's place in current public opinion. A challenge that will be relevant for ensuring a significant turnout of citizens at the 2014 European Parliament elections.

Laurent Thieule

Director of Communication, Press and Events,
Committee of the Regions

Foreword

European Communication Scholars, European Public Sphere

The European Public Sphere is at the junction of numerous facets of communication science. It's no wonder that the conference behind this publication involved three different thematic sections of ECREA (International and Intercultural Communication, Journalism Studies and Communication Law and Policy). It shows how communication science approaches complex objects by mobilising multidisciplinary tools and competences. It is also a sure sign that communication is not so much a discipline as it is a specific, multifaceted view on issues and topics, which involve communication phenomena.

ECREA is an academic association, grouping nearly 3,000 scholars from across Europe and beyond. Its membership and structure reflects the diversity of communication scholarship. The academic background of its members is varied – they join ECREA because they recognise themselves as doing “communication research”, regardless of whether they hold a degree in communications or not. ECREA thus combines at least three levels of diversity: objects studied, disciplines and methods used and national backgrounds with their corresponding academic traditions.

In many ways, ECREA forms a sort of European academic public sphere in its own right. It is a rallying structure for scholars who feel they share common goals, practices and methods. It is a forum to exchange and debate, offer and demand. It is a venue to meet and create, to build and consolidate, to expose and disseminate. ECREA has developed structures, rules, procedures and artefacts to give life to this public sphere and to enable and stimulate all those activities. When ECREA became involved in the conference and its ensuing book, it was, in a way, one public sphere looking into another.

The kind involvement of the Committee of the Regions is also significant. Policymaking circles are a paradox. They are, in essence, seeking out every relevant fact, information, even educated guess, that can guide them to serve their aims. At the same time, they are very hard to penetrate for those who believe they should be heard. Policy-makers and scholars live in adjacent worlds, in parallel universes. Both have high interest in, but are also suspicious of the other. Both are peeking above

the fence, but keeping on their own side unless summoned by the other. So when a university (VUB), a learned society (ECREA) and a major European institution (the Committee of the Regions) join forces to reflect on the European Public Sphere, one can only be delighted that a door has opened in that fence; that a tendril is growing between these two worlds that have so much to share and so few opportunities to do so.

This publication is the materialisation of an outstanding occurrence; a joint effort by academic and policy-making circles to discuss and reflect upon a topic which lies at the heart of current societal crisis – that of the concept and the reality of a European Public Sphere.

François Heinderyckx

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Université libre de Bruxelles

Introduction

Towards a Multidisciplinary Approach to the Comprehension of the European Public Sphere

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The European Public Sphere in Times of Crisis

This current decade will probably be remembered as one of the most difficult and complex periods in the process of European integration. The global financial crisis has become at the same time economic, political, social and even systemic. The challenges brought by the process of globalisation involve all the European countries. It is not a locally or sectorally circumscribed crisis, but one involving the entire European Union and, in particular, some of the founding countries which started, after the Second World War, the daring venture of imagining and building a unique peace-building co-operation – among former enemies.

In these times of crisis and opportunity, European societies and the European Union are experiencing a radical process of transformation at a speed never experienced before. The Union has gone through the biggest enlargement ever, has ratified one of the most important treaties of the last few decades, has embarked on a process of adapting its institutional process to the new reality of 27 Member States and is trying to deepen political integration while widening its geographical scope. In these challenging years, the Union is testing new models of governance, new democratic practices of policy-making at internal and external levels and new participatory processes, with the aim of re-legitimising European politics and give new impetus to the European integration process. The European Citizen Initiative, the public and stakeholders' consultation mechanisms, as well as the social, economic and environ-

mental impact assessment procedures on the legislative proposals of the European Commission, all exemplify this effort.

In this era of critical democratic changes, the European Union is criticised not only for the content and methods of some of its specific policies, but for its very essence and basic characteristics: the single market, the Euro, the European socio-economic model. In short, today, the European Union is challenged at its fundamental pillars, which, for many years, have constituted unquestionable achievements.

With increasingly interlinked and interdependent economic, political, social and cultural relations, our lives as persons and citizens have become more complex and confused in an ever-increasing globalising world. The local is interconnected to the global and both are mutually shaping each other. The multiplication of stakeholders implies a multiplicity of viewpoints, interests, interpretations, identities and policy proposals. The subsequent challenges and opportunities require a variety of responses, which need to be contextualised and embedded in a web of interrelated and complex realities.

In this process of transformation, the European Public Sphere represents an actual reality and a complex phenomenon, which offers a fascinating academic and political topic for scholars and politicians. Such a complex reality has been so far addressed from the perspective of Information and Communication policies and actions and, more recently, from the perspective of new Information and Communication technologies, in particularly the Internet and the new online social platforms and spaces that thrive on the Web.

We strongly believe that, in order to understand and comprehend such a complex reality, a more complete and integral approach is required. The European Public Sphere is placed at the crossroads of different disciplines and policy domains ranging from education, culture, citizenship, identity, governance, policy traditions and history to, of course, communication and information disciplines.

With this publication, we aim to introduce new perspectives on the applied reflection on the European Public Sphere. We would like to propose a new multidisciplinary approach to the analysis of the European Public Sphere by extending and complementing the more traditional analysis of the information and communication policies. Particularly, we are attempting to provide a fertile terrain of study and policy discussion with the themes and policies related to European Identity-building, Citizenship-building and Multilevel Governance Structures and Actors. This only presents a modest attempt, but with the firm hope that other scholars and policy-makers will find the approach interesting and

worthwhile, pursuing the topic of the European Public Sphere from the proposed integrated perspective.

We strongly believe that this is the right time for a truly multidisciplinary discussion about the European Public Sphere. The time has come to approach the European Public Sphere in all its complexity and to develop interesting but well developed links with other connected disciplines and policy fields.

Setting and Acknowledgements

This publication is the final outcome of a Jean Monnet Conference, held at the Committee of the Regions, in Brussels, on the 2nd of February 2012. The title of the book reflects entirely the title and the scope of the conference. Its articulation is different.

The conference has been a joint venture between 3 different actors: ECREA – the European Communication Research and Education Association, the Vrije Universiteit Brussel and the Committee of the Regions. In particular, three sections of ECREA – International and Intercultural Communication, Journalism Studies and Communication Law and Policy – contributed with applied reflections and dedicated human resources to the accomplishment of the event. The Vrije Universiteit Brussels proposed a successful Information and Research project in the framework of the Jean Monnet Programme of the European Commission, which co-financed the conference and the book. Finally, the Committee of the Regions offered logistical and administrative support and hosted the event in its premises.

The Structure of the Book

The publication presents a mixture of academic work with more policy-oriented contributions. Papers have been written by a variety of authors, being senior and junior scholars, practitioners and politicians, consultants and administrators. Policy recommendations have been included in their contributions. This gave us the possibility to propose in one book an interesting variety of disciplinary approaches and a rich diversity of topics, containing many ideas, reflections and observations as well as policy considerations and propositions.

The book is introduced by two forewords, written by Laurent Thieule, Director of Communication, Press and Events at the Committee of the Regions and by François Heinderyckx, President of ECREA and professor at the Free University of Brussels. In their forewords they both focus on the complexity of the problems that need to be tackled, and the necessity of interdisciplinary and complementary answers. This is much in line with the book's objective, i.e. bringing together scholars

and policy-makers, administrators and practitioners on a backdrop of multi-level structures of governance and representation.

The book is divided into four main parts: Part 1 introduces some preliminary reflections on the European Public Sphere; Part 2 analyses the relation between the European Public Sphere and European Identity-building and Citizenship-building; Part 3 deals with the European Public Sphere(s), Communication and Information Policy and Strategies; and finally, Part 4 focuses on Multi-Level Governance Structures and the Actors of the European Public Sphere.

To expand, Part 1 offers the reader, through the policy approach of Luc Van den Brande, a politician with a Flemish, Belgian and European career, and the conceptual analysis of Jostein Gripsrud, one of the leading scholars of the European Public Sphere, the occasion to reflect on a number of ideas and concepts related to the state of the art of the subject. Both authors address the relationship between the European Public Sphere, multi-level governance and its cultural dimension and present some possible future directions.

Parts 2, 3 and 4 offer the same structure, each part consisting of an introduction and five articles. The three introductions, respectively written by Carmina Crusafon, Luciano Morganti and Leo van Audenhove, and Jamal Shahin and George Terzis, provide a contextualisation of the specific topic as well as a short presentation and assessment of the various articles. These five contributions range from an academic-theoretical paper, a more politically-oriented reflection on the topic, to the analysis of relevant case studies.

The book launches a different kind of reflection and proposes a different methodological approach to analyse and conceptualise the European Public Sphere within a radically changing context. It also presents policy recommendations that need further discussion, application and implementation. In short, it suggests that the topic of the European Public Sphere should be approached in its complexity and embeddedness with issues such as Identity and Citizenship and Governance Structures and Actors – and not merely analysed from the more classical perspectives of Information and Communication policies.

PART 1

PRELIMINARY REFLECTIONS ON THE EUROPEAN PUBLIC SPHERE

Public Sphere(s) and Space(s) in Europe¹

LUC VAN DEN BRANDE

President of the Committee of the Regions' CIVEX Commission

The Context

When we address such important issues as European identity, culture or the emergence of the European Public Sphere, it is wise to address the issue of European governance; most notably multilevel governance. Therefore it is important not to have (only) a semantic discussion amongst academics, but to discuss its real virtues and practical consequences for the development and interaction of these key concepts, which are crucial to furthering EU integration.

The European Union is facing extremely challenging times. Many of our democracies – both young and old – are under extreme pressure, including the European Union itself as a supranational identity. The difficulty is that its many multiple crises often require contradictory responses. Europe is suffering at the same time from a sovereign debt crisis, a banking crisis, a social crisis, a competitiveness crisis, a political crisis, a confidence crisis and even an identity crisis.

EU leaders are actively searching for adequate solutions and much has been accomplished since the start of the crisis: greater budgetary surveillance through a new “Fiscal Compact Treaty”; higher liquid firepower through the new “European Stability Mechanism-Treaty”; the development of greater “European economic governance” through the new Eurozone Summit, the “Six-Pack” and the “Euro Plus Pact”; a new long term “Europe 2020 Strategy” with five headline targets for sustainable, smart and inclusive growth; the adoption of the Single Market Act, a new strategy for completing our Single Market; greater tax co-

¹ The text of this contribution is largely based on the speech delivered by the author at the occasion of the Jean Monnet Conference “The European Public Sphere: From Critical Thinking to Responsible Action” held at the Committee of the Regions, Brussels, on the 2nd of February 2012.

ordination; and the emergence of European Labour Law, as enhanced monitoring and a peer review will be organised amongst all Member States, evaluating each other's new "National Jobs Plan."

The crisis does unite Europeans. As President Herman Van Rompuy, stated earlier this year: "We are all in the same boat." However, greater budgetary surveillance and the EU's strong push for structural reforms also challenges its legitimacy and accountability. A punitive democracy will not deliver the appropriate changes.

The crisis is also challenging Member States. Hungary has been criticised for downgrading fundamental rights and freedoms. Greece and Italy are now headed up by a Technical Cabinet. New leaders have been elected, but still many countries are under the strong monitoring of the European Commission, the ECB and the IMF. Politicians, eminent scholars and even a chief EU official – Jean-Claude Perris – [DG of the Legal Service of the Council] are observing the emergence of a multi-speed Europe. Finally, we can see a conflict emerging in the UK between on the one hand, the central level, and on the other, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland – demanding Prime Minister Cameron to take a more pro-European stand.

Need for a European Public Sphere

Without doubt, a genuine EU communication strategy – as opposed to a mere information strategy – is needed more than ever. The responsible Commissioner has to be more than just a Public-Relations Manager. They should explain why and how decisions were made, how it will affect people's lives, and – crucially – this must be done in a way that is understandable to the man on the street. 'Plan D' provided a good tool for this, as it incited the EU to "go local." However, in my view, the strategy could never properly deliver, as EU communication funds were only allocated at the national level. Hopefully, new social media can provide new bridges to the public at large.

Eventually, the emergence of a European Political Union will have to go hand in hand with a renewed discussion on the so-called 'democratic deficit' in the EU. In my view, a Convention should thus agree upon a renewed institutional architecture enshrined in the future (Constitutional) Treaty. However, this would probably take us another decade – years we simply cannot afford. So, the million Euro question is: how we can generate a stronger European Public Sphere, without opening up an "institutional" Pandora's box? The challenge is to provide a system of innovative interest representation, in which people feel represented on an equal basis in their various identities. The good news is that such a system exists – and that its full deployment would not require a treaty

change. I am, of course, referring to the emergence of an intelligent Multilevel Governance system in the EU.

In the Committee of the Regions – the EU’s political assembly for regional and local representatives – we are convinced that both the restructuring of our economies and the creation of jobs and growth must happen ‘in partnership’ between the institutions: with Member States, regions, cities, the socio-economic partners and civil society platforms.

Due to globalisation and social informatisation, people identify with a number of groups and territorial levels. As has been observed in recent academic literature, (see amongst others Prof. Stijn Smismans and Prof. Koen Lenaerts) “The problem is that neither the classical ‘*trias politica*’ (Montesquieu) – neither the ‘checks and balances system’ were primarily thought of a system of territorial and functional interest representation in the 21st Century.” In other words: if we are to succeed, we need to strengthen our legal and political participatory instruments to come to a renewed governance architecture based on the ‘principle’ of multilevel governance.

I am convinced that the EU can demonstrate worldwide leadership in the development of sound multilevel-and multi-actor procedures and policy tools; enshrined in secondary law through a European Code on Participatory Administrative Procedures.

Of course, the new Citizen’s Initiative will be a part of this EU Codex as one of the participative instruments and methods allowing for greater involvement, dialogue, responsiveness and effective policy making. Policy co-ordination, budget synchronisation and a shared commitment towards the joint implementation of our future agenda for sustainable, smart and inclusive growth, are a top priority. We cannot fail. As observed by Professor Dominique Moisi, Special Advisor to the Institut français des relations internationales – IFRI: “The key question is not to know whether there is less or more France or Germany in Europe. The question is rather whether there is more or less Europe in the world.”

This Reform Agenda can only be achieved if we work together. All policy-makers, socio-economic partners and civil society platforms should share the same policy agenda. This is precisely what MLG does. It ensures that all these actors work together – and not against each other. MLG does not question the state’s authority, but on the contrary, it makes sure that those who have the expertise on the ground are also committed to implement the grand strategies put in place by the State. MLG strengthens openness, participation, co-ordination and commitment. It allows us to take account of the real territorial diversity in Europe.

MLG is a concept that has been advocated for years by the Committee of the Regions and which now has been regularly the subject of informal ministerial Council meetings. This has led to joint conclusions by the Council's Presidency, stating that "In the EU of the 21st century multilevel governance is presented as an essential tool for bringing citizens closer to the European Union construction process and as a stimulus for participative democracy through the creation of meeting and work forums with distinct interlocutors such as the Committee of the Regions that put into practice response mechanisms co-ordinated at different levels of government in Europe, thus improving attention to citizens and moving forward with global co-operation."

The ministerial meeting has stated that ways of enhancing the involvement of local and regional levels in EU decision-making should be pursued, through the reinforcement of co-operation between the CoR and other EU institutions. The ministers have also invited "the Committee to provide a regular political appraisal of progress in multilevel governance within the EU." The latter is exactly what we are aiming at with our "Scoreboard on Multilevel Governance."

Advantages of Multilevel Governance

Let me now list some net advantages of MLG:

1. MLG help us to cope better with globalisation. MLG highlights the imperative need for concerted action by all relevant actors. The economic and political weight of regions and cities is a decisive factor in the success of measures to cope with the challenges of globalisation – such as ageing, climate change or migration. The failure of a number of EU strategies designed to deal with the challenges of globalisation – such as the former Lisbon Strategy – is largely due to the lack of ownership.
2. MLG results in better legislation: all relevant partners are involved in the preparation and joint implementation of EU legislation. MLG aligns the EU's ambitions more closely to the diverse management and planning practices on the ground. MLG guarantees the necessary flexibility to attain common (EU) goals. Moreover, in a world that is interconnected, networking is seen as a decisive factor in better legislation. Knowledge is powerful, but shared knowledge is more powerful. A MLG approach favours this networking. Networks link different governance levels and legislators together with thematic networks of citizens, serving as essential bridges in a modern society.
3. MLG reinforces European democracy first of all because it stimulates the involvement of elected politicians at all levels in the EU

decision-making process. MLG is essentially multi-channelled and therefore it allows for more ‘active’ European citizenship. Regions and cities must have the opportunity to choose freely through which gateways they voice their concerns, ideas and interests. This idea is intrinsically linked to participative democracy: people want to participate, decision-making is scattered, and top-down or unilateral decisions are simply no longer acceptable in our democracy. MLG thus offers a participatory answer by providing tools for participation to regions, cities, and ultimately to the citizens themselves. Clearly, it favours co-operation and eventually democratisation itself as it multiplies opportunities for citizens to influence government. The strengthening of interactions between public, private and civil society players in the implementation of public policies (horizontal partnership) is therefore an important way of promoting multilevel partnership. Linked to all this, Multilevel Governance is essential to restore people’s trust in democratic institutions and to bring civil society back into the centre ground of governance. “MLG thus reinforces the contract of confidence between political leaders and the general public.”

4. MLG is essential for the sustainable development of our continent: By means of an “integrated approach”, it entails the joint participation of the different tiers of government in the formulation of European policies and legislation, with the aid of various mechanisms such as consultation, territorial impact analysis, partnership contracts, etc.
5. MLG results in more co-operation in Europe: diverse forms of co-operation (territorial and cross-border) are an intrinsic feature of MLG. Such co-operation provides an opportunity to overcome obstacles caused by the existence of national or administrative borders. This co-operation provides functional groupings and cohesion mechanisms that maximise the impact of EU legislation and promotes active citizenship. For example, the establishment of the new “Macro regions” are a pragmatic answer to real problems on the ground that goes beyond mere cross-border co-operation.

The White Paper and its Follow-up

This spirit of co-operation also plays at the European institutional level. It means that the Committee of the Regions will re-adjust its inter-institutional relations with a view to including more partnerships and complementarity. As a matter of fact, the CoR will soon sign its reinforced co-operation agreement with the European Commission.

With all this in mind, the CoR took the political initiative to draft, under my Presidency, its very first White Paper on Multilevel Governance. It proposes to “Build Europe in partnership”, meaning that regions and cities will be real partners and no longer just “intermediaries”. In its White Paper the Committee puts forward thirteen proposals and ten key examples in order to improve European governance. In its follow-up, an elaboration process of a European Charter on multilevel governance was launched, as an opportunity to integrate multilevel governance into the EU’s core values.

As stated earlier, the Committee is also ready to monitor on a yearly basis the development of Multilevel Governance within the EU’s governance model through its “Scoreboard on MLG”. The Scoreboard reveals gaps in the institutional practices and detects the potential for a better MLG architecture when designing policies and strategies at EU level. December 2011 saw the first edition and covered the period 2010-2011. The Scoreboard provides for a comparative assessment of MLG performance at the EU level under four priority policy strategies: Europe 2020 Strategy and the 7 flagships; Energy Strategy 2020; Stockholm Programme; and The 2010 Spring Package.

The results of the first edition of the Scoreboard show that:

- 1) EU institutions make firm statements on the virtues of MLG, without practicing a mainstream culture of MLG in the preparatory phases of policy, meaning that there is often a lack of MLG administrative routine;
- 2) Governance practices related to “procedures” (including information, consultation, stakeholders involvement and responsiveness) better respect the objectives of MLG than practices related to the “content” of the policies and the use of innovative participatory instruments (content such as territorial approach, smart regulation, instruments for joint implementation and partnership).
- 3) In all policies, recommendations are made with regard to how to bridge the gaps of MLG and how to increase the potential of a MLG culture.

The second edition of the Scoreboard is expected in September 2012 and will cover four new EU policies/strategies: the new cohesion policy package; the new CAP package; the Single Market act and two of its legislative components, notably energy taxation and public procurement; the renewed European neighbourhood policy.

Conclusion

I conclude this contribution by presenting some initial important developments, notably as regards future regional policy. As Special Ad-

viser to Commissioner Hahn, I was extremely pleased that the Commission took up our advice to include a specific article on partnership and multilevel governance in the Regulations on the structural Funds. In its proposed Regulation, laying down the common provisions on the structural funds and the cohesion fund, the Commission has proposed the following:

- First: MLG is confirmed as one of the leading general principles of future cohesion policy in the Commission’s contextual explanation;
- Second: Art 5 of the regulation states that Member States shall organise a partnership in accordance with the MLG approach. MLG is clearly recognised in the title of art 5 on ‘partnership and multilevel governance’ – it is thus a legal principle to be respected and scrutinised by the Court;
- Third, MLG is to be respected within both the Partnership Contract and all Operational Programmes within Member States. Accordingly partners shall be involved in the full policy process, i.e. in the preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of programmes;
- Fourth, the Commission will propose a European Code of conduct that lays down objectives and criteria to support the implementation of MLG and partnership. This Code should prevent Member States watering down these key principles;
- Fifth, every Partnership Contract “shall detail the actions taken to involve the partners and their role in the preparation of the Partnership Contract and the progress report as defined in Article 46 of this Regulation”.

In my view, regions and cities have a strategic place in building a Common European Identity and Public Sphere based on shared values. Through their position, they are able to promote multi-dimensional partnerships and networks bringing together all relevant actors in an intercultural dialogue resulting in joint actions on the ground. Multilevel governance is the way forward to a more involved and accountable Political Union. This Jean Monnet Conference therefore provides an excellent opportunity to bring good practise and actors from various countries – active on political communication – together.

In a world that has become interdependent and competitive, governments – together with socio-economic and civil society actors, at all levels of governance – have to seize opportunities together. In my view, we have now a window of opportunity to make the case for a strongly connected European Union, both horizontally and vertically. This is my belief: a Political Union committed to working *together* with its citizens