European Civil Society and the European Intellectual.

What is, and how does one become, a European intellectual?

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Habermas (in Carleheden and Gabriëls, 1996:16): ‘Whether…a forum for communication will arise ironically depends mostly on intellectuals as a group who unceasingly talk about Europe without ever doing anything for it.’

‘In the world today, we are already perceived and addressed not only as “French” or “German”, but as “European” intellectuals’ (Balibar, 2004: 205)

Kristeva (1993: 179) ‘In Europe we have a conception of the political that includes an educative role; it isn’t so robotized as in the United States.’

I have been concerned for some time with questions around the possible existence of something one might call a European civil society (see Outhwaite, 2000; 2006), and this paper continues these reflections. By ‘European’ I mean for these purposes Europe-wide, or at least common to several countries of Europe. So in the case of civil society, if the term means anything at all, it is clear that there are civil societies in the UK, Germany and so on, but whether there is a European-level civil society is much more questionable.

There is in fact a kind of Dutch auction in much thinking, including my own, about these issues, where we start by asking whether there is a European-wide civil society, retreat to a conception in
which there may not be that but at least there may be a European public sphere, and finally, if disappointed in that expectation\(^1\), to my present theme, whether at the very least we can talk about a smallish number of transnationally recognised European intellectuals, including sociologists or at least social theorists.\(^2\) Intellectuals might then be seen as the vanguard of a European public sphere or civil society à-venir, rather as they were in Germany and elsewhere for the national societies of the nineteenth century.\(^3\) They would of course be dependent on existing national and transnational structures, notably syndication arrangements and other transnational media forms.

When I began to draw up a list of possible candidates, the number of contemporary or recently active intellectuals with a genuinely Europe-wide resonance revealed itself as rather small. Many of these, moreover, could be argued to owe their prominence in part to their contributions to questions about Europe. To exclude them for this reason, however would have left me without a list at all. More seriously, it would be natural to expect European intellectuals to be interpellated, by themselves or by others, to comment on European issues.

The lists in the Appendix to this paper are therefore a provisional and no doubt biased\(^4\) suggestion of some likely suspects (almost all, I fear, male).

Of my A list, I shall concentrate in particular on a subset of eight social theorists: Bauman, Bourdieu, Derrida, Eco, Foucault, Giddens, Habermas and Žižek. These are probably sufficient to illustrate some characteristic differences in trajectory. Despite the untimely death of three of them, all continue to be central to social and cultural theory in the early twenty-first century, as well as holding or having held significant roles as public intellectuals. Each is firmly grounded in their native or, in Bauman’s case, adopted country, while having a major presence in the rest of Europe (I am ignoring here the otherwise important Algerian connections of all three Frenchmen.)
Bauman, of course, was driven out of Poland in 1968 and returned, so far as I know, only in 1988. He has probably been the most reluctant to embrace the role of public intellectual which accrued partly as a result of his accelerating output of stunningly original and stimulating work in social theory and partly also because of the transformation of Eastern Europe and Russia from the late 1980s onwards. He received the Amalfi European Prize in 1990 and the Adorno Prize in 1998. He has written substantially on the topic of Europe, most recently in a short book (2004).

The case of Bourdieu is rather particular. About his prominence there can be little doubt. His death, like Derrida’s, made the lead story and most of the front page of Le Monde and was substantially covered elsewhere in the European press. Although his first book, on Algeria, was inevitably a focus of major public controversy (more), he was also reluctant to embrace the role of intellectual in a field which he was more concerned to deconstruct. In his later, more militant period, nastily characterized by Luc Boltanski in Le Monde as ‘a kind of agitprop’, he made up for lost time with a host of public interventions and initiatives. His Centre de Sociologie Européenne, founded in 1968, speaks to his pan-European concerns. In 1997 he received the Ernst Bloch Prize in Ludwigshafen; Ulrich Beck’s laudatio (Beck 1997) specifically addressed the issue of European intellectuals. Beck himself appears on my B list but is a plausible candidate for promotion to A; again, he has become increasingly concerned with European issues.
Giddens’ trajectory has been different but comparably dramatic. From being very much a professional sociologist (indeed the doyen of UK sociology), though spectacularly well-travelled and with an unrivalled ability to speak without notes, he went on to develop the intellectual rationale for Blair’s third way, to make LSE a major centre of public as well as scholarly debate, and to performatively illustrate his conception of globalisation with a series of Reith Lectures at sites around the world. He is now of course a Labour peer and active in a number of major European initiatives, particularly in the area of social policy (Giddens, 2007).

Foucault, Derrida, Eco and Žižek seem to have slipped less problematically into their public intellectual roles, though Derrida’s seems to have been relatively slow to develop (Lamont, 1987: ). Habermas, too, was pugnaciously involved in controversy from the beginning of his career, with his outraged response to Heidegger’s unwillingness to address his complicity with Nazism (Habermas, 1953) and his active involvement in the later student movement. His first publication in English (Habermas, 1971) included two essays on this subject. In 2001 he received the German publishers’ Peace Prize and was described in one commentary on this event as the ‘Hegel of the Federal Republic’ (Ross, 2001). His joint statement with Derrida in 2003 was a particularly prominent transnational intervention. He is also of course the author of some ten volumes of ‘political writings’ which he is careful to distinguish from his other scholarly work. He has become increasingly concerned with European issues, notably the constitution, whose vicissitudes in France and the Netherlands he commented on with a powerful combination of passion and cool analysis. (He had earlier, of course, argued unsuccessfully for a new German constitution in 1990.)

What can we conclude from these instances? All these thinkers have massive scholarly reputations. All of them, even if in some cases their theoretical works are sometimes dense and difficult, have written superbly for a broader public. If I am right that the names of most if not all of them would
be familiar to the readers of serious newspapers and journals across Europe, what does this tell us about a putative European public sphere?

Let us look a bit more closely at media structures across Europe. Very crudely, print and electronic media have experienced opposite developments: concentration in the first case, massive diversification in the latter. In both, however, ambitious projects of Europeanisation in the 1970s tended to be abandoned or scaled down in the latter part of the twentieth century. Morley and Robins (1995: 52) note, for example, ‘the retreat of many of the entrepreneurial enthusiasts of “European” satellite television, away from their original pan-European ambitions, towards a revised perspective which accepts the limitations and divisions of separate language/cultural markets in Europe.’ There is also no genuinely European newspaper, published in the major languages, and The European (1990-98), published in English and owned for most of its brief life by the notorious Robert Maxwell) made a poor showing compared to the Herald Tribune, Financial Times or Economist. Schlesinger and Kevin (2000: 222-9) give a somewhat more positive analysis of the substantial pan-European presence of these three publications. 6 They point also to Euronews, launched in 1993 on a transnational public service broadcasting base and transmitting in the major West European languages; this however is very uneven in its European reach. More recently, France 24 broadcasts in English as well as French, but is solidly and explicitly French in its basis and orientation.

Most discouraging, perhaps, is the abandonment of automatic syndicalisation of mainstream newspapers, as opposed to the production of specialised cosmopolitan editions such as Le Monde’s weekly/monthly in English or the Guardian Weekly. ‘Thus there are hardly any transnational media that have the potential to reach the majority of European citizenry’ (Adam, Berkel and Pfetsch 2003: 70) Europub.com; also EJST 8,3
Those taking a sceptical view of the existence of a European public sphere, particularly media theorists, have tended to conclude that Europe has not got past first base. Marianne van de Steeg (2002: 499-500) cites three typical examples from Philip Schlesinger (1995: 25-6), Peter Graf Kielmansegg (1994, 27-8) and Dieter Grimm (1995: 294-5). For Kielmansegg and Grimm, linguistic division more or less rules out the possibility of Europe forming a communicative community. Schlesinger sets the stakes fairly modestly as ‘the minimal establishment of a European news agenda as a serious part of the news-consuming habits of significant European audiences who have begun to think of their citizenship as transcending the level of the nation-state’. He goes on, however, to suggest that ‘even a multilingual rendition of a single given European news agenda is more likely to be diversely “domesticated” within each distinctive national or language context…than it is likely to reorient an audience towards a common European perspective’. And what for Schlesinger is a hypothesis becomes for Grimm a matter of definition:

A Europeanized communication system ought not to be confused with increased reporting on European topics in national media. These are directed at a national public and remain attached to national viewpoints and communication habits. They can accordingly not create any European public nor establish any European discourse.

As van de Steeg argues, this is both theoretically and empirically dubious. Theoretically, it overlooks the ways in which a communicative community may not just be the product of an existing substantive community but may help to bring it into existence. Empirically it seems to rule out interesting elements of Europeanisation within existing national media structures. As she shows in a modest but suggestive study of the discussion in 1989 to 1998 of the prospects of EU eastern enlargement in four European weeklies, there are significant differences between the four. Whereas Der Spiegel and the New Statesman tended to relate most clearly to their respective
national frameworks, the Spanish *Cambio 16* reprinted articles from similar German, Italian and French journals and the Dutch *Elsevier* engaged more directly with pan-European debates (p.514). The *New Statesman* stands out for its relative lack of attention to the concrete implications of enlargement for the EU’s institutions and procedures (515).

Although she does not discuss intellectuals explicitly, van de Steeg’s conception of the public sphere is loaded in that direction; she defines it as ‘consisting of actors who debate in public a topic which they consider to be in the public interest, i.e. of concern to the polity’. More importantly, a media analysis of this kind would be highly relevant to assessing the structural opportunities for Europeanizing intellectuals.

Three further distinctions might be useful in mapping the area: those between the domestic and the international, the multinational and the transnational and between invited contributions (speeches, articles, interviews, debates) and spontaneous interventions by intellectuals in the public sphere.

Newspapers and journals may be multinational like the *Financial Times*, with its modified overseas editions, or (more rarely) genuinely transnational, like *Lettre International* (which however has a home base in Germany) or the academic journals of the ISA and ESA, which migrate to follow their editorial teams from site to site, even if they have a home base for publishing and printing.

Invitations may be nationally based, as when the BBC invites Giddens to deliver a lecture series, international, as when the German Book Trade invites the Polish/British Bauman to receive its Prize or the Polish paper *Polityka* invites Michnik and Habermas to a debate published there and in *Die Zeit* (Habermas and Michnik 1993), or transnational/European as in the case of the Charlemagne Prize. Interventions will most often be national but may be transnational in their origin and/or destination, as in the joint declaration by Habermas and Derrida (2003). Any shift towards the internationalisation or Europeanisation of such activities will therefore be of interest.

One straw in the wind is an appeal on human rights in Turkey, published in *The Guardian* in September 2005 [illustration here].
What, in conclusion, can one say about a European public sphere? I have cited some of the more sceptical commentators on this, but I shall close with a recent statement by Klaus Eder (2005), from the more optimistic pole to which I would also in the end attach myself, at least with the will and part at least of the intellect. For Eder, an emergent public sphere and demos are evolving together: ‘A transnational public...exists in Europe as a cross-cutting of elite publics, citizens’ publics and popular publics, related to each other by some supranational institutional environment...A European public is not a chimere but a thing that already turns up in critical times [he mentions Habermas’ intervention in the Iraq war protest]...A transnational public sphere...is one which is no longer tied to a reified body of people such as the nation, but to a latent demos that can be there when time requires it’ (Eder, 2005: 341-2)
A list

Giorgio Agamben
Raymond Aron
Raymond Barthes
Jean Baudrillard
Zygmunt Bauman
Pierre Bourdieu
Ralf Dahrendorf
Régis Debray
Gilles Deleuze/ Félix Guattari
Jacques Derrida
Umberto Eco
Hans Magnus Enzensberger
Michel Foucault
Anthony Giddens
Günther Grass
Jürgen Habermas
Václav Havel
Julia Kristeva
Jean-François Lyotard
Adam Michnik
Antonio Negri
Andrei Sakharov
Jorge Semprún
Alexander Solzhenitsyn
George Steiner
Slavoj Žižek
B List

Tariq Ali
Rudolf Bahro
Étienne Balibar
Ulrich Beck
Norberto Bobbio
Alain Finkielkraut
Timothy Garton Ash
Germaine Greer
Michael Ignatieff
Václav Klaus
Leszek Kolakowski
György Konrád/ I. Szelényi
Karel Kosik
Claude Lévi-Strauss
Michel Maffesoli
Roy and Zhores Medvedev
Edgar Morin
Serge Moscovici
Jean-Luc Nancy
Connor Cruise O’Brien
Jacques Rancière
Milan Šimečka
Alain Touraine
Tzvetan. Todorov
References


(The web version includes a French translation.)


http://www.iccr-international.org/europub/docs/europub-d1.pdf


Risse, Thomas (2002) ‘How Do We Know a European Public Sphere When We See One?’, IDNET workshop, EUI. [http://web.fu-berlin.de/atasp/texte/pi5s1otn.pdf](http://web.fu-berlin.de/atasp/texte/pi5s1otn.pdf)


1 It is of course a simplification to pose the issue simply as one of the existence or non-existence of a European public sphere. As Risse (2002:1-2) and others have suggested, it makes more sense to distinguish between different types of public spheres and different dimensions of ‘transnationalness’. For a more optimistic analysis, see, for example, Trenz and Eder, 2004.

2 Richard Münch (1999: 249), for example, has suggested that the bearers of a European identity will primarily be ‘the elites of top managers, experts, political leaders and intellectuals....

3 For the German case, see for example Bernhard Giesen, 1993. Even in the nineteenth century, of course, there was a good deal of trans-European activity by public intellectuals. As Christophe Charle (2004: 187) notes, Zola and the other French Dreyfusards, whose intervention is widely seen to have launched the word ‘intellectual’, received widespread support from the rest of Europe. World War II was also a powerful impetus to pan-European intellectual as well as (other) political activity. Klaus Mann (quoted by Hartmut Kaelble (2004: 304)) wrote in 1949 that intellectuals are ‘Europeans now. Shared suffering has a unifying force.’

4 Less biased, perhaps, than John Lechte’s ‘Fifty Key Contemporary Thinkers’ (1994), of whom only six are both really contemporary (e.g. not Freud or Bakhtin) and not French (or primarily active in France). To be fair, the subtitle of the book makes clear that he is concerned with structuralism and its opponents.)

5 The list of recent recipients of this prize itself a useful indicator of Europe-wide resonance. As well as Habermas in 2001 it includes the Hungarian Peter Eszterházy in 2004 and the Turkish writer Orhan Pamuk in 2005.

6 See also Preston, 2005, who cites an overseas sales figure of 300,000 for the FT.

7 There are, of course, parallels with Habermas’ position on these issues and, more specifically, with his dispute with Grimm. Also with Ulrich Beck and Edgar Grande’s more speculative argument in *Cosmopolitan Europa* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2004), that a reflective and cosmopolitan conception of Europe can to some extent escape the dilemmas of in/out, us/them, nation-state/federation. The undeniable elitism of the EU is here given a positive spin: the EU embodies the paradox of a civil society *from above* aiming to establish one from below (Beck and Grande,
2004:196). More optimistically, they suggest, the concept of European civil society offers the EU the opportunity of opening up a transnational space in such a way that it organises itself.