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DOES A “EUROPEAN PUBLIC OPINION” EXIST?

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Numerous objections can be raised to the contention that there is such a thing as a "European public opinion". We have noted at least three, all fundamental. First, the notion of European public opinion is an offshoot of the study of collective forms of opinion. The social sciences have consistently had trouble grasping and analysing social phenomena when they do not take the form of collective movements, as borne out by the significant theoretical and empirical uncertainties surrounding the concept of public opinion. Second, the notion of European public opinion assumes the possibility of identifying opinion that is specific to Europeans. This in turn assumes the possibility of defining a common sphere that is specifically "European" in nature. The third and final objection is that the notion of European public opinion implies the possibility of analysing its consistency and grasping the forms under which it may be taken as a social reality. It is not possible to base the hypothesis of European forms of opinion simply on the enumeration of widely-shared social behaviours, or the description of preferences or beliefs shared by a large number of people, across national borders, as these stem more from a shared socialisation or shared cultural parameters than from the existence of a veritable political opinion dynamic. The existence of "European public opinion" is only partially borne out by the sociography of European public opinion phenomena. Proving its consistency also implies the possibility of identifying public manifestations of opinions shared by Europeans.¹

Defining a European political sphere: the European Union

The notion of European public opinion is based primarily on the hypothesis that there is a specific European sphere, distinguishable from a broader environment and which may be used to determine particular phenomena relating to collective opinion due to its institutional organisation. The specificity of this sphere must be sufficiently strong for it to determine any collective preferences that may be identified or which may emerge, the particular traits of which may be ascribed to the characteristics of the sphere itself. It is obviously possible to apprehend the notion of a "European sphere" from an historical and cultural perspective, to the point of claiming that geography can provide a precise definition of its boundaries. Granted, geography and history are important factors in framing collective representations or, more broadly, in the emergence of cultural traits shared by a plurality of human societies. To support the view that there is a "European" form of civilisation, we could cite traits in areas as diverse as religion (Judeo-Christianism and secularism), philosophy (humanism and individualism), politics (parliamentarianism and the rule of law) or economics (capitalism and free market). The criterion used to verify their importance could be that the differences noted within the European sphere, or between the human societies that comprise it, are not as great as those that separate the European sphere from the rest of the world. At the same time, a culturalist approach sometimes complicates the distinction between a "European" model and a "Western" one, if only because of the fact that the European model has spread to other geographical and human groupings, via colonisation, migration, population flows, not to mention economic, cultural and social exchanges. From the perspective of collective representations and mentalities, European societies share a number of traits with societies in the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

¹ See Erik Oddvar *Eriksen*, *An Emerging European Public Sphere*, *European Journal Of Social Theory*, 2008, volume 8: n°3, pp. 341-363.

That is why the idea that there is such a thing as European public opinion should not be based exclusively on the idea that the various societies comprising the European sphere share a number of geographical, historical and cultural traits. The specificity of Europe as an entity has become more consistent since the emergence in Europe of what we will term a unionist movement. European union was long the object of political and philosophical speculation, from the emergence of European nationalisms in the mid-19th century to the end of the First World War. It subsequently became a reality after the Second World War. The birth of a "European union" has led to the creation of a growing number of institutions, shared by a growing number of countries, from the association of six countries in 1957, to the enlargement that brought their number to 27 on 1 January 2007². This unprecedented historical phenomenon allows us to adopt a political definition for the relevant European sphere. Reference to European public opinion must here be articulated around the grouping known as the "European Union". Adding "European" to the "unionist" idea may be taken as a political definition, rather than a geographical one, even though it is of necessity related to the question of the relevant sphere or territory, and therefore to the actual geographical boundaries of the European sphere under consideration. But these geographical boundaries stem from political decisions leading to the fact that certain countries belong to the said union while others do not, despite their being part of the same geographical area, this being exemplified for instance by the absence of Norway and the presence of Cyprus. The fact that the "European Union" represents a politically defined area is what makes it a pertinent sphere on which to base arguments in favour of the existence of European public opinion. Beyond their shared cultural heritage, which we owe to history, the Europeans belonging to the Union share a group of institutions that are superimposed on the national institutions of the various member states of which they are citizens: a joint Parliament, elected by universal suffrage since 1979; a European citizenship giving people the right to vote and to be elected, partially detached from their nationality but limited to European nationals (unlike voting-right systems for non-nationals that can be seen throughout the world); a single currency, shared by 16 of the 27 member states, but which has nevertheless come to be seen as the "European currency", in Europe and throughout the world; an abundant corpus of joint standards that take precedence over national laws; governing bodies, such as the Commission, the Council of Ministers or the Council; a dedicated budget; a capacity to produce sector-based public policy, etc. Sometimes unknown to Europeans themselves, often misunderstood, but also on occasion clearly identified – the European Parliament for instance – these institutions have fostered the gradual emergence of an original European political system over the last half century, contributing to the emergence of a shared European public sphere. It is within this framework that the question of European public opinion must be posed³.

² Cf. Hartmut Kaelble, *The Historical Rise of a European Public Sphere*, *Journal of European Integration History*, 2002, volume 8: n°2, pp. 9-22.

³ Cf. Liana Giorgi/Ingmar von Homeyer/Wayne Parsons (eds.), *Democracy in the European Union: Towards the Emergence of a Public Sphere*, New York, Routledge, 2006.

The two types of approach of European public opinion

The notion of European public opinion assumes that Europeans living within the politically ordered sphere known as the European Union share opinions. But the opinions of Europeans may be shared by non-Europeans. In such cases, one would need to speak of transnational, or even global opinions. This leads us to distinguish between two different types of specificity attached to the idea of a European public opinion: the first is informed by the existence of purely European issues; the second by the existence of a purely European point of view concerning an issue that is not exclusively European.

The first type of approach reflects the specificity of the issues at stake. Thus, for instance, while it is possible to measure European public opinion about the single currency, it is important to bear in mind that the "European" nature of this collective opinion stems directly from the European nature of the object inspiring the opinion. The euro is an institution born of the emergence of a European sphere, itself resulting from the unionist will and dynamic. Hence, the euro becomes the foundation, or the mirror, of a collective opinion that may be termed "European" because it is itself purely European⁴.

The second type of approach emphasises the singularity of a European point of view in respect to issues that are not only purely European. While the second type of specificity can be used to verify the existence of European public opinion phenomena, it implies a comparison between European and non-European preferences and views. This implies the existence of issues that may be deemed sufficiently important to inspire the formation of collective preferences not just in Europe but also outside. This is what makes it worthwhile to study opinion phenomena caused by a major international crisis, of which the 2003 Iraqi crisis is the most recent archetype, or the structure of opinions on fundamental questions including those bearing on the performances of the market economy or the effects of globalisation, or those offering a specific basis for the manifestation of differences, because the opinions they engender offer a digest of value systems: tolerance with respect to homosexuality, the status of women, the degree of preoccupation about the state of the environment⁵, the relationship between religion and the state, etc.

⁴ Cf. Dieter *Rucht*, The EU as a Target of Political Mobilisation: Is There a Europeanization of Conflicts?, in: Richard *Balme*/Didier *Chabanet*/Vincent *Wright* (eds.), *Collective Action in Europe/L'action collective en Europe*, Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, 2002.

⁵ Cf. Christopher A. *Rootes*, The Europeanization of Environmentalism?, in: *Collective Action in Europe/L'action collective en Europe*, idem.

A study carried out in June 2003 within the framework of the Transatlantic Trends programme⁶ identified not only the existence of a European public opinion distinct from the opinion of a comparable grouping, namely the United States, but also refreshed the way in which the people interviewed perceived this difference, on both sides of the Atlantic. The question was aimed at determining whether Europeans and Americans believed their cultural and social values to be different⁷:

Statement: Europeans and Americans believe their values to be different. (June 2003)

	<i>Europeans and Americans have different cultural and social values (as a %)</i>								
	United Kingdom	France	Germany	Netherlands	Italy	Poland	Portugal	Europe	United States
Agree	82	85	79	87	73	72	80	79	83
Disagree	15	14	19	11	23	18	11	17	14
Don't know/ Refusal	3	1	2	2	4	10	9	4	3

Source: Transatlantic Trends. Survey conducted between 10 and 25 June 2003 by TNS Sofres, with a sample of 1,000 people in each participating country, representative of the national population aged 18 years or older. Data collected during face-to-face interviews in Poland, and by telephone in the other countries (www.transatlantictrends.org/).

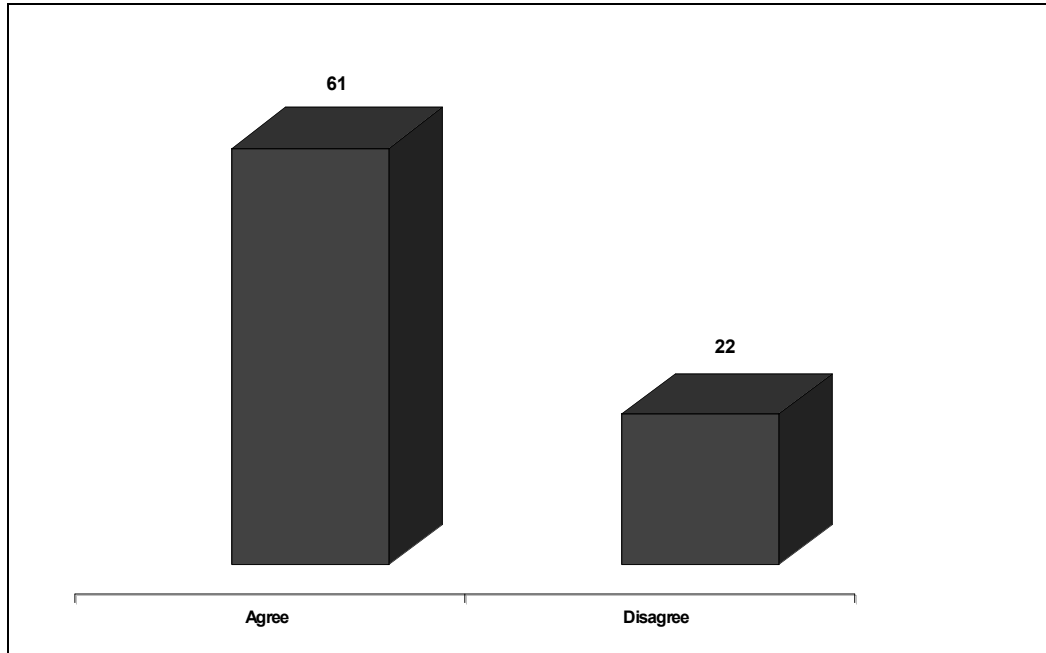
⁶ See http://www.transatlantictrends.org/trends/index_archive.cfm?id=18.

⁷ A caveat most certainly needs to be made in respect to the breadth of the divide highlighted by the research, which was conducted just after America's military intervention in Iraq, although the clarity of the findings does offer the data a certain degree of credibility.

Numerous transnational surveys offer data that show clear differences in terms of opinion and value between the Europeans and other peoples, for instance, the Americans:

Question: For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you strongly agree, tend to agree, tend to disagree or strongly disagree: *When compared to other continents, it is much easier to see what Europeans have in common in terms of values.*

(as a %)

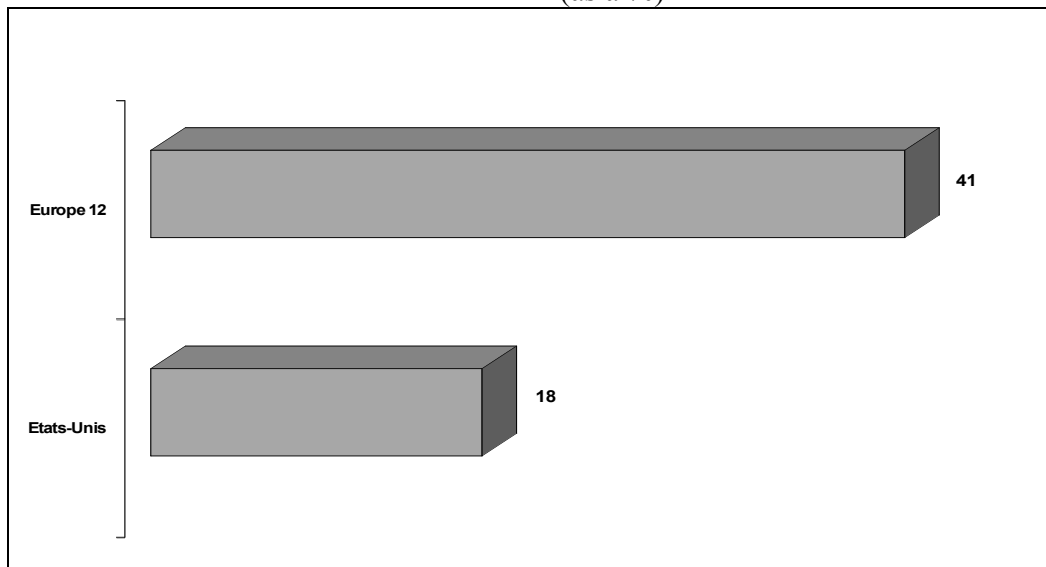


Source: Eurobarometer 69.2, Spring 2008

Priorities for the next American president/European leaders

Climate change

(as a %)



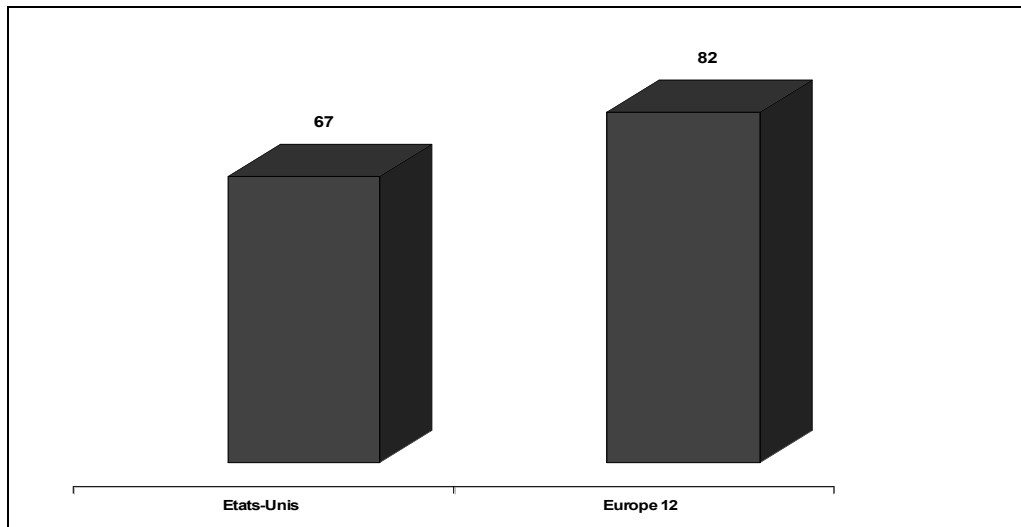
Source: Transatlantic Trends. Survey 2008

We will therefore term an opinion "European" if it is both shared by Europeans and, more or less, specific to Europeans – either because the question prompting the expression of an "opinion" would make no sense outside the Union, or because Europeans' opinions appear to be sufficiently specific.

Question: In the next 10 years, how likely are you to be personally affected by the following threats?

Global warming

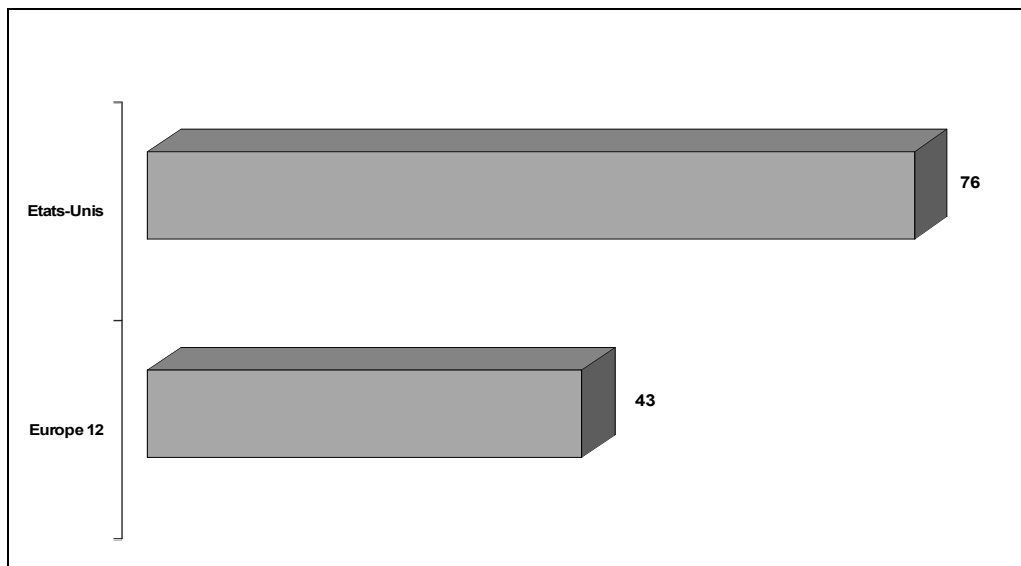
(as a %)



Source: Transatlantic Trends. Survey 2008

Statement: Support for options in Afghanistan: *Conducting combat against the Taliban*

(as a %)



Source: Transatlantic Trends. Survey 2008

The European public opinion's existence is dependent on quantitative surveys

The idea of European public opinion requires dual verification, the first showing the existence of a point of view common to Europeans, and the second demonstrating the specificity of the European point of view in the world. There is no way to make such verifications other than to use quantitative tools such as opinion surveys. Two different types of tool are necessary: the first bringing out the dominant view among Europeans, the second allowing the singularity of European public opinion to be seen contrasting extra-European opinions. Surveys carried out over the last 30 years by Eurobarometer have left us with a wealth of data,⁸ namely a series of measurements of dominant opinions within the institutional European sphere (EU), supplying the first type of information. There can be no doubt about the importance of the Eurobarometer surveys, especially since the costs involved in conducting regular quantitative surveys on such a large number of countries means there is a dearth of information of this type. Because of the costs involved, the measurement of European public opinion is largely dependent on the Eurobarometer surveys, which are conducted under the aegis of the European Commission, or more precisely that of the Commissioner for Institutional Relations and Communication Strategy. The status of the Eurobarometer data makes their production important both as research tool, helping inform the Commission about the state of public opinion, and as a communications tool, helping the Commission justify its decisions. In this respect, it is not out of order to see Eurobarometer as a political instrument. But this does not diminish the quality and importance of the data it produces. While this may call for a measure of prudence on the part of the people using the data, such prudence is always necessary when dealing with public opinion surveys, whether they be national or transnational, or financed by a public institution or a body emanating from civil society.⁹

Information of the second type should allow the singularity of European public opinion, among others as opposed to extra-European collective opinions, to be assessed. Such information may be collected by private companies conducting large-scale international surveys, at the request of specific clients, such as the press or foundations supporting specific expert programmes. The major private polling companies are occasionally called on to conduct surveys covering several European countries, a group of European Union members, countries outside the Union, or even outside the European sphere. The Gallup network or the Taylor Nelson Sofres and Ipsos groups, for instance, conduct surveys of this nature.¹⁰ Other surveys add to the body of available data, such as the Pew Global Attitudes Project, chaired by *Madeleine K. Albright*, which was launched in 2001 to measure the impact of globalisation, modernisation, cultural and technological transformations, and 9/11 on values and attitudes throughout the world.¹¹ Transatlantic Trends research, funded by the German Marshall Fund, Compagnia Di San Paolo and the Luso-American Foundation, is particularly precious, as it is dedicated to contrasting representations between the European Union and the United States. Another source is the European Values Survey, which, although not strictly

⁸ See http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/index_fr.htm.

⁹ On this point, see my contribution: L'Eurobaromètre et la recherche en science politique, in: Bruno Cautrès/Pierre Bréchon (dirs.), *Les enquêtes Eurobaromètres. Analyse comparée des données socio-politiques*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 1998, p. 42 and sub.

¹⁰ See for instance the big survey conducted in April 2005 by TNS-Sofres for EURO RSCG in ten Union member countries on the theme of "European values" (www.tns-sofres.com).

¹¹ <http://pewglobal.org>.

speaking aimed at measuring public opinion, its role being a more fundamental one, namely research into values, nevertheless constitutes a mine of particularly pertinent information.¹²

In any event, European public opinion is collected by opinion polls. It is thus the average of findings obtained in each of the countries studied, weighted on the basis of the size of each country's population within the broader grouping. The findings show that national variables are not always the most relevant ones for evaluating and understanding opinion. For some questions, of course, it is possible to detect certain national particularities. In the lead-up to the introduction of the euro, for instance, the Germans' attachment to their national currency come out more strongly than that of the Italians or the Greeks; similarly, when a question contrasts the notions of a "Europe of Nations" and a "Federal Europe", a greater leaning towards the "nationalist" option can be seen in the United Kingdom, Denmark and Austria; on the issue of enlargement, the French manifested, at a specific time, the least favourable opinion. However, aside from these particular issues, the keys to a pertinent interpretation of the data are more "social" than "national": for instance, the attachment to the European idea is broadly speaking highest among people with a higher level of educational attainment, whatever the country; another example is that while European men are favourable to enlargement, European women tend to be less so, again whatever the country, etc.

Similarly, it is possible to dispute the very relevance of the national dimension from a methodological point of view. Samples are representative of populations residing in each of the countries, but regionalised cross-border surveys would bring out territorial, cultural and social homogeneity phenomena that are hidden within a national framework. In 1996, on the basis of a particularly large sample (65,000 people), a Eurobarometer survey offered a breakdown by region. This brought out major regional disparities within some countries, including Germany, Austria, Finland, Sweden and the United Kingdom.¹³ It could be posited that there is an opposition between areas located near borders and those lying well within the national boundaries, or that some differences of opinion are informed by historical or cultural factors, the roots of which go down to a time before the relevant country's current borders were drawn.¹⁴

While employment, education, healthcare, the environment or fight against crime offer examples of shared preoccupations liable to prompt the emergence of collective opinions, such opinions are not "public opinions" until their existence has been made public. Citizens are not aware that they share a point of view if there are no institutions or instruments capable of highlighting the convergence. Opinion surveys, and the publication of their findings, are what allow us to qualify collective opinions as "European public opinion". In democratic systems, opinion polls are not the only way in which collective opinions are publicized. The media, demonstrations and petitions provide an alternative way into the public sphere. The fact is that our reliance on quantitative opinion surveys is virtually total when discussing European public opinion, given the constraints restricting the complete emergence of a European public sphere.

¹² Launched in the late 1970s, the European Values Survey has included three major surveys. The first was conducted in 1981, the second in 1990 and the third in 1999, when it was extended to 43 different European countries covering just about the entire continent. See: *Les valeurs des Européens, Futuribles*, n° 277, July-August 2002. See in particular in this special issue the description of the methodology and the description of national samples by Pierre Bréchon and Jean-François Tchernia, pp. 7-9.

¹³ See Eurobaromètre-47, 1996.

¹⁴ On this point, see in particular Louis Chauvel, *Valeurs régionales et valeurs nationales en Europe, Futuribles*, n° 200, 1995, pp. 167-200.

International opinion surveys require the mobilisation of greater means than national ones. Such surveys are therefore scarcer, and the corresponding lack of information means that certain European public opinion phenomena may go unnoticed, simply because of a lack of measure. The cost of organising such surveys limits their use, in reality, to a handful of particularly powerful institutions, whereas a national survey is within the grasp of an association, a media company, a trade union or a political party. But it would be a mistake to confuse the scarcity of measurements with the absence of European public opinion phenomena, bearing in mind that the scarcity of measurements stems from the technical constraints linked to conducting transnational and international surveys.

European public opinion: a non-constrictive form of collective opinion

In reality, the way in which the Union's institutions are organised means that opinion polls are the main means of measuring the effects of European integration on European people. The public is largely unaware of the conditions governing discussions and decision-making within the Union, whether it be in the Commission, the Council of Ministers or the European Council, which only partially find their way into the national media – and not on a sufficiently regular basis. The European Parliament has been elected by universal suffrage since 1979, but European elections are in reality a series of national polls, as is borne out by the recurrent expression of protest votes backing up the pertinence of the "simultaneous second-order national elections" model inspired by an analysis of this new type of consultation.¹⁵ It is clear that the Union's institutional organisation and its way of functioning do not provide a system of communication between voters and government similar to those offered by national democracies¹⁶. To assess European people's reactions to decisions or to highlight such reactions, opinion polling is the closest thing to a regular communications mechanism. But the order of the opinions, unlike the order of the election, is not in itself constrictive. Opinions are not legally binding. This is what distinguishes them from votes, which are decisions. Opinions only become constrictive when they turn themselves into a force. A shared opinion becomes a force if it comes to be perceived as a collective opinion. For an opinion to be seen as collective, it must either emanate from people enjoying a high level of recognition, as in the case of a petition signed by well-known personalities, or it must be presented as an opinion shared by a large number of people, as in the case of opinion polls, mass petitions or street protests.

The chief strength of public opinion is that it is an expression of quantity, namely that a large number of people share the same point of view. For an opinion to be seen to be shared by a large number of people, it must gain access to visibility as such. This implies the need for a public sphere for opinions, i.e. a sphere in which collective opinion phenomena are visible. While the various electoral democracies comprising the European Union have become familiar with opinion phenomena, which people in power may find themselves forced to take into account, the way in which the European public sphere is constituted makes it hard for European public opinion to emerge naturally as things stand. The fact that the findings of transnational surveys are not well-known to the general public and only used to a small extent by the members of the political class (the rulers, elected representatives) or the experts, commentators and speakers from civil society (journalists, union leaders, experts, teachers),

¹⁵ Karlheinz Reiff/Hermann Schmitt, *Nine Second-Order National Elections: a Conceptual Framework for the Analysis of European Election Results*, *European Journal of Political Research*, 1980, n° 8, pp. 3-44.

¹⁶ Cf. Stephan Brecht, *The European Social Contract and the European Public Sphere*, *European Law Journal*, (2006-01), volume 12: n°1, pp. 61-77.

despite recent progress,¹⁷ limits their political force. European public opinion shows the asymmetrical nature of the Union's relationship with Europeans: it is a one-way relationship in which the powers that be can gain an insight into European public opinion, or, thanks to Eurobarometer, monitor its trends month after month, while it is not possible for Europeans to see such findings or, more often than not, to know that their individual preferences or points of view converge with those of other Europeans.

Given that the opinions that span European societies are mostly invisible, they cannot influence European institutions or the construction of the Union, not even in the form of a shared reference, enabling them for instance to call on the powers that be to justify a specific decision. The dearth of measurements and the poor visibility of the findings are not the only reasons explaining the non-constrictive nature of European public opinion. It also owes something to the relative insensitivity of European institutions when confronted by the expression of European public opinion. This institutional insensitivity stems from the organisation and the apportioning of power within the Union. The European Parliament's weakness, the member states' desire to retain a determinant voice in the decision-making process and the fragmentation of the only true pan-European elections into as many national elections as there are member countries combine to discourage the taking into account of European public opinion. In turn, deprived of the power to question and any real influence, European public opinion is cut off from the political dynamic that would give it a bigger voice.

The emergence of collective movements in Europe

The importance of European public opinion phenomena is significantly limited by the fact that they rely almost exclusively on opinion surveys and by the insensitivity of the institutional system to the findings of such surveys. By contrast, it is possible to contend that while such unfavourable conditions have not stopped the emergence of such phenomena, their force as social phenomena could nevertheless be felt more strongly. Apart from its measurement in surveys, the expression of European public opinion has, over recent years, taken on the form of collective cross-border mobilisations in which the maturing of the phenomenon under consideration can be observed. Two such cases may be cited. The first concerns collective movements organised by associations or trade unions; the second concerns protests at the time of the 2003 Iraqi crisis.

The Europeanisation of collective mobilisation illustrates the consistency of European public opinion phenomena. Thanks to recent research in the social sciences, we know that social groupings, both traditional and new, have gradually sought to extend collective action to the Union level over the last 30 years or so, in the innovative form of transnational movements, thereby giving birth to new practices, "Europrotests" or "Eurodemonstrations",¹⁸ or even a Europeanisation of the trade union movement,¹⁹ non-

¹⁷ While researchers were quick to use Eurobarometer data from its beginnings in 1973, journalists long ignored them. The growing interest from the media and numerous members of civil society for Eurobarometer surveys can be seen in the big efforts made by the European institution to facilitate public access to the findings of its surveys. Access to detailed breakdowns is still limited to researchers and, more broadly, professionals in the field of opinion surveys. By contrast, the overall findings may now be quickly and easily accessed on the Eurobarometer site. The media have started citing these surveys regularly.

¹⁸ See Pierre *Lefebure*, Euro-manif, contre-sommets et marches européennes. Bilan de l'action protestataire transnationale dans la construction européenne depuis trente ans, in: Bruno *Cautrès*/Dominique *Reynié* (eds.), *L'opinion européenne en 2002*, Paris, Presses de Sciences Po/Fondation Robert Schuman, 2002, pp. 108-130.

governmental organisations and associations.²⁰ However, the change of scale complicates matters, as it entails the transfer of collective action from the national sphere to the European sphere. The move to a transnational dimension considerably increases the cost of mobilising people.

For the trade unions, the Europeanisation of a labour conflict requires not only the production of an agreement on the terms and goals of the movement, which becomes harder as the number of people involved increases, but also significant logistics efforts and other new competencies, including language skills.²¹ A Euro-demonstration in Brussels requires the mobilisation of more resources than a national protest. Attendance is often smaller, which lessens the public impact. The increased cost of organising the event can also spark potentially dissuasive inequalities, which is perfectly illustrated by the choice of the site on which the Euro-demonstration is held. Whatever site is chosen, the cost of getting people there goes up as the distance from the meeting place increases. While this is not in itself a new problem, it is heightened when the size of the relevant territory increases. With no change in the way people are brought to the site of a protest, the extension of the Union can rule out the Europeanisation of collective action. The Europeanisation of collective action therefore requires fresh thinking about the forms and repertoire of social mobilisations. Change may already be underway in this respect. Information and communications technologies are making a big contribution.

This is one of the lessons from the European protests against the military intervention in Iraq in 2003. Mass demonstrations in national capitals were not the mainstay of the protest movement. Rather, an original phenomenon, namely a multitude of simultaneous and decentralised micro-protests, seemed to suggest that keeping such protests at local level could provide a pertinent response to the shift to the European level. The protests against the military intervention in Iraq were an unprecedented historical event. They provided us with a means of assessing the contours and consistency of European public opinion, in Europe and throughout the world, independently of the opinion polls on which its study is still largely reliant. Thus "demonstrated", in the strict sense of the word, European public opinion imposed itself for the first time in 2003 as a genuine form of public opinion.²²

Between January and April 2003, nearly 3,000 protests took place across the world, bringing together a total of more than 35 million protestors in 90 different countries.²³ These protestors, who took to the streets for one march or another, together made up the biggest political mobilisation ever observed. Among the 58 days of protest listed in this historic series, attendance was greatest on seven key dates: 15 February, 15 March, 20 March, 21

¹⁹ See Roland *Erne*, *European Unions. Labor's Quest for a Transnational Democracy*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 2008; Ann P. *Branch*, *The Impact of the European Union on the Trade Union Movement*, in: *Collective Action in Europe/L'action collective en Europe*, idem.

²⁰ See Paul *Magnette*/Mario *Telo* (eds.), *Repenser l'Europe*, Brussels, Éditions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 1996. *Magnette* and *Telo* emphasise the importance of this phenomenon: "Civil society associations play a fundamental role in the formation of a transnational public sphere: public opinion, cultural, social and political movements, contribute to the creation of a European civil society, formally and informally, by increasing the number of players and instances of supranational democracy." p. 25.

²¹ Described very well by Roland *Erne* in his chapter 8: "A Euro-Democratization Union Strategy: The ABB-Alstom-Power Case", *European Unions. Labor's Quest for a Transnational Democracy*, pp. 128-156.

²² See the text published by Jürgen *Habermas* and Jacques *Derrida* in the newspaper *Libération* on 1 June 2003: "Europe: plaidoyer pour une politique extérieure commune". In this article, the authors present the big European demonstrations on 15 February 2003 as an event that "may well, in hindsight, go down in history as a sign of the birth of a European public sphere".

²³ I offered a quantitative evaluation of the global protests against the military intervention in Iraq in my paperwork: *Globalized Protest: Demonstrating in the Age of Globalization. The case of the protests against the military intervention in Iraq in 2003*. This work includes an appendix giving the complete list of demonstrations held.

March, 22 March, 30 March and 12 April. The extent and nature of the mobilisation can be seen in both the number of protestors and the number of protests. By putting the 2003 global protests into a database, the overall event can be described and analysed. Each country's contribution to the success of the event, based on the number of demonstrations and demonstrators, can be measured. The data can be aggregated to measure the contribution of the various geographical groupings, thereby highlighting Europe's contribution to the overall protest movement.

It is clear that the biggest demonstrations against America's intervention in Iraq were European. Europe's contribution was more often than not determinant, sometimes accounting for virtually the entire event. To illustrate this fact, let us take the example of 15 February 2003. This day marked the peak in the global protests against America's intervention in Iraq. It was probably also the biggest collective protest in history. 15 February 2003 accounted for more than a third of all demonstrations held during the period under study (36%) and nearly a third of total attendance (30%); it was both the most massive and the most widespread event, the 883 protests listed having taken place in 78 different countries. But above all, 15 February clearly highlighted the weight of Europe's contribution to the global protest movement. More than half the protests took place in the European Union and the Europeans far outnumbered the other contingents:

European Involvement in Global Protests on February 15, 2003

(as a %)

Number of protests listed	883
Proportion represented by European protesters (EU15)	57.9
Proportion represented by European protesters (EU25)	59
Proportion represented by European protesters*	65.6
Proportion represented by American protesters (United States)	21.8
Proportion represented by Canadian protesters	1.5
Rest of the world	10.8
Number of protesters accounted for or estimated	13,098,720
In Europe (EU15)	80.6
In Europe (EU25)	80.8
In Europe*	82.3
In the United States	6.9
In Canada	2.6
Rest of the world	8.1

*European Union (25 members) + Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Iceland, Macedonia, Norway, Romania, Serbia and Switzerland.

The Europeans' contribution to the collective mobilisation against the military intervention in Iraq can also be assessed by looking at the list of protests held during the period:

**European Involvement in Global Protests from
 January 3 to April 12, 2003
 (as a %)**

	Number of protests	Proportion of total (%)	Number of protesters	Proportion of total (%)
UE 15	1210	40.6	20,244,941	56.9
UE 25	1233	41.4	20,297,091	57
Europe*	1330	44.6	20,599,261	57.9
United States	982	29.7	2,558,320	7.2
Canada	118	3.9	898,824	2.5
Rest of the world	548	21.6	11,494,617	32.3

*European Union (25 members) + Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Iceland, Macedonia, Norway, Romania, Serbia and Switzerland (34 country au total).

The role played by the Europeans in the global protests against the military intervention in Iraq can also be seen by taking the 58 days of protests as a whole. Looking at the number of protests, the weight of the United States is important. However, if one examines the relationship between the United States' contribution to the number of demonstrations and the number of demonstrators, one sees an asymmetry. Nearly a third of the protests took place in the United States (30%), but less than one protester in ten was American (7.2%), showing attendance to have been well below average. The situation is the opposite in Europe, although the gap is narrower. Over the period as a whole, less than half the demonstrations organised took place in Europe (41.4%), but more than half the participants were European (57%). We also note that, within Europe as a geographical entity, the proportion not belonging to the Union is marginal, whatever the criteria. Adding the ten countries that were getting ready to join the Union has only a slight impact on the overall findings, even though opinion polls conducted at the time showed that these Europeans were just as hostile to the military intervention in Iraq as their neighbours.

A quantitative study of European collective movements raises greater methodological issues than those usually encountered when working on transnational opinion surveys. It is nevertheless still vital to foster the study of transnational collective movements, without which the consistency of European public opinion would remain too soft. It is partly because there are still too few studies in this field that the notion of European public opinion inspires more scepticism than the idea of national opinion. In each of the European Union countries, it has been standard practice for decades to call on public opinion on a daily basis. Public opinion has become a standard feature. Its trends help highlight the questions that are of concern to society and the splits within it. Alongside the press, Parliament, political parties, trade unions and associations, public opinion is part of the representation of the people, helping them make their judgements and express their decisions. Deprived of this image of themselves and the community they form, within the Union and throughout the world, Europeans are forced to fall back on their national identity. The transformation of collective forms of engagement and the evolution of European institutions will have a big impact on the question of European public opinion.

Abstract:

The idea that there is such a thing as "European public opinion" should be seen as part of a broader concern for transnational forms of the expression of preference and of collective mobilisation. The idea that "European public opinion" exists would require the existence of opinion reflecting a dominant opinion, at any given time within a relevant European sphere, in this case taken to be the European Union and, moreover, would require that this opinion be that of Europeans. The existence of "European public opinion" is only partially borne out by instruments used to measure public opinion. Testing its consistency would also require that it be possible to identify public forms to the expression of shared European public opinion, thereby making it possible to bridge the gap between an opinion shared by Europeans, i.e. dominant, and European public opinion, i.e. collective opinion that is both European and publicly expressed.
