

## Online mediation of Europe: The Austrian case

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Austria's media landscape is generally held to be distinctive in the European context in terms of magnitude and power.<sup>1</sup> It is dominated by relatively large sized media organizations, which publish for a small market made up of barely 8.5 million potential users. High degrees of market concentration account for media power with some leading newspapers exerting high influence on politics and public opinion. We can add to this a tendency of media populism where journalists engage with people's moods, serve mainly their entertainment needs and frame political news and debates in a dominantly negative way that spreads anti-political sentiments and undermines the representative system of democracy. (Mazzoleni 2003; Plasser and Ulram 2003)

One of the central questions of this chapter will be whether the digital revolution and the use of the Internet as a tool for political mass communication has a potential to break this monopoly of media populism in Austria. This chapter informs about the particularities of the political e-spheres hosted by professional journalism websites and political blogs in Austria. Where and how are EU news made salient in the internet and how is the legitimacy of the EU debated? We start with an overview of political news-making in Austria and the particularities of the political e-sphere therein. (Mazzoleni 2003) This will allow us to identify general formats of news-making in the internet, the most popular news sites and their relationship to offline media. Secondly, the profile of the selected news sites and blogs will be presented. The standing of European political communication online is described through the salience of European news. In the main empirical part of the chapter, we will provide a systematic account of the particular forms of participatory journalism evolving in the context of EP election campaigns comparing professional news sites and independent political blogs as well as journalistic inputs and user commenting.

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<sup>1</sup> Josef Trappel on [http://www.ejc.net/media\\_landscape/article/austria/](http://www.ejc.net/media_landscape/article/austria/). See also Kaltenbrunner et al. 2007, Steinmauer 2002, Fiedler 2004, Filzmaier et al. 2007.

## 1. Political News Making in Austria

Austria is among those countries (together with the UK and Germany) where tabloids are very influential in shaping the political climate. Tabloids (*Kronen Zeitung*, *Heute*, *Österreich* und *Kleine Zeitung*) cover almost two thirds of the total coverage and reach daily more than half of the population in Austria. The main tabloid *Die Kronenzeitung* sells over 1 million copies and is estimated to reach more than 40% of all Austrian households. There are three other tabloids which still sell more than twice as much as the Austrian quality newspapers: *Kleine Zeitung* (only distributed in Carinthia), *Österreich* (mostly distributed through free copies) and *Der Kurier*.<sup>2</sup>

Compared to this dominance of tabloids, quality news are a niche product in the Austrian media market. The two remaining quality newspapers *Der Standard* and *Die Presse* have a relatively small circulation (around 80.000 each) and are read by less than 5% of the Austrian population. The traditional *Die Presse* is found to be more conservative in style and content while *Der Standard* is not only more modern but recently also more successful to secure a share of readers.

The restricted plurality of the Austrian newspaper market is also reflected at the regional level. Regional newspapers have traditionally a strong standing but are increasingly under market pressure from the tabloids, and in particular by *Kronenzeitung* and its aggressive marketing strategies (Fiedler 2004). Some regional newspapers like the *Tiroler Volkszeitung* have responded to these advances of the *Kronenzeitung* to conquer the regional market by launching own tabloid formats. Today, usually one newspaper monopolises the region. Regional newspapers often have a conservative outfit and openly support regional government.

Tabloids do not necessarily compete with national and Vienna based quality newspapers but address different readerships. In a populist newsroom, tabloids contribute to the polarisation of the audience. Tabloids have penetrated however the regional media market and over the last decades have successfully taken over many regional and local papers. Formats of political news-making in the yellow press are similar: we find often short, telegramme style articles that are expressed in a simple language and do not overburden the reader with information.

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<sup>2</sup> Österreichische Auflagenkontrolle 2008, Annual Report. <http://www.oek.at/> accessed 04.11.2009.

News are frequently not only similar in style but also in content, reprinting agency news from the Austria Press Agency (APA).

A further characteristic of the Austrian media market is its relative openness to foreign products. Readership of German newspapers and magazines is still low but particularly quality news are delivered by German journalists and the major German quality newspapers are widely distributed.<sup>3</sup> Through television, the Austrian and German audiences are even closer interlinked than through the print media. Austrian television news are monopolised by the state owned ORF with one national wide and one regional channel. Television news are professional and follow quality standards in terms of information values and impartiality. According to Eurobarometer 2009, television is also seen as the most credible news source with 67 per cent of the population holding television more trustworthy than newspapers (against only 49 per cent EU average). One Austro-German public television channel (3 SAT) broadcasts political news from both countries. Journalists and programme coordinators from the German ARD and the Austrian ORF traditionally cooperate closely with regard to the provision of foreign and European news. The private television market is monopolised by big German broadcasters with a high share of audience in Austria. Some of them offer partially separate news for the Austrian market.

In terms of content and quality of political news, the tabloidization of the Austrian newspaper market is a strong constraint to political communication turning Austria into a prime example of a media democracy (Filzmaier et al. 2007). In the Austrian case, Plasser and Ulram (2004: 30) spoke already ten years ago of the consolidation of a populist newsroom characterized by an editorial logic that tends to pick up anti-immigrant and anti-elitist topics and amplify popular prejudices. In the case of news coverage about the European Union, newspaper populism strongly correlates with anti-Europeanism, which works across the ideological divide and traditional party cleavages. The *Kronenzeitung*, for instance, does not take a clear ideological stance in terms of partisan affiliation but has regularly expressed a strong anti-Europeanism.<sup>4</sup> Also other tabloids tend to frame the EU in negative terms. Among the quality newspapers, *der Standard* is the only EU friendly newspaper in Austria. Others, like *die Presse* or regional newspapers, are neutral with regard to daily EU coverage but critical with

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<sup>3</sup> This traditionally holds for the Munich based *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, the magazine *Der Spiegel* and the weekly 'Die Zeit', which are sold all over the country. The Hamburg based weekly 'Die Zeit' has recently even launched a special Austrian edition.

<sup>4</sup> This pattern of volatile ideological affiliation but constant anti-Europeanism of the tabloids is also reported from other European countries, notably from *The Sun* in the United Kingdom (Price 2009).

enlargement. When circulation is taken into account, newspapers, which defend more or less openly a Eurosceptic agenda, reach approximately 60 per cent of the Austrian population while European friendly newspapers are read by just five percent of the Austrians.

## 2. The political e-sphere in Austria

### a) *Online News-Making and salience*

#### *Professional journalism in the Internet*

Political news-making in the Internet to a large extent reproduces these general patterns of the traditional news landscape in Austria. In general, one could state that there is no ‘new journalism’ in the WWW but rather a re-production of offline journalism.

Table 1. The top 10 most popular websites for political news making/debate in Austria

Rank	Name	Link	Alexa ranking (Austria) <sup>5</sup>
1	ORF	<a href="http://www.orf.at">www.orf.at</a>	5
2	Der Standard	<a href="http://www.derStandard.at">http://www.derStandard.at</a>	14
3	Kronenzeitung	<a href="http://www.Krone.at">www.Krone.at</a>	32
4	Spiegel	<a href="http://www.spiegel.de">www.spiegel.de</a>	39
5	Bildzeitung	<a href="http://www.bild.de">www.bild.de</a>	40
6	Kurier	<a href="http://www.kurier.at">http://www.kurier.at</a>	41
7	Die Presse	<a href="http://www.diepresse.com">www.diepresse.com</a>	48
8	newsonline	<a href="http://www.news.at">http://www.news.at</a>	53
9	Oesterreich	<a href="http://www.oe24.at">http://www.oe24.at</a>	61
10	Kleinezeitung	<a href="http://www.kleinezeitung.at">http://www.kleinezeitung.at</a>	65

Among the top 100 most popular websites in Austria, we have identified the 10 most prominent sites of political news-making. Table xx indicates the centrality of political news making in the Internet. Around 15 per cent of the most frequented sites are related to political news. The internet is thus far from being purely entertaining or being merely a social utility. The internet is clearly politically relevant and political news are daily read by a quite

<sup>5</sup> Rankings as of October 2009.

substantial part of its users. Having said that, it also comes to the attention that political news making in the internet is not necessarily original. What strikes is that all entries of the list are professional journalist sites run by the major media organizations of Austria and Germany. In general, what is put online is also part of the offline news of the particular daily newspaper or periodical in question. This points to a strong overlap between the offline and the online public sphere in terms of ownership, salience and contents. Similar to the offline public sphere, political news making differs largely in terms of quality: professional standards are taken most seriously by the internet presentation of the two Austrian quality newspaper *Der Standard* and *Die Presse* and the German newssite *Der Spiegel*. Other websites provide little journalistic inputs and are mainly relying on agency news. This is the case of the six tabloids in the list, which offer only restricted journalistic services and publish mainly news provided by the Austrian Press Agency (APA). APA is responsible for the streamlining of the Austrian news landscape feeding several news platforms with almost identical contents. Newsonline, which ranks eight in the list of most popular political websites is basically a newsticker of APA news. Österreich (9), Kleine Zeitung (10) and partly also Kurier (6) publish incoming APA news with little or no editing.

What, if at all, distinguishes the online from the offline public sphere? What turns these Internet news platforms into “New Media” is not their independence or their alternative news formats but the different kind of participatory journalism that unfolds online. All of them are multifunctional platforms, offering a variety of services, such as e-mail, e-shopping, entertainment and social networking. With the exception of the two quality news formats *Standard* and *Presse* political news constitute only a small part of the contents and services offered by these sites. This marginalization of political news is not necessarily restricted to the online media but can also be observed in the printed versions of the tabloid newspaper.

There is however an important difference of ranking when comparing the popularity of online and offline news media: Quality news in the internet is rewarded with attention whereas the tabloid formats loose in users’ popularity. *Der Standard* is Austria’s most popular online media but only the country’s eight largest offline media. *Die Kronenzeitung*, which sells three times more offline copies than *Der Standard* is less successful with its internet presentation. This gives evidence of the fact that many users indeed search for quality news in the Internet and refer to trusted sources and professional services. The presentation of quality news is rewarded with users’ attention. The top ten internet news platforms also tend to be less Eurohostile than the top ten offline media. Although the majority of news are by trend still

negative or critical with the EU, the likelihood to be confronted with Euroscepticism for the average user is lower in the Internet than in the offline media.

### *The Austrian political blogosphere*

As there were no political blogs in the Austria Top 100 websites listed on Alexa, google search lists, link lists from professional journalist websites<sup>6</sup> and the Wikio.com ranking for Germany were used to identify the top 10 most popular blogs in Austria. The following list does not claim to be exhaustive. In contrast to the consolidated professional journalist sites, the blogosphere is changing rapidly, new blogs emerge and old blogs cease to function. Blogs rank low in terms of daily visits and, for the average user are far less popular than professional journalist websites. The big media corporations clearly beat the independent media in terms of salience. Even the most popular blogs have a very restricted scope ranking not even among the first 5000 most popular websites in Austria. Also the absolute number of independent blogs is difficult to estimate. Politikblog lists entries from 180 blogs, some of them however affiliated with political parties, trade unions or local government. In any case, political blogs are only a small segment of the expanding blogosphere with thousands of blogs evolving around sports, culture, entertainment, computing or simply personal diaries.

Further problems with confining the Austrian blogosphere emerge since there is considerable overlap between German and Austrian blogs, especially among the more popular ones. In turn, we also find some specific Austrian Internet niches, which are almost exclusively used by Austrians. The blogosphere repeats the general pattern of the national public sphere, it is relatively open on the one hand to other German speaking media, but on the other hand develops a regionalist subsphere. To account for this specificity of the Austrian blogosphere, we rank websites not only according to Alexa's absolute user numbers but also list the relevant shares of German and Austrian users.

Table xx: The most popular political blogs in Austria

Domain	Alexa Ranking Austria <sup>7</sup>	% Users in Austria	% Users in Germany
<a href="http://alles-schallundrauch.blogspot.com/">http://alles-schallundrauch.blogspot.com/</a>	5597	8.5	85.1
<a href="http://www.politikblogs.at">http://www.politikblogs.at</a>	6402	81	14
<a href="http://www.bildblog.de/">http://www.bildblog.de/</a>	7600	3.5	94

<sup>6</sup> An overview of political blogs in Austria can be found at <http://www.blogverzeichnis.at/politik/>.

<sup>7</sup> Rankings from October 2009.

<a href="http://www.netzpolitik.org/">http://www.netzpolitik.org/</a>	9429	2.4	94
<a href="http://www.erstaunlich.at/">http://www.erstaunlich.at/</a>	10845	91	
<a href="http://feuerhaken.org/">http://feuerhaken.org/</a>	10855	72	12
<a href="http://zurpolitik.com/">http://zurpolitik.com/</a>	10892	100	
<a href="http://www.spiegelfechter.com/wordpress/">http://www.spiegelfechter.com/wordpress/</a>	14775	3	90.1
<a href="http://carta.info/">http://carta.info/</a>	16545	3.2	91.6
<a href="http://www.nachdenkseiten.de/">http://www.nachdenkseiten.de/</a>	17793	1.3	96.3
<a href="http://www.zwischenruf.at/">http://www.zwischenruf.at/</a>	30962	38.6	51
<a href="http://www.rigardi.org">www.rigardi.org</a>	40780	78	

As this broad spectrum indicates, political blogs are an important source to increase the plurality and often also the quality of opinion. In contrast to the more popular news formats maintained by the big media corporations, most of the political blogs under observation strive for the exclusivity and quality of news and the originality of opinion and critique. As will be further elaborated in the survey, political blogs stand in a strange symbiosis to mainstream media. They are frequently used to correct ‘media lies of the tabloids (such as the German BILDblog and many of the Austrian blogs under observation). Blogs are used to criticize printed journalism, they have been established as a corrective of the forth power, report media abuse and comment on media biases. This points to a style of corrective communication of the net community, which closely observes and controls each other.

#### *The profile of the selected websites*

From the above list of most prominent websites (table xx) the following three sites were selected, all of them professional journalist websites run by three of the most widely distributed offline newspapers in Austria:

- a. Der Standard;
- b. Kronenzeitung; and
- c. Kurier

*ORF* which ranks first in the list of most prominent websites was not considered as it invites only for participatory journalism on domestic issues. Foreign and EU news were not included in the daily list of articles that could be commented upon. The high salience of the website *ORF* in the ranking is also not explained by its use for political information and news. The *ORF* site is mainly used for retrieving information on television programmes. *Spiegel* and *Bild* are German websites and therefore point to the partial overlap between the Austrian and

German public sphere in terms of users. A further problem with sampling occurred because *Der Standard* and *Kurier* archived agency news only for short periods. At the time of coding (September 2009) all agency news of *Der Standard* (approximately 40 per cent of the sample) could no longer be accessed online. The remaining sample of editorial news was still substantial to allow for a random selection of threads for coding. In the case of the tabloid *Kurier* it was found that almost the entire EP election campaign news coverage was based on agency news. Although user comments were still available online, a meaningful correlation between professional news input and commenting could no longer be reconstructed and the newssite was excluded from coding. To maintain the size of the sample, the number of articles coded from *Standard* and *Kronenzeitung* was increased respectively.

**a. Die Kronenzeitung**

**Type of content:** tabloid newspaper. The welcome page only features pictures and headlines of top-news (similar to the frontpage of the print version). Categories include, among others, Austria and world news, entertainment, sports, weather, family and games. The platform is fully interactive, whereby users can personalise the content they see on their screens, comment on all published articles and upload relevant photographs and/or videos, as well as set RSS feeds, email alerts and podcasts on material that interests them. Users are further invited to community building through contests, the very popular Talksalon with several thousand topics ranging from politics to private collecting approx. 600.000 entries from individual users.

**Style of writing:** News articles and comments do frequently not adhere to professional journalism standards (impartiality, accuracy, diplomatic language). Journalists apply a typical tabloid style making use of emotional and scandalising language, focusing on personality and prominence and not substance and indifferent of source and equilibrated opinion. Articles tend to be very short (maximum 1600 characters). One eminent feature of the newspapers are its frequent comments and columns. Journalists frequently express their personal opinion on political issues and tend to comment negatively on political elites. In chats and commenting netiquette is often breached by insults, hate speech and racist and anti-semitic entries. Moderators regularly intervene and, in some cases, even had to close particular threads.

**Political affiliation/ editorial stance:** The *Kronenzeitung* is officially impartial reflecting the plurality of opinions of its journalists. In practice, it becomes regularly active in popular campaigning raising all kind of social and political issues and mobilising popular



resistance against elites. Examples include a campaign against the nuclear power plant in the Austrian border area of the Czech Republic, a campaign against the EU constitutional treaty and a campaign against Turkish membership. One Austrian particularity is that such media campaigns can be combined with popular initiatives (*Volksbegehren*) and this way can be made very effective. Media become here an important player and even without party support can mobilize large sections of the public. Media analysts also agree that the *Kronenzeitung* has significantly contributed to the success of Jörg Haider and the FPÖ throughout the nineties and 2000. The *Kronenzeitung* has never explicitly supported Haider and its party but has always defended similar positions or run parallel campaigns (e.g. against foreigners or EU enlargement). The *Kronenzeitung* is also outspokenly anti-European. As such it is heavily contested within Austria and abroad and frequently involved in legal and political quarrels. Very controversial was also the its open support of the MEP Hans-Peter Martin, who was given a floor to campaign against the EU and made a very efficient use of the possibility offered to him by the *Kronenzeitung* to speak directly to the Austrian electorate. Without this strong and explicit media support, the electoral success of Martin, who won 17.9 per cent of the votes in the election cannot be explained.

**Ownership information:** The chief editor Hans Dichand who has taken over and restyled the newspaper after the Second World War still holds 50 per cent of the *Kronenzeitung*, the other half controlled by the German media holding WAZ. Hans Dichand, who has recently won the Big Brother Award for its outstanding merits of manipulating public opinion in Austria is one of the most fickle persons of Austrian post war history. Several commentators have attributed to him the power to coronate the Chancellor of the Republic, since it is difficult to imagine (and in fact never occurred) that a government could be elected which did not receive, at least indirect support through the editorial line of the *Kronenzeitung*.

#### **b. Der Standard**

**Type of content:** Quality newspaper, founded only in 1988 with the intention to launch a modern, English style newspaper. *Der Standard* is said to be the first newspaper in German language that went online already in 1995. In later years, the newspaper invested substantially in building an own editorial board for online news and, in addition, puts also all offline news and even a fotocopy of the original newspaper online. In its first years, *der Standard* cooperated closely with the German *Sueddeutsche Zeitung* and adapted style and content. Strong focus on foreign and domestic news, the scope is national with a focus

on Vienna where most of the readers come from. The Internet platform is fully interactive. Users can comment on every article, and the commenting function is highly frequented. There is an own section of opinion articles where users can read and comment opinions expressed by journalists and special blogs on selected topics are offered, which are moderated by the newspaper correspondents. The EU correspondent, for instance, moderates one blog on Europe, where also additional information are distributed that is not always available in the print version. This blog section offers extensive information on Europe, including a news archive.

**Style of writing:** News articles adhere to professional journalism standards (impartiality, accuracy, diplomatic language) ). Blogs follow a more relaxed writing style and writers clearly express their personal opinion on political issues, but all comments are moderated and netiquette is observed.

**Political affiliation/ editorial stance:** An independent newspaper, of centre-left ideology

**Ownership information:** Founded by Oscar Bronner, an entrepreneur with the ambition to establish a quality newspaper that opposes the *Kronenzeitung* in opinion-making. In its first years *der standard* was owned by the German Axel Springer Company, and in later years was taken over by the German *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. Today, the whole newspaper belongs to a family foundation controlled by Oscar Bronner, but de-facto independent and heavily state subsidized.

### **The profile of the selected blogs**

To cover a representative sample of the Austrian blogosphere, we have decided to focus only on sites that were also used by a majority of Austrian users and where particular Austrian issues and campaigns evolved. The best access to the Austrian online debates was given by a metablog <http://www.politikblogs.at/>, an independent site, which claims to sample all news and comments posted on political blogs in Austria. Politikblogs.at collects postings from a wide range of Austrian blogs in chronological and thematic order. Contents are automatically generated and updated every hour. EU topics can be filtered out separately and sampled through automatic news feeds (RSS feeds). In October 2009, this metablog retrieved postings from about 180 independent blogs. The selection is strictly Austrian, postings from German or Swiss blogs are not listed. This gives a good overview of the Austrian political blogosphere and guarantees the representativeness of the sample. In addition, we have sampled

[www.rigardi.org](http://www.rigardi.org) as a typical example of an Austrian niche blog that comments regularly about Europe.<sup>8</sup> Rigardi is an initiative of students with journalistic ambitions from different Austrian and German universities. Blogs might thus work as a training camp of future journalists, to exercise critical capacities and formulate opinion. Blog entries deal often not only with politics but also the work of professional journalists.

#### **4) Findings**

##### **4.1) Salience of the EU and of EU election campaigns in the Internet**

To understand the salience of European news in the Internet one needs to take into consideration that the most frequented websites are all provided by professional journalists and are thus profit oriented. In practical terms, this means that the amount of users and the numbers of daily clicks is the only revenue of the websites. The commercial media organisations (in our case only print media) have thus an interest to turn their websites profitable. As in the case of offline media, this commercial logic of the news media restricts the scope of European news. Political news about the EU in the Internet are primarily provided by the two Austrian quality newspaper and the German weekly Der Spiegel listed above. This means that the online news landscape in which the average Austrian user moves is basically identical with the offline news landscape. Readers of traditional newspapers and readers of online news do not live in two different worlds. This holds in particular with regard to the strong standing of news agencies which feed the main news platforms with information on ongoing events from Brussels. We can further conclude that the salience of EU news in the internet and in offline media is identical. Only three of the 11 news platforms listed maintain specific rubrics for EU news which are distinguished from foreign and domestic news: the newsplatforms from the two Austrian quality newspapers: der Standard and Die Presse and the newsplatform from the German weekly der Spiegel. Other newsplatforms do regularly report about the EU but mainly rely on agency news, sometimes with identical contents. Only Die Krone is more actively involved in news making although news clips are small and mainly reduced to one central message. Blogs are mainly used for the distribution of news and for commenting but do rarely produce original news. The news that are commented upon in the blogs are mostly professional journalist products. Professional journalistic websites are clearly distinguished in terms of salience from blogs. Professional websites reproduce printed

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<sup>8</sup> All entries from rigardi.com were also contained in politikblogs.at but were counted only once in the sampling.

media formats in terms of style and content. Everything that is printed is also available online, in turn, little additional information or opinion is online that is not also printed. This means that political news sites are not exploring all technical possibilities, e.g. by interlinking their articles (e.g. with articles written by other journalists) or by using hyperlinks. The obvious reason for this is that journalists want to preserve the exclusivity of their message and have to respect copyright restrictions, but, on the other hand, this goes at the cost of additional information value and does not make full use of the potential of the Internet. The websites under analysis are certainly also not living up to the potential of participatory journalism. They do not increase interactivity in terms of direct exchanges between users and journalists. Journalists remain rather passive in online debates and do usually not intervene in ongoing discussions.

While professional journalist websites address a mass audience and, in the case of the two Austrian quality newspapers, can build on user communities that are often bigger than their offline readers, blogs are visible only to small communities of users. Blogs are also found to be less participatory than professional journalist websites. Although blogs make more efficient use of the technical potential of online political communication in terms of offering hyperlinks to external information, interlink news threads and invite for user comments, the overall salience of the Austrian blogs is low, blog entries are scarcely commented by the visitors and no community building effect takes place that would be comparable to the reach of professional media websites that include thousands of active users.

On the other hand, and in spite of this capacity of the Internet to enable mass communication, we still observe important ideological cleavages that divide the Internet users approximately along the same line like the offline public. There is considerable group polarisation as an effect of EU news coverage. If people read mainly blogs and comments that conform their political views, polarisation is inevitable. The Standard is known for its liberal-left political stance in opposition to the conservative government and, in particular to the populist strategies of other parties and media. With regard to EU coverage, this is translated into positive attitudes with its commentators expressing support for enlargement, the deepening of EU competences and a transfer of sovereignty. The Kronenzeitung has a conservative profile and supports populist campaigning against government or against the political elites in general. This is expressed in Eurohostile attitudes and its journalists openly campaign against the EU. Readers very much align with the journal's main line of political thinking. Commenting that expresses their political preferences and we can broadly speak of a

polarisation of the Austrian population in two irreconcilable camps. This polarisation of the Austrian public becomes clearly visible in the formation of user communities that regularly chat and comment upon political issues. Both newspapers have built substantive user communities involving several thousands of regular commentators and probably hundreds of thousand of passive users. Looking more closely at the style of commenting, both newspapers are similar in the way of activating users basically every news article online is also commented, often by more than 100 posts. In both newspapers, commenting unfolds a dynamic of its own, comments on comments and the debates easily departure from the original topic of the threat. As a consequence of this community building, effect, the range of opinions expressed in an online forum is rather narrow. There is a streamlining of opinion and the level of tolerance among the users is low. Deviant opinions from the main tone of the forum are immediately singled out.

In contrast to professional media sites, political blogs lack resources and knowledge but, on the other hand, can escape more easily the commercial logics of news selection and framing that is necessary to adress large audiences. All blogs included in our list are run by privates for non profit reasons. The bloggers who write on these sites are usually not identical with newspaper journalists or other authors of professional websites. Bloggers often want to be different. In order to distinguish themselves, mainstream political news (either online or offline) are nevertheless still the major point of reference. They relie on a shared world of users that knows what is 'going on' in the mainstream media and understands the distinguishing marks set by the blogger. This strive to be different also explains why bloggers are often also explicitly anti-populist, scrutinizing style and contents of the campaigning of the main parties (especially the FPÖ) and the media coverage of Austrian tabloids. Bloggers pretend to assume a monotoring function of the populist newsroom in Austria. Our survey suggests however, that the impact of blogs on 'correcting' mainstream media populism is low. The mobilisation potential of the Internet as a corrective measure of populist campaigning cannot be utilized as long as the blogs ermain largely unobserved by the users.

Within the wider public communication context, professional journalistic websites are increasingly used for non journalistic services like lifestyle, guidebooks, sports, games, e-shopping or chatting. Especially *Die Kronenzeitung* is offering these kinds of services, which are becoming important to turn webprofiles of the newspaper also profitable. A well known strategy of 'faked' interactivity consists in the offer of particular gadgets like foto series, surveys or games that invite the users to test their knowledge. The main purpose of these

gadgets is to increase the number of clicks and the average time users spent on the webpage, which is used as the measurement for revenues from advertisement. Quite frequently, these gadgets are ‘hidden’ between political news, e.g. by linking news articles to foto series without any journalistic content or news value. In general, these new ‘tabloid’ formats of political news presentation make it more difficult to distinguish between forms of political communication and entertainment. More detailed user surveys are needed to be able to decide about the status of political communication as part of the multiple purposes of web communication.

The online presentation of *Der Standard* gives us some indications that an investment in quality news-making in the internet can actually pay off. *Der Standard* is the most professional news site in our sample focused on ‘hard news’ provided by professional journalists. This service is rewarded by the user and the journal has won a good reputation for its news quality. It should be noted, however, that these quality formats are also heavily sponsored from public and private donations, which makes the online editorial office of *Der Standard* less dependent from commercial constraints.

In the following, we measure the intensity of campaigning through evaluative statements. We look at ‘strong’ evaluations in which the legitimacy of the EU is contested as an indicator of the high intensity of campaigning. If we find that polity evaluations are substantial, this indicates also high levels of contentiousness of the EU polity in the media during EP election campaigns. Campaigning is then not only about political parties and their positions on EU policies, it is also about the underlying principles of integration, the institutional and constitutional design of the EU or the future project of integration.

	Main Text	Comment on Main Text	Comment on Comment	Total
Der Standard	13	15	1	29
Krone	15	45	6	66
Politikblogs	14	5	8	27
Rigardi	2	1	0	3
Total	44	66	15	125

Table xx indicates that online news contain such ‘strong’ evaluations of the EU polity and its basic legitimacy. Evaluations of EU-legitimacy are given in main articles and in comments. In average, each article coded contained at least one ‘strong’ evaluation. User comments expose an even higher number of evaluations of the EU. Given that only the first 20 comments of each thread were taken into consideration, we find that the EU is regularly contested by the users in the context of EP parliamentary campaigns. The debate in tabloids is more emotional than the debate in quality newspapers as becomes visible by the high number of evaluative comments posted by the readers of *Kronenzeitung*. Although readers of *Der Standard* post an equal amount of comments, the debate in the quality newspaper is less focused on EU polity contestations. Political blogs display a low frequency of comments both in absolute numbers and in terms of polity evaluations of the EU.

#### **4.2 Participation in online debates**

The question is further: who evaluates European integration or the EU? Do journalists take a campaigning role or are evaluations mainly reported from political actors? Results point to a low intervening role of the journalists. This is expectable with regard to the traditional role understanding of journalists as neutral brokers of the political process. Opinion-making in both quality and tabloid news outlets is restricted to comments. Also journalists of the populist *Kronenzeitung* do not actively campaign against the EU but either leave the floor to partisan actors or take a more passive role in selecting negative news on the EU. In the case of political blogs, we would however assume that bloggers take rather the role of opinion-makers and not of news-makers. Why do bloggers not more frequently express their own opinion on the EU? One reason is that many bloggers try to imitate journalistic standards and to raise the quality of their sites. They behave as ‘would be journalists’ with a view of occupying positions within the journalistic field (e.g. students from communication and media departments). The other reason for the absence of EU polity evaluations by political bloggers is that the blogging community used the context of EP elections rather as a pretext to campaign against the populist right in Austria. This points to a strong polarisation of the Austrian e-sphere with mainstream tabloids exposing the EU hostility of their readers and peripheral blogs targeting the political enemy domestically. In many blogs, the EP Parliamentary campaigning was only the contextual topic to express outrage or irony against the leaders of the Austrian populist right and their style of campaigning.

	Main Text	Comment on Main Text	Comment on Comment	Total
Journalist / Blogger	2	0	0	2
Citizen(s)	4	60	15	79
Party Actor	35	6	0	41
Non-State Actor	3	0	0	3
Total	44	66	15	125

	Der Standard	Krone	Erstaunlich	Rigardi	Total
Journalist / Blogger	0	0	2	0	2
Citizen(s)	14	53	12	0	79
Party Actor	14	12	12	3	41
Non-State Actor	1	1	1	0	3
Total	29	66	27	3	125

	National	Foreign	EU	Total
Journalist / Blogger	2	0	0	2
Citizen(s)	78	1	0	79
Party Actor	36	1	4	41
Non-State Actor	2	1	0	3
Total	118	3	4	125

Table xx: Actors'scope

Both newspapers (quality and tabloid) use party actors as their main source of information and as the legitimate voice that evaluates EU legitimacy. EU election campaigns in the internet are fought by domestic parties. MEP candidates have a low salience compared to domestic party leaders. The only visible EU actors was the independent MEP candidate Hans-Peter Martin who defended his seat successfully through explicit Eurohostile campaigning. Non-partisan actors or other EU actors remain marginal. Also news coverage of election campaigns from other member states is restricted and foreign political actors are only given



voice in exceptional circumstances. Debates in online fora are exclusively carried forward by citizens, who remain among themselves, do not enter into dialogue with other political actors or journalists and do also not refer systematically to statements of political actors (measured, for instance, through indirect quotations).

There is no visible campaigning effect in the small sample. Salience and participation remains at an equal level with a peak around the election days. Sequencing of debates matters only with regard to EU polity evaluations which are mainly found in the campaigning period and drop significantly after the elections.

#### **4.3. Evaluations of EU legitimacy in online debates**

Thus far, our research findings indicate that EP election campaigns news coverage is not only about party politics or party positioning on substantial policies but regularly includes more fundamental evaluations of the EU as a political system and a contestation of the institutional and constitutional set up of the EU. In the next step, we will be able to show how the EU legitimacy is evaluated in online debates. Do evaluative statements in online media predominantly express regime support or opposition? And what are the underlying principles of justifying EU legitimacy? In all news sites, campaigning in EP election campaigns shows a tendency to evaluate the EU and European integration negatively. *Kronenzeitung* is most explicit in selecting negative evaluations of the EU in terms of principle, polity and project. EU coverage of *Standard* is more balanced, exposing overall less evaluations of EU polity worth and not rejecting the EU in principle but rather being critical with the existing framework of integration, with the EU's alleged democratic deficit and with enlargement.

There is also a noticeable difference between the two main news sites in giving direct and indirect voice to Euroscepticism. More than a third of EU polity evaluations of *Standard* are given through indirect quotations, i.e. in the context of actors' statements that comment upon statements of others. This journalistic practice can be interpreted as a way to mirror the complexity of the debate and the variety of actors's positions. By drawing on indirect quotations, the journalist reconstructs the discursive context of contentious politics through which the EU legitimacy is negotiated. Actors' arguments are being made contextual and critique is more likely to be expressed. Political news in *Kronenzeitung* instead give almost exclusively direct voice to EU polity contestations basing their coverage on actors' statements which devalue the EU. Actors' statements are thus detached from their discursive context.

Quite often, the particular tabloid style of writing turns the statement into an acclamation that is devoid of justification. Of crucial importance for the construction of the message is further the selective bias of the journalist to single out and place actors' statements in the text. In the case of the Kronenzeitung, this bias works towards selecting mostly negative messages from the debate.

	Principle of Integration			
	Positive	Negative	N/A	Total
Der Standard	2	2	25	29
Krone	1	17	48	66
Politikblogs	3	7	17	27
Rigardi	0	1	2	3
Total	6	27	92	125

	EU Polity							
	Level - Positive	Level - Negative	Scope - Positive	Scope - Negative	Inclusiveness - Positive	Inclusiveness - Negative	N/A	Total
Der Standard	1	2	1	0	2	9	14	29
Krone	1	8	0	5	3	13	36	66
Erstaunlich	3	2	1	3	1	8	9	27
Rigardi	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	3
Total	5	13	2	8	6	32	59	125

  

	Project of Integration							
	Level - Positive	Level - Negative	Scope - Positive	Scope - Negative	Inclusiveness - Positive	Inclusiveness - Negative	N/A	Total
Der Standard	0	2	0	0	4	14	9	29
Krone	1	3	0	2	6	29	25	66
Erstaunlich	0	0	1	0	3	2	21	27
Rigardi	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	3
Total	1	6	1	2	13	45	57	125

		Der Standard	Krone	politikbklags	Rigardi	Total
Transmission	Direct	21	62	15	0	98
	Indirect	8	4	12	3	27
	Total	29	66	27	3	125

Table xx: Transmission of messages

In the next step, we analyze whether user comments are distinguished from evaluations given in the main text of the news thread. Is there a revision of worth from journalistic input to user comment? Do the user comments justify EU-legitimacy differently than journalist and political actors?

	Principle of Integration			
	Positive	Negative	N/A	Total
Main Text	3	7	34	44
Comment on Main Text	2	15	49	66
Comment on Comment	1	5	9	15
Total	6	27	92	125

Table xx. Location of evaluative statement

		EU Polity							
		Level - Positive	Level - Negative	Scope - Positive	Scope - Negative	Inclusiveness - Positive	Inclusiveness - Negative	N/A	Total
Location	Main Text	1	4	0	2	4	13	20	44
	Comment on Main Text	2	8	1	4	0	17	34	66
	Comment on Comment	2	1	1	2	2	2	5	15
	Total	5	13	2	8	6	32	59	125

		Project of Integration							
		Level - Positive	Level - Negative	Scope - Positive	Scope - Negative	Inclusiveness - Positive	Inclusiveness - Negative	N/A	Total
Location	Main Text	0	4	1	0	7	19	13	44
	Comment on Main Text	1	2	0	2	5	24	32	66
	Comment on Comment	0	0	0	0	1	2	12	15
	Total	1	6	1	2	13	45	57	125

Tables xx-xx indicate that negative evaluations appear dominantly in user comments and less in statements of political actors in the main news articles. Citizens, in general, are more likely to comment negatively and to reject the EU in principle. Political actors' and citizens' statements converge however in criticising the democratic deficit and enlargement (polity and project inclusiveness negative).

Finally, we analyze the justifications that underlie EU polity evaluations and the differences between the newssites, the users and the political actors's statements in evaluating the EU.

	Justification of Worth							
	Democracy	Culture	Necessity	Economic Prosperity	Safety	Other	N/A	Total
Der Standard	2	9	1	1	3	0	13	29
Krone	19	8	3	10	2	2	22	66
Politikblog	11	3	4	2	0	0	7	27
Rigardi	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Total	35	20	8	13	5	2	42	125

	Justification of Worth							
	Democracy	Culture	Necessity	Economic Prosperity	Safety	Other	N/A	Total
Main Text	11	12	1	2	2	1	15	44
Comment on Main Text	20	8	3	8	3	1	23	66
Comment on Comment	4	0	4	3	0	0	4	15
Total	35	20	8	13	5	2	42	125

There is no clear difference between how political actors and users evaluate the EU. Both lay emphasis on democracy, culture and, to a lesser extent, to economic prosperity. This indicates that the concerns and expectations are shared among the partisan actors who lead the election campaign and the potential voters, who comment upon European integration in the discussion forums of the news sites. There is however a noticeable discrepancy between the official

discourse of legitimation employed by EU elites and the domestic EU debates unfolding in the media. Attempts to legitimize the EU as a functional arrangement or as a welfare and security community in times of global crisis are not reflected in media discourse. EP election campaigns are mainly used to face the EU with regular demands of democracy, culture and rights raised by domestic actors and citizens and amplified through the media.

#### 4.4) Participatory journalism and user community building

If ‘participatory journalism’ is to be understood as an involvement of users in news making and commenting through constant dialogue and interaction with the journalists and the political actors involved (quote??), the Austrian online newsroom follows rather traditional patterns of journalism. Online fora and comments remain detached from political debates on the main newssites. Neither do journalists or political actors intervene in user fora and comments nor are opinions expressed by users not relevant for the course of political debates. The user forum resembles an hermetically close world, a kind of regulars’ table in a pub, in which outside guests are exceptional and interferences from the host, e.g. in the form of moderation of the webmaster remain limited. Commenting is restricted to a community of users, many of them posting regularly and being acquainted with each other. As a consequence, the range of opinions is restricted. Online fora have a clear political line and deviating opinions are not tolerated. Evaluations in comments unfold through direct speech and build a citizens-elite divide. Comments make reference to the main text of the threat not by interacting with the journalist but by amplifying political actors’ statements. Journalists are bystanders of the debate, the main reference persons in the comment are domestic political actors whose role and understanding of the EU is contested.

		Maxim of Quantity		
		Yes	No	Total
Location	Main Text	25	19	44
	Comment on Main Text	40	26	66
	Comment on Comment	11	4	15
	Total	76	49	125

		Maxim of Manner			
		Yes	No, substantiated	No	Total
Location	Main Text	41	3	0	44
	Comment on Main Text	52	8	6	66
	Comment on Comment	11	1	3	15
	Total	104	12	9	125

		Maxim of Relation		
		Yes	No	Total
Location	Main Text	43	1	44
	Comment on Main Text	53	13	66
	Comment on Comment	11	4	15
	Total	107	18	125

		Maxim of Manner			
		Yes	No, substantiated	No	Total
Website	Der Standard	28	1	0	29
	Krone	49	8	9	66
	Politikblog	25	2	0	27
	Rigardi	2	1	0	3
	Total	104	12	9	125

		Maxim of Relation		
		Yes	No	Total
Website	Der Standard	28	1	29
	Krone	50	16	66
	Politikblog	26	1	27
	Rigardi	3	0	3



		Maxim of Relation		
		Yes	No	Total
Website	Der Standard	28	1	29
	Krone	50	16	66
	Politikblog	26	1	27
	Rigardi	3	0	3
	Total	107	18	125

		Maxim of Quantity		
		Yes	No	Total
Website	Der Standard	16	13	29
	Krone	44	22	66
	Politikblog	16	11	27
	Rigardi	0	3	3
	Total	76	49	125

#### 4.5. Degree of civility in online debates

As argued by Michailidou and Trenz in the introductory chapter of this book, the integrity of an online public sphere is dependent on a degree of civility in the interactions and disputes among the user. For the purpose of this study, we have operationalised civility as the respect of three basic communicative principles: first, an utterance or an actor's statement need to provide sufficient information for others to be understood. The *quantity of information maxim* is met if an evaluative statement informs about the supposed facts on which the evaluation is based. Second, an utterance needs to be contextualised as part of an ongoing communication processes. The *maxim of relation* is met if an evaluative statement relates to what has been said before and/or allows for follow-up interventions. Third, an utterance needs to make use of commonly accepted language. The *maxim of manner* is met if 'hot button' language, i.e. words or expressions that are likely to outrage other participants is absent (Ferree et al. 2002: 239; Wessler 2008: 13). There is no significant difference between quality newspapers,

tabloids and blogs in meeting the quantity of information maxim. EU-evaluations frequently lack sufficient information when given in relation to the secondary topic of the statement or when there is an indirect reference to other actors' statements. In the following example, for instance, the polity evaluation is part of the attributes that constitute the actor's image but no further information is provided of how this evaluation is substantiated: "Hans-Peter Martin with his well-known attacks against EU bureaucracy and against the Brussels elites got almost 18 per cent of the ballot."<sup>9</sup> Here the lacking information is part of the background knowledge of the readers, who are addressed as insiders. For obvious reasons, the quantity of information criteria is more frequently missed in user comments in discussion forums than by professional journalists. Users are not trained in reasoning and explication and often base their judgement on unfound information or prejudice. Also the opposite is possible, that users disregard the quantity of information maxim by overloading the user forum with text and 'unwanted information'. This practice, commonly referred to as 'flooding', is not found in EU debates, which rather unfold in chat style through small messages.

There is however a significant difference between different media formats with regard to meeting the other cooperative principle of communication as conceptualized by Price and discussed in Widdowson (2007: 56-65), i.e. whether the evaluation on European integration is on topic and whether messages use 'commonly acceptable language and arguments'. The tabloid format is less reliable in terms of relating evaluative statements to the main topic of the thread and meeting the manners of good conduct. There are notably less violations of the netiquette in political blogs than in professional media online forums. This is partly explained by the different background of the users who comment on political blogs and who are more 'professional' in expressing their political opinion online. While political blogs aspire for quality standards and are frequently used by users with distinguished political interests, comments and online fora of newspapers are used by the more 'regular' users to express the popular voice against the elites.

The two forum of the main Austrian news sites Standard and Kronenzeitung create the image of a gathering place for the people who speak out against the elites. We must assume that by involving thousands of active users and hundred of thousands of readers, the political commenting and chatting in the Internet has a strong impact on constituting a mass audience. Instead of fragmentation and diversification of internet communication into several user communities, we find a strong concentration of users. The Austrian online public sphere is

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<sup>9</sup> Der Standard, 08.06.2009.

further structured by the relatively clear cut polarisation of the users to two political camps: the ‘moderate’ user who comments on standard.at and Presse and can be also found in the political blogs and the ‘patriotic’ user who belongs to the online community of *Kronenzeitung* and other tabloids.

Our findings thus indicate that online discussion fora of mainstream tabloids are the main locus for the spread of Euroscepticism in Austria. This corroborates also the findings of previous research on political online debates in Austria, in which it was found that insults, threats, prejudices and hatred were heavily present (Fuchs 2006). At the same time, these findings rebut the false accusation of political blogs as being unprofessional, disrespectful and rude. Not independent blogs but user fora of professional news sites are found to be the ‘toilet wall’ of the Internet (Jean-Remy von Matt). User discussion fora display a tendency for politically incorrect speech and foster disrespect among the citizens and towards the political actors. In the following, we will therefore present a more in depth qualitative analysis of the online user debates in the tabloid *Kronenzeitung*.

In the case of the *Kronenzeitung* editorial monitoring is restricted to the most outstanding violations of the netiquette. The user community is very active placing daily several thousands of comments. Each single article of our sample is commented with often several hundreds of users expressing their opinion. In terms of contents, commenting reflects a strong political alienation of the users. Commenting is often dissociated from the topic of the main article and develops a dynamic of its own through small talk or disputes between single users. The style of commenting is marked by hate speech, insulting language directed against other users (comments on comments), against domestic government or against EU elites. Of particular interest are the collective reactions of the user community against the casual expression of deviating opinions by single users. Expressing a pro-European attitude in the online forum of *Kronenzeitung* will, with all likelihood, provoke a strong negative response, and a fierce reaction of exclusion and even hate.

The following quotation from the online forum of *Kronenzeitung* can help to illustrate some of the polarising dynamics of the Austrian online sphere:

(referring to the critical comment posted by a user who defied the populist strategy of the FPÖ): “divulging lies or quoting the nonsense of some left extremists. It is better you go back to standard.at to divulge your lies there.”<sup>10</sup>

This quotation contains in a nutshell the ingredients of media populism mirrored through the reactions of the user community of a popular tabloid: information is identified as lies, the political opponent is outed as extremist and the polarized netcommunities are recognized and taken as a reference point for excluding the other as the enemy. The polarizing effect of the Internet is more than a scientific construct, it is already shaping the behavior, the expectations and the identities of the net user. Community building is further strengthened by the possibility to affirm posts through a simple click. Interestingly, this way of commenting is only working in the affirmative way, you cannot express dislike with a post (similar to facebook). The ‘like bottom’ is frequently used, in average each comments receives between 30 and 50 affirmative clicks by other users. For a user to express dislike a subsequent comment must be posted, which requires a more active and thus more unlikely operation by the user. Comments are therefore more likely to express uniform opinion in line with the majority of the user community.

Evidence for the closure of the user community is further given by the undesirability of interventions from foreign users. The threshold of tolerance for deviating opinions is low. Foreigners (normally German users) are regularly outed but also users from the other ‘ideological camp’ are urged to leave the forum. A good illustration of these exclusive dynamics is given by the rather fierce reactions of the Austrian political online community towards interventions of foreign political actors as critical monitors of the quality of their domestic debates. Such an instance was given when the leader of the European socialists Martin Schulz commented in an interview with the Financial Times on the Austrian campaigns stating that the “FPÖ” speaks the language of the Third Reich’ and further by calling the FPÖ leader Strache a ‘Nazi’. This news was only spread in a short article in the *Kronenzeitung* which reported rather neutrally on this statement. No other domestic political actors were quoted who commented upon the statement. Also the FPÖ leader Strache who was directly attacked by Schulz or other FPÖ leaders did not transmit any response through the media. While the interview of Schulz was ignored by the campaigning political parties, it was eagerly taken up by the users. In the following, we quote some of the 1372 user

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<sup>10</sup> lügen verbreiten, oder blind unfug von irgendwelchen linksextremisten übernehmen. ist besser sie gehen zu standard.at zurück und verbreiten dort ihre lügen

comments that were posted in the discussion forums. The examples show that the netiquette is systematically violated in user comments by insults, xenophobia and racist statements (assuming that the most outstanding cases of hate speech were already sorted out by the online moderators):

Lieber Schulz, kümmere dich um deinen eigenen Dreck im eigenen Land.

Die wahren Faschisten sitzen heute links...

Liebe, schleimige NACHBARN ( Piefke ). Ihr werft uns Österreichern stets Nazitum vor doch möchte ich euch zu bedenken geben, Hitler ist nur in Ö. geboren die Sau konnte er aber nur durch euch DEUTSCHEN rauslassen .Denn schwächere zu tyrannisieren ist des Piefkes Natur. Durch das auf wirbeln von anderen Staub erhofft ihr, dass euer Dreck dadurch nicht gesehen wird. Namentlich genannt seien damit eure legetiemen Parteien DVU & NDP. SO radikale Parteien sind bei uns Ösis verboten. manchmal leider !!

Lebenslanges Einreiseverbot in Österreich!

Lieber Hr. Schulz! Die Einwanderungspolitik von euresgleichen ist Schuld daran, daß wir in Europa schon die ersten bürgerkriegsähnlichen Zustände haben! Also bitte: Seien sie doch so freundlich und halten sie ihre Schnauze!

was mischen sich die sch\*\*\*s piefkes schon wieder ein? die sind ein türkenland und wenns nicht aufpassen wirts noch schlimmer. klar dass unsere echten volksvertreter da verhasst sind - das sind doch nur penner die einen guten schnitt machen wollen mit ihrer pseudo-gutmenschen-politik.

der piefke soll seine goschn halten und soll die wendehälsin merkel, diesen amerikahörigen und europaschädlichen trampel einmal zurechtweisen. was geht den deppen österreich an und übrigens, he strache ist kein nazi, sondern ein patriot und politiker mit rückgrat, dem sein volk und die republik am herzen liegen im gegensatz zu den schleimigen kriechern von rot und schwarz, die in brüssel vor den eu-bonzen kriechen und die österreichischen bürger verkaufen und verraten.

lieber ein nazi als ein volksverräter

Herr Schulz sie sollten sich um die Zustände im eigenen Land kümmern, anstatt mit dummen Meldungen über die Politiker in anderen Ländern Möchtegernpopulismus zu treiben. Oder haben sie schon ähnliche Meldungen über die Zustände in ihrem Land aus Österreich vernommen.

Last but not least, our sample helps to qualify the status of political blogs in relation to political news and opinion making. On the one hand, we notice a strongly uniform range of opinions expressed in political blogs which can rely on an equally homogeneous user community like the professional newssites. The ideological affiliation of a political blog is easily identifiable. We notice a dominance of left bloggers among the most prominent independent blogs in our sample. On the other hand, the frequency of commenting in political

blogs is considerably lower than in the discussion fora run by the professional news sites. Political blogs chose topics related to the EP election campaign rather randomly and mostly with references to national politics. A regular campaigning through political blogs (e.g. in favor or against particular candidates) did not take place.

## **Conclusion**

The main features of the populist newsroom identified by Plasser and Ulram already in 2004 are still dominant in the present situations as reflected in our media sample. Journalists of the *Kronenzeitung* are found to place negative news and opinions on the EU and offer their news sites to political actors to launch campaigns against the EU. Overall, the professional news sites are found to strengthen the negative evaluation of EU integration and have a negative impact on the perception of the legitimacy of the European Parliament constructing clichés and prejudices, e.g. of corrupt MEPs as the betrayers of national interest. In addition, one main newspaper (*Kronenzeitung*) is found to be biased in the sense of responding only to Eurosceptic parties: the FPÖ and Liste Hans-Peter Martin. Plasser and Ulram (2004) further found that there is a media audience made up of substantial parts of the population used to consume right wing populist messages. This audience finds in the online newspapers not only the confirmation of its opinions but also the opportunity to actively express their negative attitudes and to exchange opinions with like minded. This gives an additional incentive to tabloid media to deliver specific popular formats to this audience in order to conquer market positions and monopolies.

The link between the media and political parties is however also more direct, we can assume that Eurosceptic audiences and xenophobic audiences largely coincide and Eurohostile discourse is often also xenophobic discourse with popular tabloids printing xenophobic and often even racist and antisemitic content. In spite of this strong overlap between xenophobic and Eurohostile discourse, a manipulation of the newspaper by right wing extremists can be excluded. The newspaper maintains its autonomy and is rather ready to serve the Eurohostile audience on its own account. It serves and at the same time creates a market of populism, anti-Europeanism, xenophobia and also anti-democracy.

EU-issues such as elections give rise to strong polarisation between established parties and anti-party sentiments nourished by the FPÖ and Hans-Peter Martin. Established parties frequently react with a strategy of blaming populism, but use different media. *Der Standard*,

the first online newssite in terms of salience but only the eighth most sold newspaper in terms of print copies, is used for placing an anti-populist agenda and raise quality standards against the tabloidisation. Comparing Standard and Kronenzeitung, the impression prevails of a divided society. Both newspaper stand for two irreconcilable camps which do not communicate but treat each other as enemies. European topics and debates are one field where these strong cleavages and the incommunicability between the readers of different media products are reinforced.

Media studies usually underlie a dichotomy between traditional media in analogous offline formats such as print and audio and New Media, which are online and digital. Our survey proves that there is little point to draw a line between online and offline media in terms of political news-making and distribution. Both media are institutionally and personally mixed. Most analogue media are also digitized and networked. Almost everything which is available in print is also online. In all media spheres under survey, journalism is already online in all its forms and expressions. The internet is maybe not yet the most diffused medium of political communication, but it has certainly become the most informative and the most complete medium.

The question whether digital media can be considered as representative for the Austrian public sphere is therefore affirmed by our sample. Journalists who want to be successful in opinion making will with all likelihood go online. In the Austrian case, we can observe even a qualitative plus, since the online presence of quality newspapers is more successful than tabloids. The Kronenzeitung, which is the most widely distributed newspaper on the Austrian market (and in terms of share of readership the most influential newspaper in the whole of Europe) is less frequented in the Web than the Austrian quality newspaper Standard, which has only a third of the offline readers. Kronenzeitung has nevertheless a strong online presence focusing among others on games, chats and e-shopping. Also the difference between media and audience is not, as some would claim (Sunstein ??), subverted. Users and makers of news are still clearly distinguished in the news outlets analysed. The two newspapers still address their users mainly as readers and only secondary involves them in a non monitored exchange of opinion. Commenting functions are distinguished, need to be accessed separately and mainly serve as a pinboard of opinions from which professional journalists are excluded.

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